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KCTC-9

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ORAL HISTORY

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English, Ronald W.
3/14/85
KCTC-9

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Ronald W. English

CONDUCTED BY: Jim Deeter

SUBJECT: Kanawha County Textbook Controversy

DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 14, 1985

TRANSCRIBED & TYPED BY: Gina Kehali Kates

INTERVIEW WITH RON ENGLISH BY: JIM DEETER
SUBJ: KANAWHA COUNTY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY

JD: This tape is an interview conducted with Reverend Ronald English of the First Baptist Church in Charleston, West Virginia on March the 14th, 1985. And this tape is specifically to be used for historical research in the thesis concerning the Kanawha Valley Textbook Controversy in 1974 and '75. The interview is being conducted by Jim Deeter. And the tape will be on deposit in the Marshall Library for further reference. Rev. English, just first of all, to kind of get acquainted, why don't you share a little bit about your background, where you came from, where you grew up and how you came to be the pastor of First Baptist Church in Charleston and so on.

RE: I'm a native of Atlanta, Georgia. I grew up in Atlanta, a public school system and of higher education there, Morehouse College and then a inter-denominational theological center at Atlanta University. And I stayed there for a couple of years after graduation at the ITC Interdenominational Theological Center as Director of Public Relations and Alumni Affairs. But I also was assistant pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where I was licensed into the ministry by Dr. King. And also, ordained in that church. And I worked with the uh, youth programs in that church as assistant. And uh, one of the members of the pulpit committee here at First Baptist Church is a native of Atlanta. And she called Dr. King, Senior, and asked whether he had an-, suggestions on someone to fill in after the minister here had passed away. And he recommended me and I came, with no notions of ever coming here to stay. But I guess as the line in the old spiritual says, "I went to the valley, didn't go to stay. My soul got happy, I stayed all

day." [chuckles] So, at a the unintentional or the accidental became a long term commitment that I have kept for the last, well, going now into the 13th year here. So that's how I happened to come to the holy hills of West Virginia [chuckling] from Atlanta, Georgia.

JD: You came here then, what? 1972?

RE: Right, (JD:Yeah) right. I commuted for awhile because I had a commitment at the center where I was employed as a personnel-, or as a public relations director until the end of that school term. So I commuted for about six months. After they had extended the call, actually the call in December of '71.

JD: And you came here permanently in '72? Is that right? (RE: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm) Do you have family?

RE: Right, right. No, three children. We adopted one child in '79, I believe, '79 or '80. My son was born the year that I came in 1972. And my oldest daughter, Robin Christia, is uh, she'll be 17 next week. I recently divorced, well, not recently divorced, divorced in March of '83. So that's out family situation.

JD: Mmm-hmm. Your children-, you actually had children in the Kanawha County School system during the controversy, then?

RE: Oh, yeah, yeah, right.

JD: So you had first-hand knowledge of supposedly what was going on. How did this, this controversy that began basically in May or April of 1974, how did it first come to your attention and what were some of the subsequent things that happened after it came to your attention? Do you recall?

RE: Uh, seemed like it came to my attention as a result of some members of the school board suggesting or recommending that a review committee would be established to look at the textbooks that were being proposed for the following year. And they wanted to have that review committee representative of a segment of the community. Inclusive of you know, parents, inclusive of various age categories, I guess. But [inaudible].....in terms of ethnic representation. So, it just so happened that a good friend of mine and I were on this committee. And he lived, at the time, right up the street, and his son and mine were very close friends. He was Jewish, Michael Winger. In fact, he was uh, employment security commissioner and uh, very active in the Rockefeller administration, before he went to Washington, as director of Appalachian Regional Commission. Well, his son and my son went to the same school. They were the same age. And they played together and all that kind of thing. So, it was kind of interesting when both of us got this call, you know, to come and sit on the textbook review committee, primarily because of our ethnic backgrounds and other things, as far as the community involvements were concerned. And I think I was the only black on that committee. Because I guess I was filling two categories: black and Baptist preacher. Because, if I recall, as I just mentioned, Mike was Jewish, there was a Episcopal uh, priest (JD: Jim Lewis?) no, not Jim Lewis. This was before Jim came. Bishop, who he's bishop now, Bishop Adkinson, Robert Adkinson. Uh...so we were asked to sit on this review committee as a representative group of the community at large. But I think the bias that we would have was kind of known. Because we kind of represented the liberal faction and uh, Alice Moore and and some others, had

appointed some other persons who would be a little bit more conservative. I had forgotten the number that was on the original committee right now. It was a pretty sizeable number.

JD: Do you remember when that was? Was that after May of '74? Was that in the summer of '74, do you recall?

RE: Uh, my history gets a little further at this point. It seems to me that it was uh, after-, before the summer of '74. School was still going on. (JD: Oh) when we were meeting. And it seemed to be that we were meeting during the time that the strike had started. Because the miners were out. So that...

JD: Well, that would have put it in the fall of '74, then. Because the miners didn't actually go out until school opened in '74, (RE: Yeah) September of '74.

RE: Yes. So this had to be around the fall of '74.

JD: School opened in '74, '75. (RE: Yeah, yeah) So you were invited by the Board of Education to sit on the committee (RE: Mmm-hmm) that would review the textbooks? (RE: Mmm-hmm) Now you say others appointed, Alice Moore and others, appointed members to that same committee. Is that correct?

RE: Yeah. As I recall, it was some kind of formula that was worked out between the board and the superintendent. Because at that time, I've forgotten the superintendent's name. (JD: Kenneth Underwood) Yeah, right, yeah. I think he had made the recommendation for my appointment and some others. Alice Moore and some members of the school board made sure it was kind of balanced, or it might have been the other way around. But he wanted to make some appointments or make some

recommendations for appointments to make sure that it was balanced. So I think the primary emphasis for my sitting on the board came from Kenneth Underwood. Because one of his assistants, one of his strong assistants, was Charlene Byrd, who's a member of our church. And uh, she was quite concerned that the ethnic bias or the ethnic content of the books as they were being discussed, would be uh, well, the resistance was showing signs of racism. And uh, that was another issue, in addition to the educational value, of uh, of this particular approach that the racism was kind of raising another kind of issue.

JD: So, you're saying that the issue wasn't primarily an educational one? (RE: Oh, no) Also, ethnic. (RE: Oh, definitely) Racism.....

RE: Oh, definitely.

JD: Is that right? Why did that racism manifest itself? Now, you're talking about the anti-textbook people demonstrating some kind of racism? (RE: Oh, yeah, yeah) How did they do that?

RE: Well, that-, it was not shown directly. Because it was always a kind of embarrassing issue. Particularly whenever we went to review committee meetings and all that. But uh, uh, it came about kind of explicitly in some of the outlying areas. Cabin Creek, some of the other, you know, hollows around the area. Where uh, the books became known as the nigger books. You know, because they included the contribution of black authors. But some of the black authors, in speaking the vernacular, and in speaking language that was, you know, from the writings of the particular books we had, Jane Baldwin is one that came to mind. They may have used

all the references may have utilized all the four letter words. In addition to some of the poetry that they had cited from black authors, I know there were others, E. Cummings, and Ezra Pound were among the authors that they had considered to be atheistic or humanistic that they cited as being reasons for not wanting these textbooks, you know, introduced. So it became a hot part of the issue. But the way that it came down, as far as far as the community response was, a lot of times the books were called nigger books. Or a lot of times, references were made to uh....the content of blacks, blacks having the kind of visibility in the literature and the history. It was kind of disturbing, blacks having that kind of visibility. It was kind of disturbing to a lot of folk. And so, and this just represented a different approach, you know, to history, to the interpretation of it, to the reading of it, to the teaching of it. And then, there were teachers who were not very versed in it. And it involved retooling for them, get involved a kind of reeducation and re-assessment, evaluation of how they were teaching, some honest enough to admit, we don't know enough about black history as to be able to comfortably absorb it. Therefore, we need to get a little bit more tooling ourselves. Others resisted it, you know, as a means of saying, "No, we don't...." So that was a strange kind of coalition being formed all over the place. And sometimes, then I think this was the time when there was an attempt at the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. Particularly in this area. And so, the uh, book issue and the references to, you know, to nigger books, and then the whole notion of this being irreverent and humanistic education, that undergirds the basic moral values of the American society and all that, you know, because we are for God and country. And these books were giving

credibility to writers who were not for god and country. And consequently, you should oppose the books on the basis of both morality and patriotism. And so, these kinds of issues kind of got all mixed in the pot. And uh, but, but the obvious racist overtone of it became very dominant, as the controversy moved on. And as some uh, signs and taunts and gheers were made in certain areas, where blacks are very scarce, if at all. And so, it was kind of the exposure of the community ignorance of black people. And it become, it becomes always threatening when somebody that you have never had to deal with before in any shape, form, or fashion, you not have to deal with in so me way. If it's no more than in the pages of a book.

JD: Mmm-hmm. So you uh, you went on the this textbook review committee in the fall of '74, best as we can determine. What did you actually do on that committee? I mean, what were some of the things that you did?

RE: Well, each week there were selected text, books that were supposed to be used for each grade level. And we were to review the books, you know, read them, look at some of the illustrations and that kind of thing. And then bring back any comments that we had in a succeeding meeting. I mean, a whole lot of reading. But it basically wound up being scanning the books. So we started at grades....zero, I think, kindergarten level on up to elementary level through to about the junior high level, yeah. Because we were dealing with the elementary text. There was another set of folks dealing with the junior high and then another set dealing with the high school. But we started with the elementary text. And there were, as I recall, three different publishers that had submitted books. Silver Burdette was one, I can't recall the other two. And so we were

to look at those books, in terms of those we thought to be most representative of a ethnic exposure, and who gave a pretty good balance and who's educational methods seemed to be rather progressive and just made sense, in terms of what they were trying to do, the educational methodology [inaudible]... So that was the assignment, to read books at each level and to compare the content of the books supplied by two or three publishers for that particular grade level.

JD: Did you find any of these books offensive yourself? Did you find any of them particularly offensive?

RE: No, no.

JD: Were any of the books in the elementary section that you looked at, did they use foul language, four-letter words, that kind of thing, things you mentioned earlier that people were complaining about?

RE: Well, there were some. I mean, for example, a book like The Learning Tree Growing Pods. I think there were some references from his book in that. I think I mentioned James Baldwin. Well, they would use vernacular terms like shit and damn and you know, like somebody using it in a conversational way. But I don't recall the vulgarities really being that extensive at all. As to be offensive. But they may have used words like damn and, and uh, or Hell, something like that, just [inaudible]...way. which would, by some measurements, be offensive. And there were other references that Godless. Poetry that made some reference to evolution. Or God being present, you know, in everything. As you would likely have some poem by an African or Afro-American, because that's part of the African culture. But they saw

that as being something that made God too small, you know, that he become so [inaudible].... So those were the kinds of references that seemed to have gotten the most response. And then there was the anti-American argument that you would have certain black authors who would be protesting the way that Americans were treated-, or blacks were treated.

JD: Like Malcolm X or Eldridge Cleveland.

RE: Exactly. And they were considered to be anti-Americans. No matter the fact that Eldridge Cleveland made a significant turnaround later on.

JD: Yeah, right. I happened to hear him speak on time in person. It was quite a change.

RE: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, I think there were some sections [inaudible]....

Malcolm's autobiography. So there were things along that line. Which, from the standpoint of literature, would have to be included [inaudible].... But I never saw anything that I considered to be..... Because I always kind of kept [inaudible] ...as being what I wanted my children to read. And I never saw anything that I would have any problem with my children reading.

JD: So how did your committee function, then? What was the outcome of your committee? And what did you finally resolve? Or did you resolve anything?

RE: Well, I'm not sure that we resolved anything. I think that our committee, the one that I sat on, had the majority of that committee were in favor of the textbooks. And we reported that, you know, to the board. Then the board made a decision on, on the text that it would use, based on the findings, you know, that we had. But as I recall, there

was a strong opposers to the uh, report that was submitted. But uh, it went with the majority consenting for the use of the books, and I think recommending-, no, supporting the recommendation of the board members, because each committee had a board consultant that sat with it, as a member of the committee. (JD: I see) So that any questions that we had would be forwarded to this consultant who, if they did not have the answer, would be able to go back to the board and this consultant would be a paid, I mean, was a teacher or a member of the board of education or somebody they assigned, you know, to that particular task. So, and the consultant would be in a position of making a recommendation of preferred text. And if we supported those, we could go with that. And if not, then we could also tell them that. [phone interruption]

JD: We were talking about this committee's involvement in the selection of the books and how you made recommendations and so on and so forth. Let me move on to another area, basically. Uh...talking about other people that were involved in this controversy, as the year moved on, as '74, September, October, November, December, as that year wound down, the violence, from what I see at this point, get, got progressively worse. Especially in the fall and early winter. Were you aware or were you involved in any incidences that you can remember of violence being done to you personally, or to....?

RE: No, no more than phone calls that would come. Which [inaudible]..... particularly my ex-wife. But uh, there were no occasions that I recall, of any kind of violent actions that I suffered. I mean, no, going to and from the site where the committee met, was kind of considered a little hazardous. Because as I recall, it

was in a neighborhood of all white, you know, families. And after a while, they kind of knew where we were. Now, they didn't want to have the meeting at the board, obviously. Because that would be kind of an attention-getting site. So we met up at the Creed Firehouse, where the books were stored, which made it accessible as far as the books and what-not. But Creed was up the road. I mean, it was almost up the hollow a little bit. And that was-, and then one night they had to meet at another place on up further. I happened to be out of town that night. And that was the time, I think, they got some company from the Ku Klux Klan, and some I don't know if that was in a burning of crosses as such. But I do recall a couple friends of mine told me because I had missed some really heavy action from when there was some crowds that came around, and [inaudible]..... and they had called the police to break it up. Well, this was the first phase of the escalation being, you know, so aggressive in the street. And I think that happened as a result of the miners being out on strike, and then a lot of tension that was related to some other kinds of issues. Some things I do recall I kind of felt a little bit different toward when I heard them out.

JD: Can you give us a [inaudible]....?

RE: For example, part of the problem seemed to have been the way that people perceived that the board had made decisions in a kind of high-handed way, over what would affect, you know, their children and what they were gonna have taught in the schools. And consequently, the community input or the community response or feedback, or status with the board, or with the administration at this point, was considered to be under a strain. And they had not really endeavored to establish the

kind of rapport with the community that may have averted some of this in part. So, part of what was happening to the textbook controversy was a lightening rod for a lot of issues. And among those issues seemed to have been the lack of community involvement in the decision-making process at the Board of Education, and the board not reaching into the community to establish the kind of rapport that would be helpful, you know, on a on-going basis whenever change is gonna have this kind of impact and effect. And so I think the board did kind of start looking at itself in that regard. And saying if you don't include folk, that's what really sets up the likelihood they're gonna resist whatever you have to offer. And so that were part of the issue. And so when the miners were out, and the alliances were formed, you know, that people were making these kinds of decisions for us and not consulting us, then that really became a real heavy opportunity for making that kind of protest. And that's what was going on.

JD: How much of a cultural thing was this? Now, you may not maybe understand what I'm asking you. But I've heard a lot of talk about the hillers and the creekers and the (RE: OH, yes) and them being so isolated and their ethnic background, their cultural background is different than the people out here and so on. How much of an issue was that, do you think?

RE: I think it was a significant part of an issue. In fact, I think it was more an issue than black and white. Particularly around this area. Because blacks were so much in a minority. Now, it may have been an issue, as far as the content of the book's black and white, black history, black writers and all that. But when it came to the issue of the books themselves. And the decision-making and how folk were perceiving the school

system, I think that's where the class struggle got in to it. I mean, between the hillers and the creekers. And I wasn't even aware of that until after, you know, awhile when I saw that the violent activity was happening, you know, among the hills, you know and outlying areas where a lot of that was going on. So it seemed like there was just, you know, the Hatfields and the McCoys, in a different way, a different type of environment. It seemed like that issue was very, very prominent. And I was surprised to see how much that was.

JD: Yes, you would think in 20th Century America, after 1960, that would have died out. That idea, you know, if you go up one of these hollows you're libel to be shot because you're a reveneurer. And that seems to be part of the issue here. That those people felt threatened with outsiders telling them how their kids ought to be educated.

RE: Yeah, yeah. And it doesn't surprise me, in a way, that that issue is still so much alive, given the geography. And given the uh, uh, patterns of rural and urban life in this area, communications being what it is. [inaudible]....not as a result of somebody really trying to do something fancy or technology-wise. But that was the way you use a mountain to kind of bounce signals across. Well, I'm saying, it really doesn't surprise me, as I think about it, given those things. One of the things, I had fun, kind of making an illustration is, the idiomatic expression for a group down south, as far as what we find here. And down south, when somebody is talking about a group of folk, they say, "Y'all," you know, which mean, "you all". Up here, I often hear the term "We'uns," which mean, "we ones". Now, "you all" is a collective term, you know. "We ones" is a collective but a very individualistic term, meaning "we ones". So it seems that there's

still something about the individualism, and about the kind of isolationism in this area that would make it difficult for that to be a kind of collective consciousness. In any given thing. In the textbook controversy, I think this kind of [inaudible]...that it's going to be pockets of folk. And they find the cohesion among families and folks [inaudible]...neighborhood. But a sense of community beyond the neighborhood, that's something else. And to a lot of folk, it's still an illusion.

JD: Yeah. Well, my understanding, I was told by some of the Board of Education people that, that was about the time that the school board, Board of Education, had determined to close a lot of the little one-room and two-room schoolhouses all over the county, and were beginning to consolidate (RE: Right). And I guess many people felt threatened by that, that their kids were going to be going with black kids or maybe they were going with some other group, and they would be influenced by them or whatever.

RE: There was a lot of things the board did that I don't think they really looked at what the sociological implications of it were. And uh, maybe they just saw this being one decision made for education, another decision made for economics, you know, as far as closing the schools. But all of this coming down at the same time, somebody just really hadn't done a lot of homework, in terms of anticipating the reactions.

JD: You mentioned earlier, twice so far you mentioned the Ku Klux Klan. And I want to just dwell on that for a minute. How much did outside people, I'm talking about the Ku Klux Klan, the John Birch Society, someone even mentioned a socialist group, community group, you need to get that? [phone interruption] Okay, I asked you before you had to leave about how much influence outsiders might have had on this

controversy. Could you comment about that a little bit?

RE: Yeah. Well, it may seem like two, there was another issue where it was not just obvious outsiders like the KKK, and the communists on either sides. But I think Underwood himself was considered to be an outsider. Because he was not a native of this area. And some members of....

END OF SIDE 1 - TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 2 - TAPE 1

RE: I was saying that Underwood himself was from outside the area. And as you made mention, Alice Moore was outside of the area, too. But it seemed like Underwood was from the kind of background, liberal [inaudible]...what-not, that made his presence a little bit more suspicious than Alice Moore, who was able to kind of connect with the pulse beat of the folk that she represented. So the outside influence has always been something very suspect in the area. I was told, for example, when I came that it would be to a year before I was a considered a neighbor, and a maybe a lifetime before I'd ever get any consideration, as far as, native. My son did not have that problem, because he was born here. So that's [inaudible]..... Now, in terms of specific groups, though, that I knew and had some either direct and indirect contact with, the uh, the KKK was here because it was trying to resurge itself. That was during that era when they were walking on opposites of the streets, in some cities in the south, where some pro-, some other types of protests were going on. So that was part of that resurgence movement in terms of our coming here. I don't know of, I don't have any direct knowledge about the Nazi's or John Birch's. I mean, I heard but I didn't have any

direct knowledge about that. Uh...on the other side, there were the
and socialists, who basically would be talking about the embarrassment, how
unfortunate it is that these books that were blacks, you know, had black writers, were
given this kind of treatment. So they were out protesting and saying that we are for the
rights of minorities, you know, that's how they were kind of making that connection.

JD: You were talking about the groups.....

RE: Yeah, so I don't know of any.... But as the communist groups came, several
called, several would call and some-, one or two came by. And they were very
sympathetic, in terms of minority issues, that they seemed they were being supported-,
that they were being threatened. Which also gave them a kind of [inaudible]..... So
you had the KKK trying to get the on the reactionary side of the
fundamentalist and the uh, you know, the forgotten country, and the conservative
element. Then you had the communist kind of seeing an opportunity to get into the uh,
ruckus, get some notoriety, maybe not as obviously as the KKK. But they were trying to
get some notoriety and win some alliances on the liberal side. Because they were kind
of supporting the liberal issues here. They had the miners in between, you know.
Otherwise, they would be the ones who were the working class, and that kind of thing.
So uh, that's how I saw the outside influences in the midst of the controversy, and how
that some of the alliances just kind of broke down along that line.

JD: Did they tend to prolong the issue, you think, the outsiders, the groups?

RE: No, I think what really prolonged the issue was the fact that the miners were out on
strike. Because that gave a lot of bodies to be in the street, and particularly a lot in

those outlying areas. And then, it also gave some avenue of venting some of the frustration they had about being out on strike, period, and what was happening in the families and that kind of thing. I mean, it was just a seasonal time that the miners would go out on strike, no matter what. And I think at the same time, there was a lot of tension within the UMW over the change of leadership, and a sense that this striking business was really defeating the purpose in the long run, which was what happened in a lot of the areas, because mines closed. So that was a feel, maybe the beginning of the end, as far as the uh, the mines were concerned. And so probably....I....I would tend to think that's what caused it to last. I didn't see that, that kind of powerful witness, so to speak, of the KKK causing it to be of a long-term, nor of a the communists.

JD: They were just kind of looking for some way to get a platform?

RE: That's it.

JD: Yes. Let me change the subject again for a minute. Did you have any personal contact with the people who would be identified with the anti-textbook side, Alice Moore, Marvin Horan, Charles Quigley, Avis Hill, those people. Did you have any personal contact with them during this period?

RE: Oh, yeah, Quigley, Avis and uh, Horan. One-, a United Methodist Bishop, I've forgotten his name now...

JD: I know his name, too, but I can't think of it just this minute.

RE: Well, it'll come to one of us in a moment. Well, he, he, he saw a kind of peace-making role, reconcillatory role, that he would want to contribute or play in it. And aside

from the meetings that we were having in the review committee situation. And he thought it might be helpful just to get the leaders, particularly the pastors, from the churches, of the different churches, together and to have a kind of a forum for talking about, you know, some of the issues that were disturbing us. And uh, which seemed to have been an excellent idea to approach. And so he had the first meeting over to I think it was down here on the corner at the United Methodist Center. There seemed to me to be another meeting arranged as a kind of a dinner, you know, type thing. Then there was one...yeah, there was one arranged for Christ Church United Methodist in the area of that downstairs. And it seemed to me, that was another time that I was out of town. And uh, the police came and I've forgotten what it was that caused them to arrest...

JD: They were arrested for contributing to the delinquency of minors. That one was issued by the city of Cedar Grove, West Virginia, which is up in the eastern part (RE: Right) of Kanawha County. And that city had issued a warrant for their arrest for contributing to the delinquency to minors. I remember that story.

RE: Well, that was another meeting that I missed.

JD: Sounds like providence was working...

RE: And so, when I came back and they told me that the bishop and some other folks were, [inaudible].... But anyway, it was in that context that I met Quigley and Horan and uh, Hill.

JD: Did they seem to be people that were amiable, that were open to suggestions and....?

RE: Hill was, and uh, Horan, Horan. (JD: Marvin Horan) Marin Horan, yeah. I was particularly impressed with him. Because he was just somebody that felt trustworthy, and I felt like he was standing strong on his convictions, as I was standing on mine. But he was open to hearing, you know, at least the other side. I had the feeling that uh, Quigley in particular, and Hill, too, to some extent, were looking for some notoriety that they felt this was an opportune time to get, as, as, you know, preacher, profit, protestors and that kind of thing. In fact, one of their churches split during this time. And I think it was Quigley, because not far from where I live on the hill, part of the congregation that had gone with him, moved up there with him. But uh, I don't think that last too long, and, and before they moved on to someone else. There was the church originally that the congregation was together over on Bigley Avenue. And it's, split not long after the controversy. So, it seemed like part of what was happening, you know, and [inaudible]..... issue getting more notoriety out of it, that we kind of utilized this opportunity for other things. But I remember Horan, Horan as being a very genuine, open, and concerned brother. And not literally educated, in terms of school. But very well-learned as far as just dealing with folk. And he was speaking his own convictions and the conviction of those he felt that he served. And I felt a certain kind of pastoral integrity in him that I did not feel in the others. And uh, so I, I really enjoyed our conversations. And I felt there was some learning going on, you know, in terms of where he was and where I was. And we had a warm, kind of congenial meeting. The other two were just basically kind of, they didn't want to call me nigger and I didn't want to call them racists. [chuckling] We tried to do the best we could to be as courteous, as

we kind of talked through some of these things.

JD: The reason I asked you that question is that I've heard accusations from both sides, that there were, that the anti-textbook people wouldn't listen, they wouldn't compromise, they didn't try to reach middle ground...[phone ringing]...you need to get that? (RE: Mmm-hmm) Okay, I was stating that I've heard accusations by both sides that neither side would listen or try to compromise. Did you get a feel for that? Or...

RE: Yeah, I got a feel from Hill, particularly. I think more [inaudible]...

it seemed like at first they had some areas for compromising and what-not. But uh, the more it became obvious that they may be on the winning side or they may be the ones who came out on top of this, the more

they got, the less likely they were gonna deal with anything, particularly out of Avis.

And that's what made our conversations so difficult. I mean, it just kind of bogged down at that point. And, but it wasn't even clear what they were being recalcitrant about.

And, and it was just getting to be very general, you know, as though, "We want to ban all the books."

JD: Well, he told me that himself. He said that, I asked him, I said, "Wasn't there any area you all could have compromised on?" He said, "The only thing we wanted to do was get rid of all the books." (RE: That's right) And I said, "Well, what about all the millions of dollars that have been spent on all these books that was thrown away?" And he, he didn't really address that. But I got the feeling from him that, that, that was it. Either you get rid of all the books or we're gonna keep protesting.

RE: Right, right. Which was an obvious kind of power move. Because I mean, if you

have the power to do that, then it really becomes awesome in terms of what you can do for the next time around, or in some of the situations. So it was kind of like going for the assuming that that would give you a much stronger political posture.

JD: But you didn't sense that in Marvin Horan?

RE: No, I didn't sense that in him. I really didn't. I saw that he was willing. Now, what areas of compromise I don't know. But I sensed that he was willing to work at, and [inaudible]...over there-trying to get some kind of understanding that would not be so ultra-either/or type thing.

JD: Well, did you ever get the sense-, the feeling from any of these anti-textbook people that they were, in fact, playing the part of censors? That they actually wanted to censor?

RE: Well, the funny part about that was, in we also figured that maybe someone wanted to get rid of all the books. The literacy rate among the anti- was not very high. So, I mean, the only way you could assess is that you could read. And a lot of the books were being protested on the basis of the teachers, or based on what somebody else told, you know, and somebody else inflamed the passions. So, I've been, yeah, there was a strong censorship, you know, bias. But uh, as it kind of got out and the time that it was really thick, it was for all of them, because I don't think anybody took time to read exactly. And then, our excerpts, would duplicate, you know. That was part of gathering the strength or gathering momentum or what. And they would take excerpts, like proofs the Bible. And they would say, "Look how bad, or how horrendous these books are," based on these excerpts. And

they'd have these things floating around to the churches and synagogues and places like that. So that's why I didn't think the censor business was really some....[inaudible]....if you're gonna do census work.

JD: Okay. Let me talk a little bit about this thing starting to wind down now, as the controversy began to come to-, or reach a head, so to speak, or come to a point, the violence seemed to begin to diminish some. School went back into session. What do you remember about how this finally resolved itself? What really happened to make things start to cool off? Or did anything happen?

RE: Well, they, one, one is, the miner's went back to work. So that uh, eliminated a lot of stuff on the street. There was the automatic bottom-out, that a news story like this gets. I mean, after awhile it becomes old news. And of course, part of what kept it going was the notoriety it was getting that here in West Virginia we were bad in books. As in other things, I think Underwood had resigned. And John Santrock, I believe (JD: Yes) was his replacement. Santrock was a more pastoral type administrator, as I recall it. He was the expert in kind of putting out the fire. He was from here, he had been in the system. And he began working in terms of trying to be a mediator, you know, between the school board and the community, without compromising either. Like he formed certain kinds of alliances with the Alice Moore faction. But at the same time, he did not compromise. Then Alice Moore left. And I think some embarrassing things kind of came out about her domestic situation in the paper. So that kind of taught us the image that she had as being the uh, Joan of Arc of this movement, so to speak. So I think several factors, as I recall, kind of happened. You know, from the removal of the

JD: I think it's ironic, I've heard some school people tell me today that ten years later it's just as hard to get people involved in the selection process, parents and so forth, they don't want to get involved, they don't want to take the time. I find that ironic. Because in 1974, parents were screaming and hollering that their kids were being perverted by liberal textbooks. And now, in 1984, '85, they don't seem to care again. I find that ironic.

RE: Yeah, well, I understand it is kind of ironic. But as we recall, what was-, stimulated the awareness, it was the other issues that were kind of forced into that, such that..... It was not the issue of selecting that created the cries for involvement. The issue was that these things have been selected and assuming that has been for this purpose, and by these people. And now, I think they're dealing more with the issue of where the new schools are going to be placed. And that has gotten the notoriety, as far as exposure, rather than textbooks. So it seemed to kind of center on what kind has a tendency to gravitate the most media attention at the moment.

JD: What's important at that moment.

RE: Yes.

JD: Well, let me ask you some questions in retrospect. First of all, did this controversy do any good at all? And if so, what kind of good? Or did it hurt?

RE: Well, I think always a little bit of both in that. I think it did some good, as far as the board becoming and the administration becoming more sensitive to community needs and to community concerns and to trying to draw, you know, some learning from how the pattern of communication is a two-way street between those two, board, school and

community. I think uh...it...well, I think it may have exposed some apparent racism that usually can go underground if it's not dealt with. And to that extent, it may have been good, in terms of people doing some soul searching, really, on where they stood on these kinds of books being taught to their children, no matter how liberal they thought they were. You know, there is a strong conservative push along this line and sooner or later it has to be dealt with, so..... I think that it kind of forced folk who may have considered themselves to be liberal, to really take another look at that, in light of something that really lies really close to home. Uh...as far as the uh, religious issues are concerned, and the religious community and the religious leaders, I've always had the notion that in this valley preachers really follow the folk. And I think Avis and Quigley and all those, I mean, even though they were really very much in, in focus, that they were not the prime movers. They were kind of like the thermostat leaders of the type leaders, you know, who kind of respond to the heat rising among the folk. And then, you know, let me get out front, and here we are. The well, I've seen preachers in the valley, black and white, primarily, as far as out front political action or social action, that kind of thing, they're not there. It's basically the folks that's there. And then we might kind of go, as blacks, what might be happening in Atlanta, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, where you have like participation at a much greater level, and black politicians who preach it like [inaudible].....from Philadelphia, is a clergyman and all that. That's not happening here. And I mean, that's just not been a part of what's happened here on the side of blacks or whites. The most powerful clerics that I have know have been

episcopal bishops and Roman Catholic bishops, you know, in this area [inaudible]..... So I didn't see that to be something that's going to pertain to polarizing the religious community because the clerics of that community were involved in the controversy as they were, and there was some split [inaudible]..... That's even been claimed to have healed up the fastest, because there was no major impact, no loss there at all. So those other two things, I would tend to think would be the most significant things.

JD: I had someone tell me earlier in another interview that the way some of these people who were inarticulate—we talked about them earlier—it's funny that people who were illiterate were complaining about textbooks they couldn't even read. My question to that individual was how in the world did these people ever find out what was in the textbooks, and how did they get so worked up about this thing? And his comment was, it was the preachers in their pulpits telling the people that these are of the devil and these are "nigger textbooks" and what all. You think that's true?

RE: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, yeah. I mean, we saw that. And that's what I had mentioned earlier, I mean, when I talked about Avis getting a lot of notoriety and Quigley getting a lot of notoriety on what they were interpreting to the folk. I mean, in that sense, they were being consistent with the prophetic traditions as being those who . But those who interpreted in another way, [inaudible]....bias.....yeah, that was exactly what was happening. And they had a lawyer, solid following of folk who were-, had common interests, often various communities. The neighborhood, as I was speaking of earlier. And that was a shared value. And they articulated the shared value and kind of were able to stir up the passions along the alliances. They had trust, they had credibility.

And whatever they said, in some situations, was actually taken as gospel.

JD: Okay. Could this thing have been handled differently? Could it have been avoided? Could the controversy have been avoided in your mind?

RE: I don't see how it could have really, no. Now, it may not have been as uh, as comprehensive and as complex. But I don't see how....if there hadn't been a textbook controversy, it would have been something. Because the issues were there. I mean, it was too many exposed nerves, or it was too many exposed wires, live wires...just laying around. I mean, as far as the school, community controversy, the miners and the hillers and the creekers and all that. I mean, it was just too much stuff. It was just waiting on something to happen to draw it together. I don't see how it could have been avoided, really.

JD: I've had several people tell me the same things. I'm also interested in knowing if you have any knowledge of textbooks today, I'd be interested in knowing if textbooks today reflect any of the input that happened in 1974 and '75? In other words, is Kanawha County School Board system uh, textbooks, less liberal, more conservative, as a result of what happened in '74 and '75?

RE: Yeah, I have really intended to take a longer look at myself. Now, the only way that I have taken a look at the textbook recently, I guess it might have been a part of my burnout of having spent that long a time on textbook review committees that after that was over, I said, "Oh, I don't need to look at another textbook for a long, long time." That's the only time I have taken a look at any was my children. And I would look at the books they were using for social studies and history and health sciences. And those

seemed to have been pretty balanced, as far as ethnic contributions were concerned.

And I think a lot of them were from the Silver Burdette series, which seemingly was a good series, if I got the right one. So that's how I have primarily looked in a very casual way over the past year or so, at what's going on right now. So I really don't have a good feel to answer that with, with uh, with authority, so to speak.

JD: Okay. Well, that's really all I have. Do you have any final comments you'd like to make about the controversy, anything particularly you remembered....?

RE: The only thing we've covered....

JD: I've tried to get an overall of the thing. And there were a lot of things we didn't talk about. But I primarily wanted to get your views on the racism and that kind of thing that you were involved in. I appreciate your contribution.

RE: Well, one of those things that really caused the black folk to talk to a lot of black folk about, I mean, the NAACP had a problem trying to figure out what side's it's gonna come up. Because there were people who felt like, you know, a certain language, be it from black or white authors, should not be in the books. So, they were saying, "Well, look at that..." And there were other sayings. But our people, our history is at stake here, and our presence is at stake here, and therefore, we should rather aggressive in making [inaudible]..... So it wasn't just

END OF INTERVIEW