JW: Let's talk a little bit about what it was like to go through the segregated school system in Liberty because you had, my guess is, all Black teachers?

BS: That's right.

JW: All Black principals and an all Black student body. What was it about coming up here that was different?

BS: Well, I think, and that was one of the stark differences because most of the jobs I had, the few jobs I had prior to coming here were jobs basically working in the cotton fields, working corn fields, and so forth. I remember my school days. I remember being around people almost every day that looked like me. We worked together and so forth, and when I came to Kansas here, there was a stark difference. Even when I graduated from high school, I was very deeply concerned about education. That was one of the things, one of the main purposes I had in life was education. When I came here, I began to work a little bit in the school system and so forth, it was quite a difference because at that time, we still had segregated schools right here in Kansas.

So once again, it was schools that I attended. I went to quite often. It was all Black schools. It sort of made me think because there is a great difference between Texas and Kansas. There's a lot of differences there. But I didn't anticipate when I first came to Kansas here that I would find segregated schools.

JW: Because we are the home of Brown v. Board.

BS: Absolutely. Absolutely.

JW: And the school district where you rose to the position of being on its governing body was the governing body that had to deal with segregation.

BS: Absolutely.

JW: I think that if you had come up and gone to Topeka High, you would have found that it was integrated.

BS: That's right.

JW: But not the elementary schools.

BS: Right.

JW: So talk to me about being on the School Board [USD 501 Board of Education] then. I mean, you've had this experience of coming from Texas, going to Washburn which was integrated, and sitting on the School Board, first the DCAC and these parent groups, and then dealing with the requirements to desegregate the schools here in Topeka. They didn't desegregate easily or early.

BS: No, you're absolutely correct. When I came on the Board in 1990, the district was still under court orders to integrate the schools. It was in 1990 I think when we drew up the first plan to integrate the schools. It was quite a chore. That was in 1990. We had several plans. And the very first plan, I can sort of remember like today, the very first plan they drew up, that the School Board drew up, it closed I think four schools on the east side. And there was only one potential school to close on the west side of town.

JW: Belvoir was one of them.

BS: Belvoir.

JW: Was it Lundgren?

BS: No, it was Belvoir, Highland Park North, Highland Park South, Lafayette. [*After the interview Mr. Scott corrected this list: the 5 schools on the eastside of Topeka proposed for closing were Lafayette, Hudson, Avondale East, Highland Park North and Belvoir. The one proposed closure on the westside of Topeka was Crestview.]*

JW: Lafayette's the one I was thinking of.

BS: What had happened, when we sent in that first plan, Sherman Parks and I, we were the two that looked at it, and we found that all of the burden—

JW: Sherman Parks, Jr.

BS: Sherman Parks, Jr. That's right. It was on the east side. The kids on the east side had to bear all of that. What happened, I think in 1993, Sherman Parks and I, we went throughout the community, talking to people about it and everything. Many of the people, these were White and Black, they felt the same thing. They heard it, but it wasn't a reality to a lot of people. It was just like these are Black schools. They

were lower performing schools, and they used that, I think, and I was on the School Board, as a measurement to close them.

But when we talked to people in the community, they saw it different.

JW: How different? How did they see it differently?

BS: Well, basically, they understood that it didn't look right in the first place.

JW: It didn't look right.

BS: I didn't look right. When you look at it on paper, you know, it didn't look right because all the movement at that time would have been on kids on the east side of town because what they would have to do to integrate other schools on the west side, they would have to move them, they called it M & M transportation, transfers. They had to move them.

JW: Busing.

BS: Busing, absolutely. Sherman Parks and I, we drew up a plan. We got a lot of support all over the city for the plan that we had drawn up. One of the most interesting things that I'd ever experienced in my life was when we went to court, into federal court, Judge Rogers was a judge and we submitted our plan to Judge Rogers.

JW: Judge Richard Rogers.

BS: Yes. We submitted to him, and he looked at it, and he told, I can't think of his name, he told a lawyer for 501, he said he wanted them to take a look at. What it was was the fairness. It was a more balanced plan, and it shifted the burden on **each** side of the town for kids.

So once we presented our plan to him, we wanted to testify before the court. Our School Board president wouldn't allow us.

JW: Who was the School board president at that time?

BS: I'm sorry, not the School Board president, but the lawyer for the School Board. I'm trying to think of his name.

JW: That's all right. We'll look it up later. [*Mr. Scott later said the lead attorney for the school board was Gary Sebelius.*]

BS: Okay. He would not call us to testify. So what's interesting about this is that the lawyers on the other side, they called us. They gave us that opportunity that we could come and present. It's something that I had never seen it before. But we was able because they called us and so forth, we was able to present our plan. So that's how our plan was got in place, and that's how we as a School Board had to come back and look at the plan that we submitted and make some adjustments.

What happened, we closed Crestview. We closed Gage. I'm trying to think of the others that we closed. We closed—for some reason, I can't think of them now.

JW: And I can't seem to remember them either. I thought I'd never forget that.

BS: Right. What happened was, during this transition, we decided to close Belvoir, Hudson. Hudson was the other school.

JW: Hudson, yes.

BS: Hudson and Highland Park South, and there was another. I can't think of the other one right now.

JW: Lafayette.

BS: Lafayette. What we decided to do with Lafayette was to put a new school there—tear the old one down and put a new school there, which would later become the magnet school. That's what we decided to do with Lafayette. That was a magnet school we put there.

And way over on the west side—these schools ain't coming to mind—we decided to put a new school there.

JW: Was that Meadows? Because you closed some kind of north central.

BS: It wasn't Meadows.

JW: But you ended up with six magnet schools, I think, didn't you?

BS: No, we only ended up with two magnet schools, one at the Lafayette site and the other magnet school here on Williams.[2]

JW: Named after Mamie Williams *[long-tenured Black elementary teacher].*

BS: Right. Named after Mamie Williams. But the other new schools that we built, the one on the west side, I can't think of the name of the school, these were quality schools. These were schools that would be multimedia, both of those schools. So that was sort of the trade-off.

But the only thing, when we got the two magnet schools, one of the purposes in the plan was to draw kids from the west side to the east side.

JW: Did that work?

BS: It did not work.

JW: Are you surprised?

BS: Yes, I was surprised. As a board member, I was surprised because those schools, those magnet schools were the greatest schools almost in Kansas. We put so much into those schools to make them accessible, to make people want to come to them. We thought sure that because it was a science school—one was a science school, and I forgot what the other one, Williams, was. But they had themes that we felt would automatically draw kids to them. So we thought sure that we'd get the gifted [students] in it. If we could have gotten the gifted kids to come into that school, it would have helped to mitigate the racial balance there.

JW: So the whole thing was about numbers.

BS: Numbers.

JW: Was Sherman Parks, Jr. on the School Board before you were?

BS: Yes.

JW: Was he the first African American on the School Board, or do you know who was the first one?

BS: No, I don't know. I know Joe Douglas was on there.

JW: It was Joe Douglas, I bet, who was Fire Chief.

BS: I think either Joe Douglas or the other gentleman. I can't think of his name. I think it was Joe Douglas, I believe. I want to think it was Joe.

JW: Yes. So Topeka has a history, going back into the late sixties and certainly in the early seventies, of beginning to appoint or find African Americans to serve in some of these positions.

BS: Right.

JW: So you were not the first, but you certainly were at an important time when desegregation depended on loss of federal money. What other were the consequences, if you hadn't gotten your plan passed?

BS: Well, I think, #1, 501 would have still been under court orders, if the plan hadn't passed. And really even all the maneuvering with the new schools and so forth that we put together, you know, that still didn't racially balance the school because they had a threshold—forty-six, fifty-four, I think at some schools, and then they had different [percentages depending on the grade level], but we also had to work out the teacher ratio. At that time, one of the reasons why we could close Gage was because, at that time, I don't think Gage had any Black staff at all.

JW: Probably not.

BS: But that was one of the big sticking points, was trying to get it racially balanced for the courts because everything we was doing, we was doing [to meet] the courts [mandates]. And really after all we'd done, you know, we thought we had the schools pretty much managed, but it wasn't until 1998 and '99 that the schools was declared unitary. That's when we got unitary status—I think it was 1998 or '99.

JW: So from 1954—

BS: Absolutely.

JW: When *Brown v. Board* was heard by the Supreme Court until 1999, it took [45 years] before the Topeka public schools met muster.

BS: That's right.