

**Oral History Interview with John Page**  
**Parchman Oral History Project**  
**Interview conducted by Courtney DeLong on July 22, 2019**

[Interview Begins]

- 0:02 DELONG: So first I'm just gonna record eight seconds of silence so that we can use it for sound editing later. Now, if you could please introduce yourself with your full name and your date of birth and place of birth.
- 0:20 PAGE: John Everett Page. Date of birth is March 27, 1954.
- 0:30 DELONG: Ok, so John, can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?
- 0:36 PAGE: I was actually born in Laurel Mississippi and in 1961 my father drowned and my mother moved back to Panola County where her family was. In '66 we moved to Tallahatchie County where she went to work at Tallahatchie General Hospital and we've been in Tallahatchie County ever since.
- 0:51 DELONG: And what was school like for you growing up?
- 0:57 PAGE: Well, coming up, you know, we were seven boys in my family. All of us went to school except one that was born with special needs. With a single parent it was kind of tough, but we had to kind of start working early and get out and do stuff to help my mother get everything going and we did that. So, we did pretty good and everything.
- 1:13 DELONG: Wait, do you mind if I just pause for one sec? Also, this might sound weird but if you, it helps I think if you look at me and not the camera.
- 1:20 PAGE: Okay.
- 1:22 DELONG: Just think about it like we're having a conversation except...
- 1:23 PAGE: Okay
- 1:24 DELONG: ...I've set up crazy studio lights everywhere and wouldn't let you turn on the A.C.
- 1:27 PAGE: You look better than the camera anyway. I'd rather look at you.
- 1:28 DELONG: Thank you. [both laugh] But yeah. I don't know. I find it helps me out when I'm doing it.
- 1:31 PAGE: Okay.

1:32 DELONG: If you could sort of focus and pretend I don't have these dorky headphones. Okay, and so what was your favorite subject in elementary school?

1:40 PAGE: In elementary school my favorite subject was math, I believe it was. Yes. Math.

1:45 DELONG: Why math?

1:46 PAGE: Well it was just something that I was real good at and y'know I was a straight A student in it so I just kind of excelled in it and I liked it.

1:54 DELONG: Umm and did you have a lot of homework? Did you teach yourself mostly out of a book? Did teachers lecture on the blackboard? What was it like?

2:00 PAGE: Well most of back then they did both, but most of it was on blackboard back then.

2:05 DELONG: And from middle school? What was that like?

2:07 PAGE: Well, middle school here was right down the hill here about two minutes. Really, before we integrated, there was this school and it was really better than elementary school because the teacher we had seemed like they were more familiar on what they was teaching us back then, so we did real good at it.

2:22 DELONG: And what was... what did you remember when you first went to high school? What were you thinking about?

2:27 PAGE: Playing football.

2:28 DELONG: You played football?

2:29 PAGE: Yes I did.

2:30 DELONG: What position?

2:31 PAGE: I was... uh... I finished as tackle for a while but I didn't stay with the strained cuffs. Back then things was tough so I actually drove a school bus the last four years I was in high school.

2:39 DELONG: So all four years of high school you drove the school bus too?

2:42 PAGE: Mhm, I actually got my first bus license when I was 15 years old.

2:45 DELONG: Seriously?

2:46 PAGE: Yes.

2:46 DELONG: Can you tell me more about that?

2:47 PAGE: Yes. I drove a bus for the four years of high school. I actually drove, I think it was like a 55 passenger bus but we had 72 to 75 kids on it every day. And you just think with a 15 year old child driving the bus with that many kids on it? I actually did it.

3:01 DELONG: Wow

3:02 PAGE: I sure did.

3:04 DELONG: Was that common?

3:05 PAGE: Well, most back then, we had a lot of school kids that drove the bus because back then most of the people that drove buses back then was actually helping on the farm or had other jobs. So most of the kids drove buses back then. But it was... but it was half of the bus drivers was school kids.

3:23 DELONG: And when you... Did you play football in middle school too?

3:26 PAGE: No. I only started in high school.

3:29 DELONG: So, was football really big in your community?

3:33 PAGE: Football? Yes it was. But, you know, we didn't have a whole lot of kids that could actually get back and forth to school because transportation was short back then. We had to walk up here and maybe once practice was over if the coach couldn't take all of us home we had to walk home. I actually was about five or six miles from school. But it was good exercise. I had to run home. 14, 15, 16 years old. It didn't bother me then.

3:55 DELONG: And would you often time walk home with your friends? Or?

3:58 PAGE: It was three or four of us who actually lived out that way. We'd all get together and go home school after we got through with practice.

4:04 DELONG: Do you know... this is a sort of a shot in the dark. Do you know Michael Herman, who we interviewed as well?

4:08 PAGE: Yes. I know him. He was a classmate of mine. He was

4:12 DELONG: Yeah. He talked also about football so I was like "Oh!" Y'know? Yeah. And so you, your freshman year when you first played football you were at Alan Carver. Right?

4:20 PAGE: Yes.

4:21 DELONG: What did you think about Alan Carver?

4:23 PAGE: Well, I thought it was a great place to go to school there cuz everybody got along and everything worked well. I didn't have any problem anything. Everything was good.

4:30 DELONG: And what was your favorite class there?

4:32 PAGE: Back then, when I first got in was... we moved over. The teacher we had in English was Miss Bingum. She was really good and we liked her. Miss Blackenwood was my favorite teacher though. She taught history. She was kinda like a mother to all of us. She

took care of everybody. Took care of the whole school more or less. Yeah whoever it was she'd take care of us. Got anything? You got a butt-whipping for it but she did direct appearance. She was different. She was there.

5:01 DELONG: Umm and what did people, before 1970, what did people say when they talked about East Tallahatchie High School?

5:10 PAGE: Well at that time we didn't know East Tallahatchie High School. All we knew was Alan Carver. We never had anything to do... but I actually went to East Tallahatchie School two years before integration because they had that... they offered that class over there for metal trades and it was 16 of us left for Alan Carver and I drove a bus from the school over there every day in the afternoon. We got ready to go to that class. We took a metal trade class for three hours in the afternoon. So we would leave Alan Carver and go over to East Tallahatchie High School over there and take that trade.

5:42 DELONG: And was this... so was the class only open to black students or was it an integrated class?

5:48 PAGE: At that time, it was only blacks in that class that afternoon. But the second year, it was two whites joined that class. Well I don't know if they was actually in the class, but they was in there when we was in there.

5:58 DELONG: And, I guess, how did the white students treat you guys when you came? Did you feel welcome?

6:04 PAGE: Well in the classroom, we did. But when we would get off that bus we would actually have to run from the bus to the classroom. God, we had some kids out there and they had personal cars and they was actually trying to rob us. We ran from the classroom. We would actually tell our instructor about it that we needed to run and he would go and call the principal over there and he would say something like "They was just playing."

6:28 DELONG: I guess this was the same principal who became your principal in '71? In '70?

6:34 PAGE: No. I think they changed it in the end. Yeah they did. Because Friedhen took it in. Yeah. He was a good guy.

6:41 DELONG: And what made the metal class to you feel worth it?

6:44 PAGE: Well, it was something that I wanted to get into. So once I got out of school, if I didn't go off to school, I would have a trade that I could actually go and get a job. So we all, the whole, we all went over there for.

6:56 DELONG: And was it open to anyone at Alan Carver could sign up to take the class? Or?

7:00 PAGE: Well what they did... they actually had an instructor come over here and ask for volunteers so they actually needed 16. And matter of fact, I was the first one to volunteer and then from then on we had some my friends we all got together. There was 16 of us, actually, we went over there. Took it for two years.

7:17 DELONG: And what during this time... what was your biggest accomplishment in the class?

7:21 PAGE: Well I actually worked with sheet metal over there. We built... There was a course offering welding, sheet metal and... what's the other? Lathe operator. Running machines. But I actually took the sheet metal part of it and we made birdhouses, stuff like that, so made a little money off of it so we'd have a little change back then.

7:43 DELONG: So, that started... what year of high school did that start for you?

7:47 PAGE: Had to be '70. '70. Cuz you know two years before integration. Yes. '70.

7:55 DELONG: And can you tell me a little bit about integration. What year was it?

7:57 PAGE: If I'm not mistaken it was either '69 or '70. I'm thinking more like '70. Because '70 or '71 was the year. Because in senior year we was already fully integrated on their back home. When integration first started they kind of had the buses. You'd take classes over here at Alan Carver and we go to Charleston over at East Tallahatchie where we'd take some. I actually drove the bus then. We'd take the kids. Where like this the hour. You may have English over here. You may have history over there. So they kind of went from school to school the first year.

8:26 DELONG: So you were driving the buses that year?

8:28 PAGE: Mhm. Sure did.

8:29 DELONG: During the day?

8:30 PAGE: Yes.

8:30 DELONG: Could you tell me what a typical schedule would look like for you? Sort of how driving the bus fit in with your classes.

8:36 PAGE: Well, once the bell rang, I think it was about 10 to 15 minutes in between. We would go out the one-headed transfer. We would get on the bus, drive over there and then once that class was over, we got on the bus and drove back over here.

[BOOM from off camera]

- 8:49 DELONG: I'm sorry would you mind saying that again, I just wanna try getting it without the boom in it.
- 8:52 PAGE: Okay, well, what happened was when the bell would ring from one class to the other, we'd load up on the bus and go to East Tallahatchie high school and once that class was over, you had another class over here. You'd get back on the bus and transfer it back over here.
- 9:05 DELONG: And what did you think of the busing plan as a whole?
- 9:10 PAGE: At one time, I thought it was a waste of time because it was just too much running in-between schools. I thought we were losing time by going back and forth. And a lot of kids... y'know how you play hooky sometimes? Sometime in between schools someone didn't come back. He would skip. But then some of them actually walked back and forth from school over there. It just took too much time. But in the end, they finally stopped it and we stayed in one school
- 9:33 DELONG: Why did they end up stopping it?
- 9:34 PAGE: Well, I think they realized what they was doing was a waste of time and I think it was better to get all of the kids in one school and have them stay there all day instead of just going back from school to school
- 9:44 DELONG: And do you think the student protests played a role in making the school board realize that?
- 9:49 PAGE: I think so. I think they realized that it was something that they was really trying to get done. And once they took a look, a hard look, at it, they decided that they would go ahead and just go ahead and completely integrate, instead of going back from school to school.
- 10:03 DELONG: Did they pay you guys extra to keep driving all day? Or no?
- 10:07 PAGE: No. They didn't. We did not get any extra. Of course you know there's only... The school student bus driver only got eighty dollars a month for driving the bus.
- 10:19 DELONG: That was it?
- 10:20 PAGE: That was it. That's what we was paid. 80 bucks. Of course I got a little extra cuz my bus was actually on a... a senior system. I don't know the other drivers name cuz he was farming and I drove the bus. So once the check got paid, when we got paid at the end of the

month, he just gave me what he made. It was three times more than what student drivers got.  
True that.

10:40 DELONG: And what was the mood on the buses like, before and after the busing plan started? Did it change at all?

10:49 PAGE: Well, you know the kids talking kept up a lot of noise between schools and they had a good time. But there was no violence or anything. It was just... they were just glad to get out of one school and go to another. You like had, more or less, a break in-between. So we didn't have any problem with it, but it was just too much a waste of time for going from one school to another, you could actually be in class, or going over your notes or whatever you had to look at for that class. But on that bus you couldn't do it because you were moving all of the time.

11:11 DELONG: And did the white and the black students... would they talk to each other on the bus. Like did this act as a site of friendship or not really?

11:18 PAGE: Well, most of the time when the bus is transferred, you know, back in that day, they had a bus going, most of all the blacks would get on one bus and all the whites would get on another bus. Every once and a while, you'd have kind of integration on the bus, but it wasn't very often.

11:30 DELONG: And were any white students bus drivers?

11:34 PAGE: I can't remember any that was. It may have been but right now my mind... I don't remember any white kids that were driving the bus. So back then, most of them actually had vehicles. They might have drove themselves to school. But no, back then we didn't have any cars so we had to ride the bus.

11:50 DELONG: And how did white students treat the bus drivers?

11:55 PAGE: Well, I never had no problem. Y'know every once in a while, you know, you'd have somebody back there, like a little ruckus or something break out. But I didn't have any problems on mine. But I heard other bus drivers, sometimes they would have a fight or something like that but I didn't have any.

12:08 DELONG: And so you told me earlier that you had gone to Parchman, right?

12:14 PAGE: I did. On the first trip.

12:16 DELONG: So, can you tell me a little bit more about what inspired your involvement in that group, in that movement?

12:23 PAGE: Well, actually, when they first started, I actually wasn't involved in it. This particular day, we overslept that morning and we missed the bus and my older brother had an old car. So, he took myself and three of my other brothers and brought us to school and when we got out here in front of the school, he stopped in the front of a bus and they were letting them out to go to the school. And there was deputy sheriffs out there and they was telling kids to get on the bus. And when we walked by the bus, there was a deputy standing there, who said "Get on that bus!" So at that time we didn't rebuke him or nothing, we just got on the bus. We didn't know what was going on at the time. And then we got on the bus and they was saying we were going to jail. In Tallhatchie county, there was a little old jail up here on the corner. So I thought that was where we were going. And when the bus left...all it was... I don't know how many kids were on that bus... but they had two or three buses going there. All the buses were full. When we got over by the Tallahatchie County Jail, they didn't stop. They went on out and hit 32 and went south and then got on 32 West. Next thing we knew we were at the Mississippi State Penitentiary. They all took us to maximum security, the building where all the maximum security inmates were. And they had a big open bay, maybe something like this room here, and they had some of the inmates bring in mattresses and throw them on the floor and we were told that's what we were gonna be kept in. And I'm actually glad I did get on that bus because my younger brothers were on that and I couldn't have went home without them. So I'm glad I did go. But, we actually stayed 12 hours and we were so afraid of them that we were scared to do anything cause those inmates would come in and say "I have killed so many of the young kids coming over here!" and trying to go over here and trying to start stuff. They said "We killed him!" Well I'm sure they didn't, but they had us thinking they did.

13:59 DELONG: And do you remember... so the inmates, were they with you or did they sort of come in, came out?

14:04 PAGE: They came in to bring those mattresses that we slept on, but none of them were actually in the same room with us at that time. But, they actually had to come in and out of there.

14:14 DELONG: Can you describe the mattresses to me?



14:15 PAGE: It was just a little kind of... like a foam bed with a little cover over it that they brought in and threw on the floor. There was no bedding or nothing. They just threw them on the floor and told us that's where we were gonna sleep.

14:25 DELONG: And did they give you guys any food?

12:27 PAGE: Well, they did, but it was nothing we wanted to eat. Like, it was some kind of sauerkraut and a hot dog. It was something like that.

14:34 DELONG: Do you remember what it smelled like at all? Tasted like?

14:36 PAGE: I don't remember now, but I didn't... I didn't eat it cuz, you know, I really didn't think it was something I wanted at that time. This sauerkraut, y'know I never really did eat rutabaga or turnip greens coming up and that's what it kind of reminded me of. And I just... I didn't eat it.

14:52 DELONG: And I guess, so how old were your younger brothers at the time?

14:57 PAGE: The youngest one, at that time... See, I had to be about sixteen or seventeen. The young one was probably nine at that time.

15:05 DELONG: And he was there?

15:06 PAGE: He went, cuz all of us that got out of the car that morning, going to school, we were late getting there, and they told us to get on that bus, so we all got on the bus. It was something... but maybe younger than that.

15:18 DELONG: And how did your nine-year-old brother... How did he feel?

15:21 PAGE: Well, I kept him under my wing. I didn't let him go wander off or be out in the back. I kept him right beside me. All of them, as a matter of fact. All of my brothers were so little that we kind of got all our mattresses and pulled them together. And we all kind of got stuck together there, for that full 12 hours we was there. I think we got away about 12 o'clock that day and we left there by about 12 o'clock that night coming back here.

15:46 DELONG: And so would you mind telling me your brothers' names and how old they were, quickly?

15:51 PAGE: Well, the brother of mine that was under me was Kaserudaya. He was two years younger, so he had to be about 15. And the one that is back there now, Kenneth, he was like two years younger than he was, so he had to be about 12/13, and I might've been mistaken right now, but Pastor, the younger one, he had to be maybe ten or something like that.

16:13 DELONG: And do you know... Did your mother ever find out what happened to you guys?

16:16 PAGE: Yes, she did.

16:17 DELONG: Do you know how she felt that day?

16:19 PAGE: Well, they was really upset about it because they didn't know where we was, at first. My mother was working. She worked at the hospital. My stepfather was farming. But, that night, when we got back, they took us to a church there on West Main where we all met there and they all, the parents, was there waiting on their kids to come in. So, when we actually got there, you know, they had a meeting there and they kind of explained to the parents what went on. Y'know some of the parents back then would not let their kids come back to school that particular year. My younger brothers didn't come back that year, but I was out nine days and I came back. Y'know my mother never let them... she never did tell me I couldn't go back, but I didn't want to get behind because I wanted to finish school with my regular classmates, so I came back after nine days and graduated on time like the rest of them that was in my class there.

17:00 DELONG: So why wouldn't she let your brothers come back?

17:03 PAGE: Well, I think it was more because of my stepfather. He was saying... he was more old-fashioned than she was in it. If there was any trouble they'd need to, uh, stay at home. So, they stayed in the rest of the school year.

17:15 DELONG: And do you feel like... so, when people were in Parchman what was the general mood of most of the students?

17:22 PAGE: Well, y'know, what they was doing... nobody actually, y'know, kind of got out of line. Because they were more or less scared with the big... Cuz the guys they was bringing in there was like... I mean one of them they would call him Hercules and he had arms as big as we are, y'know. And he was kind of, we were all kind of afraid those folks and we didn't think that they were actually gonna take us to prison but that's where we actually ended up at. But, what I remember was two guys in there. One of them was a classmate of mine. Him and another guy got into an argument over there and they got to pushing, and then somebody said, "Man, y'all better stop that. Cuz if you don't, you gonna end up in jail!" And one of them said, "Where else can I go? I'm already in prison!" So it kind of just stopped right there. Sure did.

18:00 DELONG: And did this Hercules guy threaten you guys at all?

- 18:02 PAGE: Well, he was the one that said that he'd killed a lot of these kids they were bringing over there. I think it was just something they told him to say. If he had actually killed somebody... that I don't think that happened. But he was saying that when he was bringing in, throwing down those old mattresses down on the floor, telling us. Cuz he was so big he'd had two or three under his arm when he came in. Mattresses. This guy was strong looking, so we didn't give him any problems.
- 18:23 DELONG: Would you mind telling me a little more... so you're saying sort of, sorry, "they", you think told him... could you elaborate a little on who you think "they" was?
- 18:34 PAGE: The guys that brought the mattresses in?
- 18:36 DELONG: Um, the guys who were giving them instructions.
- 18:39 PAGE: I think it might've been the people that was in charge of the prison. Maybe the officers that worked there or something. Because, y'know, they never did come into the area where we were. They would unlock the door and let the whole inmates bring those mattresses in, but they never did come in there. When we asked for water they just closed the door.
- 18:55 DELONG: So, if something had happened with one of the inmates, do you think that they would have been able to help you guys or not?
- 19:03 PAGE: You said if one of the inmates had come in and started something or jumped on someone? I don't think they would have. I think they would have just stood there and watched. They might've told him to stop or something like that, but I don't think they would have come in there and intervene or anything like that but back then I think their tactic was to just scare us and whether they knew it or not we were actually afraid.
- 19:20 DELONG: And do you think that the fear from that day has impacted you in the rest of your life at all?
- 19:26 PAGE: Well, you know, once we got out and as I got older I realized that was a scare tactic. But for would they do anything to us? I don't think they would. I think they got their bluff and I think that's what they were trying to do. But, it didn't change anything for what we were trying to prove with what comes to that school, because after we come back... this was actually the time I went. I stayed twelve hours. The next time they went, they went during a time I was out of school for nine days and they actually took those kids over there and kept them for 20 days this time.

19:55 DELONG: Do you know why?

19:57 PAGE: They incarcerated them to try to keep them from protesting at the school. I didn't know at the time but I heard later on that the county was charged a bunch of money for what they done, y'know, they had paid so much for each child they kept over there for each day. But I actually didn't get sent to go in there for 20 days because I was actually home at that time.

20:18 DELONG: And, if you don't mind me asking, sort of... so you said you weren't super involved with the protest movement before you went to Parchman. Did going to Parchman, somehow... Did it make you want to be more involve at all?

20:30 PAGE: When we got out, we did protest more. We let them know that by them taking us over there, they weren't going to stop what we was trying to accomplish.

20:39 DELONG: And what did these protests look like? What forms did they take?

20:43 PAGE: Well what we would do, we would come out and just, more or less, walk around the school. We weren't violent or anything like that. We had signs that we held up and stuff like that but nobody got into any violence or anything like that. I think we got their attention out there. We got what we wanted accomplished, but I think we got the attention of the school officials.

21:02 DELONG: And do you remember what the signs said or anything?

21:05 PAGE: Well, no. Well, a lot of them had on there "We Are Somebody". That's what most of them read. I can't remember what all them said, but the one I was carrying said "We Are Somebody" and I saw a lot of other ones in the crowd that had that.

21:17 DELONG: And what did that slogan mean to you?

21:20 PAGE: I didn't understand you?

21:21 DELONG: Oh, sorry. What did the slogan "We Are Somebody" mean to you?

21:24 PAGE: It meant that because we was out here at the school. What we wanted... cutting out every activity we had so that we couldn't have anything, I felt like saying "We Are Somebody". Don't just store us to the side, so that we can't do anything. We couldn't even have a prom or anything, they took all that out. So, we just wanted to show that we were somebody and we was going to stand by our rights.

21:44 DELONG: When you say they took everything, they took prom, can you elaborate?

21:48 PAGE: Well what was happening was, y'know, during that year they were saying there wasn't going to be a school prom or anything like that. And there wasn't. Of course, I wasn't a senior or anything like that, but a lot of that stuff was taken away. Y'know, doing the activities that the kids were used to having and I heard that they was saying it was all going to completely... not even done anymore. That's what a lot of people were going to school for. They said, once we get in there and become seniors or whatever we would have this privilege, that privilege and that was being taken away. They were just trying to let them know they still wanted them. We all did.

22:19 DELONG: And how did that make you feel?

22:21 PAGE: Well, it really made a lot of kids angry. We felt that we was being done wrong because it was something that a lot of kids during school time, all day, go through school for and move up to higher grades. They look forward to doing it. But, if its not there then there's nothing to look forward to. I think it all worked out in the end. I think everybody learned from it and got better from it.

22:41 DELONG: And, so what year did you actually graduate from high school?

22:44 PAGE: 1972.

22:45 DELONG: 1972? Ok. So can you tell me a little more... I noticed a sign that said East Tallahatchie Attendance Center when I was at the school. Can you tell me a little more about that?

22:54 PAGE: Well, that's what it was called back then. See, when they integrated this was Charleston, this was Alan Carver High School, never East Tallahatchie. So rather than sitting out there with the Tallahatchie Warriors, the bleeding Warriors, these were the Alan Carver Tigers. They didn't want to agree on either one, so they changed it to the East Tallahatchie Attendance Center, because, y'know in 72, what was the first integrating class graduated out here. If I'm not mistaken, I think it still was the largest class that graduated because we had to graduate on the football field. We was all sitting out there, chilled out, and when they called our name, we got up and walked on up the football field, walked up on a little bannister they had there with the principal and superintendent to receive our diploma. For all I know... it may have been another class to do the graduating on the football field, but since then they've been graduating them in the auditorium.

23:40 DELONG: And how did people's parents feel about graduating on the hot football field?

23:45 PAGE: Well, nobody said anything. I guess, for as many students as it was, I guess it was something they felt that they had to do. I think it was... I can't remember the count, but I think it was 187, because the first year we integrated, I think that was the first year that Strata Academy came over, a private school, and a lot of the white kids actually left the school out here and went down there. But, the second year a lot of them was back out there, because, I guess, they didn't realize the cost of that school. Some of them probably weren't able to go. The parents didn't have enough money to pay it. But a lot of kids that graduated with me had actually went down there. I believe that they had come back to the school to graduate.

24:18 DELONG: So, '71 was also an integrated class that graduated?

24:24 PAGE: No.

24:24 DELONG: No?

24:25 PAGE: '72 was the first integrated class that graduated.

24:27 DELONG: So, '71... Sorry, I'm just thinking out loud. So you had the busing plan integration in 1970 to '71?

24:36 PAGE: Mhm.

24:36 DELONG: But the classes graduating weren't integrated?

24:37 PAGE: Back then, what they did, the first year... I think it was '71 when we first went over. But, they had two or three black kids that were already over there before integration. Now, if I go to admit... No, I may be wrong, maybe '71. My older brother was back there, now. He was in that class. I think it was '71. I may be wrong, but I think I was the first class with the first full one that graduated with the most students.

25:00 DELONG: And, was there animosity between white and black students in your class at all?

25:06 PAGE: I think so. I really think so. I know one time we were coming out of metal trades and when we first integrated, the whites over there, they had one big guy that they always called and they would say... let's call him Mike. So, "We're gonna go get Mike!" and we all thought that because he was big, he would come in and he was going to beat us up. But, the first time he came in and started something, one of my classmates named Jesse actually beat him half to death over there in the metal trade shop. He picked him up, dropped on his head. I left after because I thought he was dead. But, you know, he just picked him up, slammed him on his head, and I guess he hit his head hard on this concrete wall. It didn't hurt him, but

we didn't have any more trouble out of him anymore. There wasn't none of that anymore. I was kind of glad that went on because if we just had just kind of knuckled down in the corner, we'd probably have trouble with him all the time. He had been bullying us. But yes, we probably had no more problems with him.

25:59 DELONG: And why, I guess... so with the busing plan, did it feel like, an actual best attempt to integrate the school, or did it feel kind of like... What did you think the intention of that was?

26:14 PAGE: When we was taking the bus from school to school?

26:14 DELONG: Yeah.

26:15 PAGE: Right off the bat, I didn't think there was something that needed to be done. If we were going to be integrated, let's stay integrated all day. You know, most times, a lot of the kids, when they planned their subjects that they were going to take, they actually tried, more or less, to take the ones all at one school. Everyone's gonna try to do that, so most of the blacks, if they could get them all over here they would do it over here. But, they couldn't get all of them so they sort of had to go. My thing was, why would you even transfer from school to school? If we were going to be integrated, let's be integrated full time. So after the first year they didn't do that, but that first year with integration, you could see buses running all day, going from school to school.

26:51 DELONG: So did people ever protest school itself as part of the boycott? I mean, sorry, did people ever boycott going to school as part of the protests? Or was it just mostly carrying the signs when they were going to class?

27:03 PAGE: When we was out there, we never actually... that was over with. We didn't do it anymore. But, when they first started, it was just some of the protests over what they had been done, not because of the integration. That didn't have any part of it. I think it was because of some of the administration we had. I don't think they had our best interests at heart. We just kind of let them know that we wanted to be treated as equals.

27:25 DELONG: Can you elaborate on that?

27:27 PAGE: Well, what I was thinking... My thing was that they would just kind of let us be pushed over to the side because of the thing that was happening. They didn't stand up for us and say "Well, we're gonna do this and we're gonna make sure our kids are treated the same as everybody else." I just think they kind of dropped the ball with us but that's why we got

out there and let them know that we just wasn't going to lay down there and take it. I think they kind of picked the ball up and went running with it and everything got back on course.

27:50 DELONG: What does back on course mean to you?

27:53 PAGE: I mean that... I think that the school is back to where it should have been all time before it was. There wasn't nobody saying "We're not gonna do this. We're not gonna do this." All the teachers, as a matter of fact, all the teachers I had, anything that we wanted to ask them, they would make sure that it was kind of carried out. It wasn't like, "We'll see about it" or something like that. They didn't push us to the side anymore, because I guess, they said, well, these kids aren't just gonna take this stuff laying down. They are gonna stand up for what they feel is right. We didn't have any more problems after that... that I know of.

28:34 DELONG: Did you feel like the white teachers treated the black students well?

28:37 PAGE: Well, there was one that I feel like that... Some of the teachers... there were some of the teachers that I really don't think they should've been in the school system. Back then, y'know books have changed now, but there was stuff in books that was kind of like, the worst. They're

not in the books anymore now because... We had a teacher over there. He would make sure that certain kids would read and understand that when it came to certain languages... so he can try to make it sound like it was racial. But that wasn't the case, because back then in the books, when they had you reading, like in the history book, when it comes down to Chinese people, they would say "Chinese coolies". He would make sure that a black was reading that when he got ready to say that part and then he would say, there were a lot of things that we wouldn't want to be called, but the book had actually written there. Then he would say... Back then they didn't refer to blacks with the word Negro but his tongue was twisted. He would say something like, "The Negro this..." So, I just told him one day, why don't you just say what you want to say. Y'know, let him know what I thought he wanted to say. He said I was trying to incite a riot, but I was just saying that because of what he was saying. I get sent to the office, but the principal back then, he was understandable. He sent me back to class and I didn't have any problem with him. Everything was good for me, I guess, because I drove a bus for free. I got a little extra consideration.



- 30:02 DELONG: It sounds like the students organizing and protesting, that was a big effort. How did that work? How did people maintain communication with each other, stay organized?
- 30:13 PAGE: We had two or three of the students in school who were actually kind of the leaders. Then they had some outside leadership come in. We sat down and talked and we kind of communicated and more or less through the students that were actually who we considered leaders, and everything worked well. Nobody was kind of left out or acted like there was up over here or down over there. For all that I was concerned, everyone was treated equal and everything. The more support we had, I think the stronger we were.
- 30:42 DELONG: Can you tell me a little bit more about these student leaders?
- 30:45 PAGE: Well one of them was actually my classmate. When it came up, he was kind of more like level-headed, somebody that people will look up to and listen to. I think he did a good job at it. Then we had one that, he was kind of like... I won't say a bully, but he was kind of like the power guy that nobody would go try to front or anything. As a matter of fact, we had it all together then. We had the educational one, we had the muscle man and nobody bothered us. We kind of got away with what we did, but we got everyone to understand it. Things worked that way and it was something that I'm glad happened, because if we had never said anything, we probably would have never got the recognition to go forward.
- 31:28 DELONG: Could you tell me a little more about the outside support you said you guys got?
- 31:34 PAGE: Well, you know, when it came down to stuff that we wanted to do or something that needed to be done, we could actually sit down and talk to the administration about what we were considering, and they would listen to us. It wasn't, "Y'all can't do that! Don't come back in here with this!" It wasn't none of that no more. Whether we got it done or not, they would explain to us why it couldn't be done or what could be done. We felt that we accomplished what we wanted to accomplish. A lot of people may not have thought so, but I did.
- 32:00 DELONG: Did you ever interact with Ms. Lucy Boyd?
- 32:02 PAGE: Oh yes. Yes. She was a good friend of mine. She was
- 32:05 DELONG: Can you tell me more about her?
- 32:06 PAGE: Well, from the time I started working in the City of Charleston Police Department, I started out as a patrolman, and anytime she needed something, she would, more or less, call on me, up until she passed on. We was real tight. Anything she needed something, she had

my cell phone number. She would call me. She was up there at the Sun Center paper. She would call me and we'd sit down and talk. I learned a lot from her, different stuff that went on that I didn't know anything about, and she could tell me about. A lot of people didn't think she knew what she doing. She did. She really did. I was glad to go by and just sit down and interact with and learn from her. She was a great lady. Sure did. I think it was just last year that she passed on. Yeah, late last year. She was an educational person that could tell you some stuff that you never knew had happened and you probably would have never known about if she hadn't told you. Most of the time it was stuff that had happened before I was even born, but she knew about that. She was here. I liked talking to her.

33:10 DELONG: What type of things would she tell you about?

33:18 PAGE: The kind of stuff that blacks had been through in the early days. Stuff that people now don't realize had happened. Stuff that she's seen happen and had to live through. Y'know about having men, running out from behind barns, ducking and dodging, before they could even talk to one another. Stuff that we didn't know about but I had heard from other folks, like my grandfather used to talk about it but she could have actually lived it because she was there. She knew what went on. I liked talking to her.

33:40 DELONG: Did she ever tell you about Miss Berta Kegler?

33:35 PAGE: Well, she knew about it, but no. That's one thing we didn't just sit down and elaborate about because some stuff that I had heard, I didn't know what they were talking about. As I got older and stuff, they had Berta Kegler Day. I actually helped them, you know, during the time they had, not a protest, but they had a little parades and marches and stuff on that day. They just had them. I think it's always in May I believe. It's either the end of May or the first of June. I've got t-shirts, I bet I've got ten of them, y'know, "Berta Kegler Day" and the day that it's done. I always come out and any way I can help them loaning equipment and stuff like that, just kind of get things going. It's educational for me and I kind of learn from it and I try to tell my kids and grandkids about stuff like this because they really don't know. I didn't know and I learned it from older folks. The younger generation doesn't know anything about it. It's stuff that actually happened.

34:33 DELONG: Do you tell your kids and grandkids a lot about the day you spent in Parchman?

34:38 PAGE: Oh yeah, but see, they didn't believe me. My oldest son, when I told him, he said, "Daddy that didn't happen!" It did happen. He said "Well, I know we got money." How do

you think we got money? He said, "I know. You sued them." There was no suing. I had never heard the word sue back then. They took us over and nobody suing nobody because we didn't know nothing about stuff like that. We felt that they were people in authoritative positions because they knew what they were doing. Now that I know they were wrong, after being a lawyer for thirty-five years. They can't do that, but back then they did it.

35:10 DELONG: Why do you think they were able to get away with it?

35:13 PAGE: Back then we were not up on the law and stuff like we are now. Let's see... when we went I think they had... the City of Charleston back then, I think, only had two black cops. That's all they ever employed was two back then. From what I could understand, at one time, they was not allowed to come up on the square. They always had to stay around in the area where the blacks were. From the time I got hired, folks would tell me, "I know they didn't hire you because you ain't... you crazy" Old folks. No, it's not that. They just realized that things are changing. When I got promoted to captain, if you go back and check, I was the first black that was promoted and then when I made chief I was the first black chief in the city of Charleston. The only one. I worked there for 35 years, never had a write-up, never got just about anything. I came in and did my job and I did it to the best that I could.

36:01 DELONG: What, to you, means doing a good job as police chief?

36:09 PAGE: Well, you know, you go out and you treat everybody fairly. If there is a job that needs to be done, go out and do it and do it professionally and treat everybody right. And that's what I've done.

36:18 DELONG: Do you think the police chief who was police chief in 1970 did that?

36:24 PAGE: No. I'll be honest. Well, I don't know actually who he was personally. Who they had then, I wouldn't know personally at that time. I could see things that went on back then that wouldn't have went on in my administration. This used to be the time in the City of Charleston, 15 to 12 at night the police would come through town, go over down with the blue lights on and come back through town. By 12 o'clock everybody had to be off the street, or you went to jail. That's just the way it was set up back then. That was really a violation of peoples' rights because you can't force people to go home, you know. I'm not saying you could be doing anything wrong, but you could be in town if you want to be there. But, they did it and got away with it because nobody knew anything different. But, they

couldn't do that. That had stopped way before even I had gone into it. I don't know what year they stopped it, but I actually went up there to work in '83 and it wasn't going on then.

37:20 DELONG: What made you want to be a police officer?

37:22 PAGE: Well for some reason, ever since I was a little boy, I used to tell my mother all the time that I wanted a blue suit. Y'know a little khaki suit would have been fine but with what we had going on, I never did get it. From the time I got a little big enough to know what police officers did, I wanted to get into law enforcement. I tried for ten years before I was actually hired. All the guys that was in there before, when I went in put in applications, they would say... I heard one of the guys... I don't know if he was a chief or what he was. He would say, "Your brother is too much trouble, we ain't gonna hire you." And I said, "What's that? That's called guilt by association. What does that have to do with me?" They never hired me, but one day they finally got the chief who was the head when I started. I actually was doing bail bonding then, so when they would lock somebody up or something, they would call me at two, three o'clock in the morning, I would get up and go and bond them out. He said, "Man, if you're gonna be up here this time of night I could be at home and let you be doing it." I said, "Well I've actually been trying to get this opportunity." He said, "You actually applied for the job?" I said, "Yeah." He said "Well, I'm actually gonna go check and see." He went over and he said he checked the file and found 10 applications I had put in. He told me to come over there and renew it, so I went and got it and renewed it. That Friday, y'know I was coming back and forth every day. He said "Well, I saw you initially because you're up here too much." So, I came in that Friday and he said, "Well, you're just gonna be adamant about working." He handed me a gun and holster and told me to go get in the car with the officer that was on duty. I said, "Just like that?" He said, "Yeah." So, I went and got in the car with the officer then we made one trip through town, turned around, and came back into town, and there were two old ladies fighting on West Main Street. He said, "C'mon man!" I said, "Chief just told me to observe." He said, "No. C'mon." From then on, it was on. I did it for 35 years. I'm still doing it. It kind of grows on you when you get into law enforcement. You gotta have a love for it to do it because there ain't no money it, but it's just something that needs to be done. Somebody's gotta do it. I did.

39:10 DELONG: What do you love about it?

39:11 PAGE: Just being out there. If I can help the public, do things for people, you know, especially with kids, if I see them getting out of line. My thing is just trying to make sure our kids stay on the straight and narrow path. A lot of times I have been to people houses. They would call me. See, a lot of officers they would go to peoples' houses and take their kids to jail. I would go to the house and they would have called me and said "Mr. John, we know you got kids you know what to do." I'd say "If my son did something or another I'd say, 'In one minute I'll have it my way.' I'd take my belt off and make him stay there. I didn't take him to jail." I got a lot of respect out of those people. Right now, kids who I dealt with in this line of work, they come see me now. I have no problem with them. I think I did pretty good at it.

39:51 DELONG: Sounds like you did.

39:52 PAGE: I enjoyed every minute of it. Still do. I've gotten older now, but I still like doing it.

40:00 DELONG: What do you think... Sorry I'm just asking for the video. What do you think makes you so uneasy to use jail as a scare tactic for kids?

40:11 PAGE: Well, you know, depending on what age they are, you can't take them in there. They say now that you can't take a child behind a locked door. Now if it was like when I was at City Hall, if I had to bring them, I'd sit them in my office or something like that. We had holding cells. But you can't put them in there and you gotta have somebody right there with them, like the watchman. You can't have children in there with them. Especially, if they haven't committed a serious crime. Y'know somebody's kid that's acting out, dissing them and everything. You can't take those kids and put them behind no key. They're not going to jail. As you bring them in, you're going to have to sit them right there in the lobby. You can't take them behind a locked door. Plus, when they got enemies, you can't take those kids around those kids, those people. You cannot do it.

40:54 DELONG: Why not?

40:56 PAGE: Because, at their age, you can't take, say a fifteen year old child coming into the jail cell, you're bringing them in there for a fight or something like that and you've got inmates in that jail. You can't let them come in contact with them. That's a violation of their rights. That's just the law reads. Now some of them may need to be taken in there, but you can't do it.

41:18 DELONG: Do you think you experience as a kid has helped shaped this view for you?

41:22 PAGE: It kind of helped me to make up my mind about what I want to do, because some of the things that came through, back in the day. That we knew. A lot of people will use “the hood”. But we weren’t in the hood, we were in a rural area where it was just maybe two or three families and we all got together and were like one family. So, it kind of made say, well, I want to do something where I can be interacting in the community and help folks, if I could do it. So I did.

41:48 DELONG: Do you mind if I back track a bit, to high school again? Would you mind telling me a little bit more about the bus that day, when you got on, the one that took you to Parchman.

42:00 PAGE: Well, there was so many of us on there. My thing was, you know, I always kind of took my brothers under my wing because there were seven boys in my family and I was the biggest out of all of them. I was second born out of the seven but I always kind of kept him with me when we got on the bus. They had something on there that said standing room only. We got on that bus and, like I said, I thought we were going to Charleston jail when jail was mentioned, but that ain't where we went. We went to the Mississippi State Penitentiary, Parchman.

42:27 DELONG: So people were standing?

42:28 PAGE: On the bus. All the seats were full and all up and down the aisles, full, and they were still trying to push more people on there.

42:36 DELONG: Where on the bus were you and your brothers?

42:40 PAGE: We were about halfway back. We walked up that morning because we were late for school. They had us get on the bus and it was almost halfway full, so we just kind of got in and headed back. We actually found a seat back there. Some people started getting up, trying to get off, but they wouldn’t let them off. There was actually two buses to take them from here that day that were full. I think those buses were like fifty-five passenger buses, and you had maybe sixty-five, seventy kids on each bus. I can’t remember the exact count that went over there, but I knew it was over a hundred.

43:10 DELONG: So, was it five of you all on one seat together, or?

43:14 PAGE: Only three could sit on the seat. I think it was 11 seats on each side on each one of those buses. Of course, there was the big kids, you know, only two could get on a seat. But of course, they’ve got those buses, and they don’t put as many kids on the bus as they used

to back then. So we rode to Parchman on that bus. There were two buses full who went. Of course, they had the same problem in Grenada one time they told me they put all those kids in an eighteen-wheeler cow truck. They had them in the back of a trailer that they hold cows in. They didn't go on the school bus. But we actually went on the school county buses.

43:53 DELONG: So, this happened in more than just Charleston?

43:55 PAGE: Mhm. We actually read the writing on the wall and stuff that the kids wrote when they was over there, saying that they had been brought over there unfairly, and all that kind of stuff, from different areas. I know Grenada had something over there. I don't know if anywhere else did, but I know Grenada did.

44:10 DELONG: What did the writing on the wall say?

44:11 PAGE: It was saying, something like, "We was brought over here and treated as a criminal, thrown in here and frightened for, scared for our lives." There was all this graffiti on the wall that the kids would write. There may have been something to it, there may not. I don't know if there were kids that were put up there or not. It did scare us though. We were actually afraid from what they were telling us.

44:32 DELONG: Do you know why the students from Grenada were brought in?

44:35 PAGE: I think for the same reason we were, protesting around school. I didn't actually talk to any of them, but they took some over there.

44:45 DELONG: Do people on the bus that day, were they talking? Was it silent?

44:51 PAGE: No. No. There was a lot of them singing. "We Are Somebody" and all that kind of stuff. They were actually having a good time until they realized where they were going. They maybe thought they were gonna go for a field trip or something. But, it wasn't a field trip. It was a jail trip. It was wrong what they'd done because, you know, you don't take kids to jail for standing out there around school. They weren't bothering anybody. They weren't hurting anybody. But, they did it.

45:17 DELONG: How were people singing "We Are Somebody"?

45:22 PAGE: Everybody just kind of... you know, some people actually had a good voice and you could hear the bus coming and you would think it was somebody actually enjoying themselves. I guess they were just doing something to pass the time more or less. They actually seemed like they were having a good time on that bus. But, they really weren't, once they realize what was happening.

45:45 DELONG: Was it hot on the bus?

45:47 PAGE: Oh yeah. We had the windows down, you know, back then. I actually think it was cold during that time of year when we went. I don't think this was a warm time because I know that night that all this was going on, they had heat in there. It was bringing cold in all that kind of stuff but somebody flooded... y'know they have that bathroom sitting against the wall. Somebody flooded one of those things and we were getting wet.

46:11 DELONG: In Parchman?

46:12 PAGE: Mhm.

46:13 DELONG: Can you tell me more about it?

46:14 PAGE: Well, what had happened was, you know, the mess was laying on the floor. I don't know if the toilet just backed up or somebody actually did it to create a disturbance in there. You had water standing on the floor, so they moved us over to another, more or less, an area, and brought some more mattresses in there. But, by the time they got all that done they actually came and gather us and loaded us back on the buses. One time some of the kids were saying... when we got to the church down there, someone was kind of upset about it, saying they was gonna take up some money for the bus driver. I guess, his wife or something was thinking they were going to do something to him and she was trying to speak for him. But, he did what he was told to do. I'll never forget, one of the bus drivers, when they told him to bring his bus around there, he got off the bus and said, "I'm not taking these kids nowhere." He got off and walked away. But one of the other ones, he was an older guy. He drove it. But, the bus driver that got off and said he wasn't taking no kids nowhere, the deputy sheriff that was standing there, he drove them.

47:12 DELONG: The deputy sheriff drove it?

47:16 PAGE: One of the deputy sheriffs that was standing out there drove that bus. The driver that drove it every day said, I'm not going to do this. He said it's not my bus, I don't own it. When they told him to pull it up, he pulled it up and stepped off of it.

47:25 DELONG: What do you know about the sheriff at that time?

47:30 PAGE: Well, the sheriff they had at that time was the one. He was sheriff up until '89. He just finally resigned. He didn't get beat, he just finally retired. From what I understand, he was sheriff... back then they had a setup where the sheriff was gonna be sheriff for so long, that they had him be sheriff for four years and his wife would be it for four years, but he



would always do the job. Whatever was done. But now, you know, they got sort of... I know sheriffs now that have been in there for almost 30 years, but I think it was kind of reversing around then. But I've seen a thing where they can only do two terms.

48:03 DELONG: What was the bus home like, back from Parchman?

48:08 PAGE: Coming back? Well, you know, more or less, people were tired and sleeping. It was 12 o'clock and you were talking about schoolkids. A lot of the younger ones... y'know all the singing stuff was kind of stopped and we just came on in and we just turned and went to that church down there. Everybody went in and kind of had a little meeting about, you know, trying to plan some kind of strategies about this. My thing was, I missed the twenty day deal, but when they came up with that... I was actually in school when they loaded them up that day and left, because I didn't stay out. Nine days later they went back, but they loaded them up and they went back for twenty days.

48:44 DELONG: The "We are Somebody" slogan, that reminds me of the "I am Somebody" slogan, which was used during the Memphis sanitation workers strike. Was there any similarity there, or was that just a coincidence?

48:57 PAGE: Well, I thought it was because of a song back then that Johnny Taylor had recorded. You know, "I am Somebody". I thought that's where they got it from. There may have been something before that song, but that was the one that most of them used. "I am Somebody." "We are Somebody." "You are Somebody." It was a song that was actually out at that time.

49:15 DELONG: Why do you think the song resonated so strongly with people?

49:18 PAGE: Well, you know, I guess, it was a way to kind of get their message across. Let folks know that they *are* somebody, not just somebody that you can just do any kind of way. You listen to it and the way it goes it kind of makes you think, "Well, these people, they are somebody." They aren't just somebody that you can just throw away and run over. They're letting us know that, that they are somebody, and they ain't gonna take it just laying down. It worked fine.

49:46 DELONG: Is there anything else you want to add about your experience?

49:50 PAGE: Well nothing I can think of right off the bat, but it was really an experience that I never will forget. I'm pretty sure my brothers won't. We learned from it and I'm pretty sure everybody on that bus, as a matter of fact, on those *buses* learned from it.

- 50:06 DELONG: Do you think that it is something that should be commemorated and acknowledged today?
- 50:13 PAGE: Yes. It really should. Younger kids, just like my kids and grandkids, they didn't think something like that could ever happen. A lot of people don't realize it and they *knew* it happened. If it was done, people would know what happened, because a lot of people still don't know that it happened, and it happened right here. I know that it happened in Grenada too, but some people don't know it. Until I told my kids and grandkids about it, they didn't know it. But it actually happened.
- 50:39 DELONG: How do you think we can best remember it?
- 50:42 PAGE: Well, I think, by the fact that it did happen, and the coming up from it. It was the best way to know that it was an experience we learned from. It was something that, just because of the way it happened, it won't happen again. The ones that did it, they learned from it too, because they realized that they were wrong. They know that what they got away with, they can't get away with today. Under no circumstances can you get away with doing something like that today. You can't find nowhere in this area, or no other area, that would load young kids up and take them on a bus to Parchman, and put them in a cell with inmates. You can't do that.
- 51:17 DELONG: Do you think Charleston still has healing to do from this, from this time?
- 51:22 PAGE: Not from that time. I think, for all that goes, I think that's all over. There's still some stuff that probably we could learn from around here. Everything is changing around here now. If you go back and check, for years, the City of Charleston was run... everybody, the mayor and the board members, were all white. You look at it now, and the mayor and all the board members are black. Even the chief is black, almost all the officers are black. I'm not saying that it's something that should... because I believe that everything should be integrated. Equally. When I was chief there wasn't any "I'm hiring all black or all white". If I had people that were coming in that were green, that were experienced and qualified and treated people right, I'd hire them. That's just the way I look at it. And that's the way it should be.
- 52:07 DELONG: Anything else you want to add?
- 52:09 PAGE: No. Not right now. I think I've about covered it all.