

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Farrell Race Relations Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 497

JAMES EDWARDS

Interviewed

by

Ronald Rice

on

June 4, 1980

JAMES EDWARDS

James Edwards was born in Farrell, Pennsylvania on June 16, 1935. He has lived his entire life in Farrell except for three years in the U.S. Air Force. Edwards got married in 1961 and with his wife Moseann has fathered two boys. He is interested in sports and is affiliated with the Shenango Valley Urban League, Mercer County Housing Authority, Pennsylvania State Health Department for Mercer County, Twin City Elks. No. 181, Frontiers International and is a member of the Drug Council for the city of Farrell.

Edwards has always enjoyed working with people and his employment history is extensive. His career began in the Air Force as an aircraft mechanic. In 1962 Edwards became a juvenile officer with the Farrell Police and had firsthand experience with much of the racial tensions and violence in Farrell throughout the 1960's. In 1968 he worked for Westinghouse but left there to take a job as a counselor for George Junior Republic from 1969 to 1974. In 1974 he became the Employment Opportunity Director for the Multi-County Human Resources Corporation. From 1976 to the present, Edwards has been the Executive Director of the Mercer County Community Action Agency. This agency provides numerous services to the county, such as transportation, consumer protection and education, and weatherization of low income homes.

Because of his involvement with civic groups and his various employment, Edwards has had a great deal of experience in working among the Blacks in Farrell. He has dealt with many of the black minority problems both in the 1960's and 1970's. Edwards is

dedicating his life to working for the betterment of societies
minority populations and has some strong opinions about the
racial history of Farrell during the 1960's.

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INTERVIEWEE: JAMES EDWARDS

INTERVIEWER: Ronald Rice

SUBJECT: Riots, city policemen, community attitudes,
racial unrest

DATE: June 4, 1980

R: This is an interview with Mr. Jim Edwards for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the racial tensions during the 1960's in Farrell, Pennsylvania, by Ronald J. Rice at the Mercer County Community Action Agency on June 4, 1980, at 10:05 a.m.

Mr. Edwards, could you start off by telling us a little bit about your childhood and background, what you remember about your parents and family?

E: I was born and raised in Farrell, Pennsylvania on June 16, 1935. I attended Farrell schools. I was raised in a very religious background although my father was a Methodist and my mother was a Baptist. I was raised between two denominations.

I went into the service at a very early age after high school. I was in the Air Force and became an aircraft mechanic. I came out of the service in 1957. When I came back home, at that time, jobs were very difficult. We were in a recession period. I applied for several jobs at that time. The first job that came available was as a police officer in the city of Farrell. I started in the police department October 1962. I became a juvenile officer. From there, I started attending school.

I left the police department in October of 1968 and went into Industrial Relations for Westinghouse for six months. I left there in February of 1969. I became a social worker at George Junior Republic in Grove City. I left there in November of 1974. I went with the prime sponsor for the Ceta program for

a six county area. I was in charge of, at that time, all contracting and job development in the six county area. I developed a monitoring and evaluation system for the Ceta program. I left there in September of 1976 to the present position I have now as Executive Director of the Mercer County Community Action Agency.

R: What was the service like for you?

E: Very good. I was an aircraft mechanic and I was with the Strategic Air Command. As a matter of fact, I was with the first outfit that accepted the U-2 for the Air Force. We were stationed at Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio, Texas. I was a crew chief for the U-2. I had a good experience in the military.

I really think all young people should spend at least two years in the military service to help them mature.

R: When you got out of the service you went on the police force. What kind of training did they give you?

E: For becoming a police officer?

R: Yes.

E: At that time, I'll tell you what they did. Basically, I went down after I passed the Civil Service test. The mayor and council hired me. The next morning I reported to the police station. I was sworn in by the mayor and they gave me a badge and a pistol and they told me to go to work. That was it.

R: So you learned on your own.

E: Although, I did attend in 1964 or 1965 a Pennsylvania State Police Academy. I was the first police officer from the City of Farrell to ever attend the State Police Academy.

R: What was that for, a year?

E: It was for about eight to twelve weeks. It was an eight or twelve week course, I can't remember. It was for municipal police officers.

R: What are some of your interests or hobbies? Do you have any specialties?

E: Work.

R: Work? Workaholic?

E: Yes, I'm usually in the office seven days a week. My days

I'm in the office by 7:30 every morning although we don't open until 8:30. I usually open the building up and I usually close the building up. I really don't have any hobbies. On Sundays, I attend what we call a coffee clutch. It's a bunch of guys who meet in Wheatland, Pennsylvania at what used to be called The Pennant Coffee Clutch. We would meet down there on Sunday mornings about eight o'clock and we would just discuss current events, sports, you name it. I have no hobbies.

R: What was your childhood like? What do you remember most about growing up in Farrell, Pennsylvania?

E: That's a good question. When I was young, I enjoyed my childhood. Basically, I lived in town. It was very quiet at that time, you know, post-Depression days.

R: What was a typical day?

E: Guys would shoot marbles and play baseball and stuff like that. A typical day, nothing extraordinary.

R: What about, let's say, getting up to the 1960's. What were your feelings about the early 1960's? You were a police officer then?

E: Yes, I was a police officer.

R: How were things in Farrell, pretty easygoing?

E: Being a police officer in Farrell at that time was probably different than any police officer, I would say, in the surrounding communities, because of the heavy minority population in the city of Farrell. But one thing I found out during that time that led up in the 1960's, I felt that in looking over the police officers, looking at the total, there were always two types of justice, one for the minority community and one for the white community. For example, when they first formed the juvenile department, they put two officers in charge of the juvenile department: myself, and Paul Amico. When they first started out, they were having Paul Amico handle all of the white cases and me handle the black cases. That lasted about one month and I rebelled and I offered my resignation as far as juvenile officer. I told them to return me back to uniform and back to either the best or to the cruiser. I told them I couldn't work under those conditions. What they did was make me the full juvenile officer.

R: Was that mainly the chief's decision?

E: Yes, an administrative decision. Most people when they look at police brutality they look at it in the physical sense, but to me at that time and until today, there was more psycho-

logical police brutality. It has a devastating effect on the community and to people than the physical end of it. It could be in just the way they talk to you or preach to you, just be totally different. For instance, in the city of Farrell, they could arrest a young, black juvenile and the tone of voice they would use would talk down to him and also to his parents. If they would arrest a white juvenile, it's a totally different tone of voice when they communicate with the parents and everything else. So that end of it, the psychological end of it, was terrible.

I tried and I felt at that time when I talked to the police officers about in-service training and bringing a psychologist in to teach police and community relations . . . a community relations type program to help police to understand the people better. I was instrumental in the Farrell Police Department just recently giving psychological testing to all of the police officers. As a matter of fact, a psychologist friend of mine from Grove City is working with Farrell and at the present time, does all of the psychological testing for the Farrell Police Department. I think it's needed and police officers should have some psychology background in order to deal with the community, white or black.

R: A lot of people I have talked to feel that in the early 1960's most of the people in Farrell were pretty close, pretty good neighbors.

E: Well again, you're looking at it through tunnel vision-- the people who you talked to. The people in Farrell, as long as the black community was playing basketball, they were pacified. They thought things were going along right. As long as they were going to school together--I'll give you a good example, I went to school and the people I graduated with, our relationship ended right there after graduation, because you lived in two different worlds. As long as the black people at that time would stay below Fruit Avenue, you had no problems. They say we don't know why and what do you want? What are they looking for? Everything was supposed to be happy and fine for us.

At that time, there were no black elected officials. They had very little black people appointed to commissions. The black people in Farrell had very little input into their daily lives as far as the governing of their daily lives, as far as planning commissions, the recreation commission. Any commission, health, they had no input from the black community.

R: Do you think in Farrell the population is pretty equal between black and white?

E: Oh, I would say in the 1960's it might have been about twenty-

five at that time between twenty and thirty percent of black population.

R: Why do you think the city didn't give them any representation?

E: That was the type of mentality that the white society had at that time. In those days, most of the people up there just didn't care and they still have that type of mentality. To give you a good example as of today, for instance, I know the borough of Wheatland here not to long ago was trying to get equal representation on the Farrell School Board. At that time, the borough of Wheatland met with some of the school officials. Let me show you something, Wheatland solicitor John Evans is president of the Urban League. The Farrell school superintendent Louis Morocco is on the Urban League board. There was a councilman in Wheatland who was also attending these meetings. In these meetings, Wheatland was asking for some representation maybe to elect school directors from districts. The Wheatland councilman told us that these people, especially the school people were saying, "No, we can't do that because if we do it by districts we'll have too many black folks on the Farrell School Board." When we told him [Wheatland councilman] that John Evans and Lou Morocco were both serving on the Urban League Board he was flabbergasted. They never even once said or took up for the black folks and said, "You shouldn't be talking in this manner." They just let it pass. This is the type of mentality that is going on today.

R: Was it worse than the 1960's or do you think it's about the same?

E: It's about the same. It has never changed. They just probably changed colors. You know what I'm saying to you; they probably pulled off a white sheet and put on a green one so to speak. But the mentality of the person under the cover is still the same.

R: Back in the 1960's what were some of your feelings and maybe some of your friends' feelings about what most of the minority leaders across the country were doing, like Martin Luther King?

E: Let's go back to there and talk about the racial riots. For years, the NAACP, the Urban League had tried to negotiate with the white community within the system to try to relieve some of the racial pressure. They did something in the 1950's and 1960's that I felt was unnecessary. Not the black community, the white community. They passed a special civil rights legislation to give the black male and female the rights to vote or the right to integrate in schools and all of that. These were the kinds of things that the Constitution already has said. They had to pass a special legislation for us.

The NAACP and the Urban League for years have been trying to, through legal means and the proper channels, get equality for blacks. It didn't work.

R: Do you think the black people in Farrell were aware of this and most of them participated or tried to follow along?

E: Oh, they were aware of it. Sure, they did. Then back when the riots started in the hot summer and the news media broadcasting about Watts and Detroit and that sort of thing, the tension just built up within the community. It takes one little spark to set the thing off.

R: You say in Farrell particularly then, the summer, that most of the riots went on around here happened in 1967?

E: In 1967 and also in 1969.

R: Do you think it would be mostly a build up from this and the media broadcasting around the country?

E: All that was part of it but there was a lot of hostility in Farrell. I know a lot of the residents, white residents, think there were outsiders. There were no outsiders. When I was on the police force in 1967 we had a rumor control unit. You would hear rumors about people coming in from Youngstown by the busloads and all of that. That was the most asinine thing going.

To give you a good example of what happened once and people never heard it on television, I think it was in 1967, that summer the rumors going around, there were about twelve to fifteen young whites from Mercer, Pennsylvania who came to Farrell. They had chains. They had pipes and everything else. They were riding through Farrell, because they had heard rumors out there that the blacks in Farrell were rioting. So they were coming down here to put these blacks in their places. They were riding through the black neighborhoods and we arrested them. Somebody could have gotten killed. They were all fined for disorderly conduct.

R: It never made the papers with it?

E: It made the papers I think. But that just goes to show you. We arrested them on the corner of I think Staunton and Spearman. But that just goes to show you what takes place that you never hear about.

Back again, the riots of the 1960's woke or made the country aware of what was taking place within their own cities. My dad, years ago, used to tell me when he lived in the south and they beat him that sometimes when you work with a mule you had to get his attention. The only way you could get a

mule's attention is hit him right in the head with a 2 x 4. So basically, that's what the riots of the 1960's did to the country. It got their attention and let the people know that there were problems and they had to deal with them.

R: A lot of people say, "We don't like to call what happened in Farrell a riot. We like to call it violence or unrest or tension." Would you call it a riot?

E: It was a riot.

R: It was a riot?

E: Sure. They broke out windows; they burned buildings. They did the same thing here only on a smaller scale than what was done in the larger cities. There's no difference. The white community would like to say it wasn't a riot--that they had no racial problems in Farrell, but they still exist. Job problems still exist, housing still has problems. I moved up on Luan Boulevard. I bought a home in December of 1973 and moved in there in January of 1974 in the city of Farrell. I had my windows broke out and I got hate mail. I had a rabbit head cut off and thrown on my front doorstep. They even called the power company and had my lights cut off. Don't tell me about Farrell!

R: This was in 1974?

E: This was in 1974! Prior to my buying that home, the neighbors tried to get together and take up a collection of \$1,000 apiece to buy the house to keep me from buying. This is in the city of Farrell today.

R: Even now?

E: Even now! So don't tell my anything about the mentality of it! A neighbor who lives next door to me wrote the county commissioner or the tax bureau or something out there in the county to say his taxes should be reduced because he lives next door to me. This is recent, in the 1970's this took place. So don't tell me about the white mentality that you have in the communities. It still exists. They still look strange to you when you walk into a bar or where they socialize.

R: Do you think the tension wasn't just a quick build-up especially in Farrell?

E: Over the years.

R: Just parallel Farrell with the same thing that happened in the rest of the country, just not as big?

E: Just not as big that's all.

R: Well, once the violence and stuff began in Farrell, the rioting, how close were you to some of it and did you know of any of your family or anybody directly affected by it?

E: Well, how close I was to it? I patrolled the streets. In 1969, I was working for George Junior Republic. As a matter of fact the Executive Director William Gladen gave me time off, administrative leave, to just be there and help them patrol the streets in the city of Farrell, trying to curtail some of the violence. So I was directly involved. As a matter of fact, during that time, myself and Paul Flint . . . Rossi was mayor at that time and Caputo was still chief at that time. The people had just charged into City Hall. They had arrested one of the youths for breaking in Lavine's window and taking some merchandise out of the window. They had to put him in jail. They arrested him that evening and at that time they had the Aldermen system. There were two aldermen in the city of Farrell. Frank Tamber was one of them and Jack Sposatoe was the other one. Because of political things, they did not use Sposatoe as their alderman. It was a political thing. They only used Tamber. Well, at that time, Tamber worked in the mill. He was only available after 4:00. So the kid got arrested at night and they weren't going to take him to the alderman until the next day. Instead of taking him to Sposatoe and getting his bond set and everything they waited until Tamber got off of work. So when Tamber got off of work the kid's father had gone to work. They didn't have any bond. That's when they stormed the police department.

R: Tamber was a white alderman?

E: That's right and Sposatoe. Both were white aldermen, but they just wouldn't use the other one because of political reasons. Tamber was on the administrative side politically and Sposatoe wasn't, so they wouldn't use him.

They had stormed the police department. I went down there, me and Paul Flint, who is the executive director of the Mercer County Housing Authority. They were meeting in council chambers. They had the mayor and the chief backed up against the wall. I called the chief aside. I said, "Why don't you get ahold of one of your judges to set bond." "Oh, no, no, no!" I went on downstairs myself and used the phone. I called Judge Acker. He, at that time, set bond for the kid to be released and that disturbance subsided. The mentality they used that they weren't going to release this kid until they could use their alderman. The kid's father had to go to work. They just weren't going to release them. The judge did release him and it stopped that disturbance. They had kept him in jail almost 24 hours.

R: How would you assess the overall handling by the police department and the governmental agencies, the mayor and stuff?

E: At that time what a joke.

R: Pretty poor?

E: Pretty poor, right. Pretty poor, because they didn't have the ability to be able to deal with it. Number one, the riots were not a police problem, it was a social problem. It was dumped into the policeman's lap. They did not have the capacity to be able to handle it.

R: They weren't qualified?

E: That's exactly right. They just didn't know. Most of your policemen at that time were uneducated, untrained. All they knew was arresting somebody and talking to them like dogs.

R: Do you think the attitude more than helped them?

E: The attitude was just like throwing gasoline on a fire.

R: What was the news coverage like, the Herald, the TV? How do you think they handled the situation?

E: Well, at that time and still today, I think, as far as the city of Farrell is concerned, the Herald has always been biased and so the news coverage was biased at that time.

R: Do you think they added to it, blew it out of proportion?

E: Oh, yes. Sure. They sell newspapers, that's a business! (Laughter) They would never sell newspapers. I don't think the newspaper even came down in depth and really got to the problem to see what the cause of the problem was. They did their reporting just like they do now.

R: It seems like since you were actively involved in a lot of this curtailing and probably talking with quite a few people. How did some of the blacks react to you trying to curtail stuff and how did some of the whites react to you?

E: Okay, number one I got it from both sides. Some of the black radicals at that time looked at us as Uncle Toms, as trying to put them down. Some of them didn't. At that time, I felt that what took place, although I don't condone violence and destruction, was a needed thing to have because young blacks, at that time, would not take what we took. So it was a needed thing. You can find those things in young blacks now who were involved in that. I look at them now, they're within the system.

R: They couldn't get in the system, right?

E: Now they're in the system. One of them is the Deputy Director of the Farrell Redevelopment Authority. They're working within the system now. But at that time, they were just outside of the system. They saw no upward mobility. They saw nothing. They reacted the only way they knew how to react, through violence.

R: If you were trying to stop them, they would probably consider you as patronizing whites and keeping them suppressed.

E: That's right, part of the system that was suppressing them.

R: Most of the police department was white, right?

E: Oh, no! At that point, no. In the Farrell police department we had five black police officers.

R: Were there any administrative blacks like assistant chief?

E: No, at that time we had a captain. In 1967 I was a detective sergeant. So we had a black captain. Basically the police department was integrated. Because of the type of community we had, they felt that they needed black police officers. Although they didn't have any black firemen at that time, they had gotten one black fireman on and one of the white firemen refused to even sleep in the same room that he slept in.

R: This was in 1969 or in the early 1960's?

E: This was in the 1960's, sure.

R: Did they always send the black police officers in the black neighborhoods?

E: Yes, they did.

R: They never sent the white officers?

E: Well, the white officers went, but most of the time it was black police officers. That was basically why they had them.

R: So if they would get a call in the neighborhood, they would try to guess this is a black residential area?

E: Oh, they knew, but they would send black police officers. They all knew, yes. The white officers went too.

R: Is that an administrative decision or do most of the officers feel that way?

E: That was just a common thing.

R: It was just accepted as practice.

E: That's right, just accepted as practice.

R: How did most of your friends or your relatives react?

E: To me being a police officer?

R: Yes.

E: I found, at that time prior to becoming a police officer, that I had a lot of friends or a lot of associates. Once becoming a officer and doing my job as a police officer, I had found out that I had very few friends or associates in the community. I had a thing that I think it was President Kennedy said, "When you find a police officer doing his job on his beat daily, he's not a very well-liked person." At that time I was well respected, but I was not well-liked. There's a difference. So my social life, I had very little social life in the black community per se, because I just couldn't go out. I was a policeman 24 hours a day. I socialized in private functions or maybe outside of the city of Farrell. I never had a social life basically in the black community.

R: Did your family try to encourage you to get out of it?

E: Well, yes!

R: Your parents?

E: No, mostly it frustrated my wife. But that's not the reason why I left. I left the police department for two reasons: Number one, the politics that were involved in it and number two, the low pay.

R: Okay, were there any movements at all that you can recall that tried to prevent some of the violence or tried to integrate some more representation in the city government?

E: Okay after 1967 and 1969 they started appointing blacks to committees.

R: Only after the violence?

E: Only after; only after, not before.

- R: There wasn't anything before?
- E: No, the NAACP and the Urban League tried to negotiate with them.
- R: They just didn't want to hear it?
- E: Right.
- R: Okay, afterwards how fast were things? Were they rolling along or were people dragging their heels?
- E: Well, they still had to be prodded in negotiations. But, you could see where they started appointing minority people to more committees, to boards and different things like that.
- R: There was some efforts for change then?
- E: Yes.
- R: Most of it then was from the NAACP and from the Urban League?
- E: At that time, the Urban League were the biggest pushers. The NAACP was responsible for bringing the Urban League in, but the Urban League came in with a professional staff. They were the biggest pushers.
- R: Well, looking back at the 1960's and a lot of the rioting and tensions, what changes do you think could have been instituted in the city or your neighborhood or the black community that could have prevented it or bettered it?
- E: That could have prevented the riots?
- R: Yes, that could have prevented it. What do you think? If you had to look back now and say, "We can prevent all of this. Here's what we have to do!"
- E: We would have to go way back during Reconstruction days. (Laughter) Listen, one thing you cannot do is legislate attitudes! What caused the riots of the 1960's and what caused the Miami riots here just not too long ago, is attitude. That's something you can't legislate. That's something that is going to have to come through from education and I don't know when that's going to happen.
- R: A lot of people just feel what happened in the late 1960's in Farrell was just an accumulation of the events, but you would say that goes back a lot farther.
- E: It goes back a lot farther. To give you a good example, when I was in juvenile work, they used to say juvenile delinquency was imbedded between the ages of zero and five,

but it doesn't blossom or come out until its adolescent years. Okay, so to look back at over the years you follow the history of it, black history, there were slave rebellions and so on. But in modern day time, the oppression was building up and just erupted in the 1960's. That's basically what it was. It took years to build up. There's no way you can solve in a few years the injustice that was created over many a year. One, you have to have the education. The attitudes of the people have to change. People who are forty, fifty and sixty years old or older who have set life patterns and set attitudes, there's no way legislation is going to change their attitudes.

R: It really has to start a lot sooner.

E: That's right. You're going to have to start with the young kids coming up now. Hopefully, my thirteen year old will have a different outlook toward life than I do. My nineteen year old is going to have a different attitude. It's going to take more than that just to change.

R: It takes time.

E: That's right.

R: So we can eliminate the idea that it would never happen in Farrell if it wasn't for the news media. It wouldn't have happened.

E: You've got to eliminate that. You can eliminate that all together. It was just a matter of time for it to happen and the 1960's happened to be the time for the explosion. It was just a matter of time. We notice it always happens in the summertime, because it's hot and very humid. The people will jam into a large area and can't get out. You've got high unemployment and they're standing on the corners.

R: No recreation.

E: No recreation. It's just one of those things.

Some of the most asinine things they had--and I fought them as a juvenile officer--is a curfew. Let me give you a good example, a kid can drive by state law--we give him a driver's license--until twelve midnight. You have a seventeen year old and say he's out of high school. He graduated from high school in May or June. He has a car available. He goes to see his girl. Curfew goes on quarter to ten or eleven o'clock, right? He's going home and the police see him and recognize he's a youngster probably because they know him. They stop him and cite his parents and charge him over \$100 for a curfew violation. Tell me what you're creating? That happens in the city of Farrell today.

R: They still do that today?

E: That's right. Now tell me what you create?

R: A lot of hard feelings, turmoil. They have the same curfew now that they had in the 1960's?

E: That's exactly right. They have the same curfew law today they had when I was a kid coming up.

R: They don't have this in Sharon do they?

E: No. Quarter to ten, can you imagine a seventeen year old with a curfew of quarter to ten. If he's walking the streets, they can pick him up and put him in jail. Can you imagine that, and hold him there until his parents come out and get him?

R: Have there been any efforts to get rid of it and get it off the books?

E: No, they still have it on the books. That's how asinine and antiquated the law is.

R: Who supports this type of law?

E: Your local police officers. That's the mentality of our society today. Can you imagine this? It's summertime, a group of seventeen year olds are down at the corner, the police officer comes and runs them in for curfew violation. What have you got? They're unemployed; they're jammed in their house; they're hot! You don't want to watch TV because you've got reruns. Where in the hell are they going but just down the corner.

R: Basically the laws are the same now as they were in the 1960's?

E: That's right and the same thing can erupt again!

R: How do you think the race relations are between the blacks and the whites now? Do you think they're any different now than they were in the 1960's?

E: Need I answer that question?

R: The same?

E: It's the same soup warmed over, okay! In the 1960's it might have been potato soup and today it's vegetable. It's the same damn soup! As a matter of fact, the ground that was gained in the 1960's was lost because of, what do they call it, reverse

discrimination. Things were lost. They call it the white backlash; things were lost. So you're right back where you were before. It's a very difficult thing. Let me give you a good example.

I'll read a letter. I got a complaint. I just answered this letter yesterday from a local institution here that fired a black girl. They fired her for excessive absenteeism. In this institution, they had accrued sick leave which accrues one day every two months. This girl missed twelve days from August of 1979. Here's the statement they made in her letter of warning:

"We find it necessary at this time to state that no more than one day may be called off in a two month period starting as of this date April 10, 1980."

She missed two days in May. They fired her. I wrote them a letter:

"On June 2, 1980 at 2:00 p.m. Miss Blank filed an employment complaint with the Mercer County Community Action Agency in regards to her termination. In reading the April 10, 1980 letter of warning, I find nothing wrong with it until the statement is made, 'We find it necessary at this time to state that no more than one day may be called off in a two month period.' By that statement, you are telling your employees that no matter how sick you are you can only take off one day every two month period. The psychological pressure alone would have a great emotional effect on her job performance. We feel that this directive of April 10, 1980 by her supervisor put undo pressure on her. If her supervisor felt that there was excessive absenteeism, the policy should have been to require a doctor's return to work slip. In the manner which the disciplinary action was handled, I don't see how excessive absenteeism was proven in this case. For this reason, I feel that Blank should be reinstated to her position. If this injustice is not corrected, we will have no other recourse but to file a complaint with the State Human Relations Commission."

That was yesterday! That's the type of termination you get.

R: Do you think it's mainly because she's black?

E: Yes! Well, yes and no. Basically, how can you treat people like that? How can I tell you, one of my employees, that because I give them one sick day a month--they can accrue one sick day a month--that they're not allowed to report off more than one day a month whether they're sick or not.

That's asinine, okay o even terminate somebody on that basis. I guarantee you if that was, in my opinion, a white person they wouldn't terminate him on those terms.

R: Do you think they were just looking for a reason to fire her?

E: Yes. Now whether she had legitimate excuses for absenteeism or not, they never even bothered to check. They never said, "Well, if you're absent from now on I want you to bring a doctor's excuse in with you." If she didn't, then they would have some grounds. But they didn't.

R: Do you think some of the solutions would be in education?

E: Education, there are two types, I think, you can receive by going to school. One is academic and the other one is just social education.

The reason why you have to bus today and to get integration is caused by one thing, by housing segregation. That's what caused it! They wouldn't allow black folks to buy within a certain neighborhood. The realtors and banks caused it--red lining. The total social structure caused segregation in the school system today--getting back to segregation. So now in order to get integration, they have to bus kids into those schools. So now they say, it costs us too much money to bus, right? Bussing has always cost money. Bussing didn't just start, did it? In some schools they've had bussing all along haven't they? But they bussing issue came up when they had to bus from integration purposes. If they had open housing law all along, you would have had integrated schools all along. Am I right or wrong?

R: Right. How about now, do you think the laws are enforced or are they just scoffed at, the federal laws against discrimination and housing and equal rights? They're not enforced?

E: There are a multitude of laws on the books and there is very little enforcement that could be enforced really. I want to show you something. This is today. As you might have heard some time ago, there was the food stamp legislation where food stamps were going to be cut off.

R: Right. Carter's cutting of the social program?

E: Anyway, there was some stuff going on. I had to write communications out to people in regards to the food stamps.

R: To the people who were receiving food stamps?

E: Yes. I sent out 600 pieces of mail to local industries, local social service agencies, so forth and so on. I asked them for some kind of help in case this crisis arises. *

* With interview are copies of letters sent to the president of Greenville Tube Corporation dealing with this matter.

- R: Now, this is in Mercer County, Greenville. How about Farrell? Greenville doesn't have that large of a population of blacks. Do you think it would be a little better in Farrell since the population is 40% black?
- E: Well, first of all, you tell me how many corporate heads live in the city of Farrell? I don't know of any large corporation presidents or vice-presidents or top officials that live in the city of Farrell. What I am saying to you is you just can't say the city of Farrell. I don't look at it as that. I look at it as people I have to deal with who get the jobs.
- R: Take all of Mercer County. Considering back then most of the black population in Mercer County is situated . . .
- E: . . . in Shenango Valley. A large percentage of this is in Farrell.
- R: Looking back at the 1960's if someone was to consider the riot in Farrell, they would first have to look at all of Mercer County.
- E: You have to look at the whole thing, because time takes jobs. It's all in the Shenango Valley and Mercer County too. See what I'm saying?
- R: To be looked on a county level, not just so narrowly as that in Farrell?
- E: Right!
- R: I think that same thing is now. Most people when they think of Farrell, they think of riots and blacks and welfare.
- E: Farrell has Sharon Steel. The total employment of Sharon Steel is, let's say, 3,500. That's the only industry, basically, in the city of Farrell. You have National Castings, you have Westinghouse, Wheatland Tube, Saw Hill, Mercer Tube. Westinghouse is just now starting to get black foremen. Can you believe that?
- R: 1980.
- E: Just now starting to get black foremen.
- R: They weren't under the pressure that Sharon Steel was probably under, or not as close to it?
- E: Not as close. You know, there's a big difference! Look overall at your schools. The Farrell School System roughly has about sixty percent black. You've got one black administrator. He's in the middle school.

R: How about teachers?

E: You might have; I'll bet you any money, you don't have ten black teachers in the Farrell School System.

R: How about in the 1960's. Was it the same then?

E: Yes, worse! Let me show you something.

R: Things have gone from bad to just okay.

E: I wrote this letter after talking to some teachers, some school board people, and some students. The following letter was sent to each of the Farrell area board members on May 19:

"After reading in last week's newspaper of the report given to the school board by Mrs. Millie Perner in regards to kids watching TV, playing cards, and braiding hair in study halls, Mercer County Community Action takes a strong exception to this type of policy being administered in the Farrell School District. We have strong concerns that this hinges on fringes of institutional racism since the school population is between 50% and 60% minority with a high concentration of low income. As school board members, I would like to pose several questions that you can answer to help dispell some of our concerns.

First, has this activity become policy in order to control students so they can say to the outside world that you have no disciplinary problem in the Farrell School District? Is this policy set down by you to systematically curtail the academic achievements of the minority or low income or does it just show overall the incompetence of the administration and teachers of the Farrell area school district? If the above three questions are irrelevant, tell me what is relevant. Ladies and gentlemen of the school board, we at the Mercer County Community Action Agency have long had concerns only about your district in regards to all school districts. We feel that the academic standards are dropping all around us. This has been so well publicized in the past, present, and I'm sure will be in the future. You, as school board members, face an awesome task of trying to turn the tide in the standards of our present educational system. In the past years, you have had many federal dollars available to you and one of the highest school tax rates in Mercer County. You had the monetary resources at your disposal. If you as board members feel that the input that you

receive from the community hasn't been adequate maybe it would behoove you to change direction by calling resources for advice such as the Shenango Valley Urban League, NAACP, this agency, as well as church groups, could bring a strong moral fiber with their input. I think that maybe in the past all of us who are supposed to be community-minded have probably been lax in our response. When problems are brought to our attention, as this one by Mrs. Perner, we should all sit back and rethink and reset our priorities. I hope this letter will constitute the forming of an advisory committee to give direct input toward helping the Farrell area school board in studying academic criteria within the school district."

- R: Did they react to it? Did they start a committee?
- E: No, I got a call from Mrs. Perner.
- R: She is?
- E: She is the one who brought the thing up at the school board meeting. I got a call from Sabo who is a school director. I sent a copy of this to the Urban League and got no response. I sent a copy of this to the NAACP and got no response. Lou Morocco did respond to my board chairman. My board chairman did respond back to Mr. Morocco.
- R: Mr. Morocco is?
- E: The school superintendent. To me, his response was not good. These are some of the things that really gets to me, okay? He responded by saying what took place was caused by one substitute teacher. Well, I know, I have a kid in the Farrell School System. I know what takes place. The teachers in the high schools know what goes on. He said I have no foundation for my . . . I had the facts. My board chairman knows that I had the facts. These are some of the things that take place.
- R: How about in the 1960's? Getting back to the 1960's before the riots, how would you compare the school systems now to the school systems then?
- E: Same, very antiquated. The school systems all over the country are going to have to look into academic criteria and really change it around because they're really outdated. They must be able to service the total community better. To me, I feel that the school systems should operate on

a twelve month basis. That's just my own opinion. But I think we have to set different priorities as far as the school systems.

In the area we live in right now, I think we're going to have to integrate or consolidate school systems in the Shenango Valley. To give you a good example, because we're missing out, Farrell's graduating class this year is 115 people. It's a very small school district. I'll be willing to bet you any money the school superintendent here makes close to \$40,000 a year and makes more than the school superintendent in Youngstown. Do you see what I'm saying?

R: Yes.

E: And he doesn't even have a Ph.D.

R: It seems like priorities are a little mixed up.

E: That's right. You tell me the Shenango Valley itself Sharpsville, Sharon, Farrell is not as large as Youngstown, Ohio. Why couldn't you have one school system? One superintendent and go on about your business. Maybe have a couple of high schools out of it. What I'm saying is we're totally missing the boat in setting our priorities.

It's so politically motivated because everybody wants to be king of their hill. You have a school system in West Middlesex, Farrell, Sharon, Sharpsville and Hermitage and the population of this area is probably around 70,000 people. But you have five school districts in this 70,000 population.

R: I can see what you're saying.

E: The tax dollar to educate a child in the city of Farrell is the highest in the country, moneywise. It costs like 2,000 dollars or better in a year to educate one child in the city of Farrell. In some other areas that's down to \$1,000 because the student ratio to teachers is tremendous. But, you're not getting a quality education. That kid comes out of the school and can hardly read. A kid graduates from high school or the twelfth grade and can only read on maybe a fourth or fifth grade level.

R: Do you think the schools are just a place to keep the kids out of trouble?

E: That's right!

R: It's more discipline than it is learning?

E: These are some of the problems I had with them.

R: Getting back for one second if I can . . .

E: Go ahead.

R: Something you mentioned about integration, made possibly a lot of people feel that desegregating the schools is the answer to the black problems. I think you felt that it goes a little deeper than that, that if they could integrate housing then they wouldn't have to integrate the schools.

E: The schools would be integrated already. If you had open housing policy all along, and black folks could buy a house anywhere in the area you would have had integrated schools.

R: Was there much complaint back in the 1960's about the housing?

E: Sure, let me give you an example. My dad bought his first house back in 1948. Now listen to this. The only place he could buy a home at that time was in the heart of a black neighborhood. That's the only way he could buy a home, nowhere else.

R: They wouldn't sell?

E: They wouldn't sell them. Finance it in a different neighborhood.

R: Banks wouldn't finance?

E: No! Realtors wouldn't even take you there! It was out of the question. So we had to buy and we were renting in the 500 block of Darr Avenue. In order to buy a house, we had to purchase a house in the heart of the ghetto. That's the type of thing that was going on.

R: How about now?

E: Now the people who can afford it can probably buy a house in different places. You can buy a house anyplace. How many of the people can afford to buy those houses now with the high interest rate and everything else. They're demanding 1/3 or 1/4 down as a down payment. How can you afford to buy it with 30% down?

R: Okay, was there anything that you think important that you would like to add that we didn't cover?

E: Basically that's about it.

R: Thank you.