Alvin Griggs

A Transcription of an Oral Interview

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Interviewed by
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Introduction

This interview is with Mr. Alvin Griggs, who at the time was the Associate Principal of the Edison Middle School in Champaign. Mr. Griggs was born in Mississippi on May 7, 1942, and he came to Champaign in the early 1960s. Since his arrival to this area he has served in both the Urbana and Champaign School Districts.

This interview was conducted on August 25, 1983, at the Urbana Free Library. The interviewers are Patrick Tyler and Melinda Roundtree representing the Urbana Free Library Archives.

Patrick Tyler: Your date and birthplace?

Alvin Griggs: Okay. I was born in Meridian, Mississippi, 1942, May seventh. Born to a minister, Methodist minister. My father was a minister. We moved quite often, which entails most of the South. My birthplace and places I lived would include, Yazoo City, Mississippi; Meridian; parts of Alabama, which include, Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, Decatur, Mobile, Tuskegee; and Florida, which would be Pensacola, so forth.

Patrick Tyler: How was it growing up in the towns?

Alvin Griggs: Oh, I enjoyed it. I was . . . In Mississippi I guess, and Alabama, those were enjoyable years. High school, grade school, part of the boy scouts, cub scouts, coming up, part of the church, parents were both active in the community . . . excellent.

Patrick Tyler: Could you tell us about your family background, your parents' name?

Alvin Griggs: Okay. My father's name was Joseph Haley Griggs. My mother's maiden name was Gaines, and her full name would be Mildred Marie Gaines Griggs. Her father was a carpenter. Mother was a housewife. My father's father was a farmer, and they still own the forty acres of land that they received after slavery, in Mississippi right now, which is Scooba, Mississippi. Most of their people at that time attended college, Haven and Rust College in Mississippi. And my aunts on both side earned degrees

and are retired teachers right now, so they were involved in education, or the ministry, or farming, some other work.

Patrick Tyler: Could you tell us your first arrival to Champaign?

Alvin Griggs: I came to Champaign in the early sixties after completing four years of undergrad at Arkansas AM & N, which was a state black land grant institution. Got there from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, finished high school in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and went to Arkansas for four years of schooling, and left Arkansas coming to Champaign-Urbana for grad school, the University of Illinois in the early sixties.

Patrick Tyler: Could you tell us the place where you, where did you live?

Alvin Griggs: Lived, my first apartment was on Chalmers. I lived over there a year. After a year, I purchased a house on Hill Street in Urbana. Lived there at 906 Hill Street, just west of Lincoln Avenue, lived there until the early part of the seventies, 1970. And then, we bought another home and moved south of town.

Patrick Tyler: How does the black community, as far as your experience, differ from when you first came here to today's time?

Alvin Griggs: I guess when I first moved to Champaign-Urbana there was a totally segregated community, or no open housing policy at that time. They were having

problems in downtown Champaign at J.C. Penney's and I think Sears. People were picketing the stores. My wife worked at Penney's for a while after that, while she was in grad school.

All of the black people lived north of University Avenue and west of Lincoln Avenue, and east of Neil and I would say the majority of blacks at that time. The ones that I knew that didn't live in those areas were longtime residents of the community like Esther Suggs, her parents, and Gene Suggs. She lived just a couple of blocks south of University Avenue. Ozella Kelker and Taylor I'm trying to think of Taylor's last name Taylor Thomas moved out east of town to build their homes because of segregation and real estate during that time.

Now there's a drastic change in terms of housing, and a drastic change in terms of jobs, a drastic change in terms of black involvement in the community. So there's been progress, especially in housing. Almost every community in Champaign-Urbana now would be integrated.

In terms of job responsibilities, there were very few blacks in responsible roles, professional roles. Now there are many in the city government, the public schools, in the University, and even professional people. At the time I first moved here there was no black lawyer. There are several now, about half a dozen in town. No black dentists at the time, and at the time we didn't have a black doctor. Now, we've seen two or three black doctors go through the town. There's a black dentist in town, and lawyers, and other professional blacks. So it's been some progress.

Patrick Tyler: How did the Civil Rights Movement affect you personally or in the community?

Alvin Griggs: Well, I lost my scholarship (laughs) going through the Civil Rights Movement. I grew up in it. I was in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, when Artharene Lucy tried to integrate the University of Alabama. At that time, the city was under a curfew. I was also in high school when Dr. King started the movement in Montgomery; and I was also arrested in Montgomery during that time. I went on to Arkansas and participated in a demonstration against the governor. I lost my athletic scholarship at the time, but got it back. I moved to Champaign. I guess I got involved in so many things here, which included some of the movements in town with the Urban League, some of the movements on campus, some of the things in the public schools, and that's how I ended up in Champaign Centennial High School, because of the riots involved out there. So it don't seem like I can't get away from that, quiet as it's kept.

In terms of Champaign, I don't think the movement was as strong as the black college campuses where we had to endure a lot of hardship. Urbana was just a march downtown for jobs and things like that, but was involved in the Douglass Center problems, too, with the new center. I worked at Douglass Center for a number of years in the sixties when Mr. Williams was director and booker for it, and they were going through the problems of trying to establish a new center, so we did some demonstrations at the Park District office. So I've been somewhat involved in the Champaign-Urbana Civil Rights Movement, and Equal Rights Movement, open housing, and things like that.

Patrick Tyler: Did crime, you know, after the Civil Rights Movement or the latter part of it, did crime in the black community decrease or increase from your viewpoint?

Alvin Griggs: I think it's increased, but I don't think it's related to the Civil Rights Movement at all. I think crime now as we see it is all over the community, not just in the black community, but crime is a part of our nation and our world. Crime increased in Champaign-Urbana because of drugs and only drugs, not because of civil rights or anything else. If you notice, the crime that we have now, the burglaries, the armed robberies, the killing, you would find some indirect but direct correlation between drugs, narcotics. Whether it's robbing to purchase, robbing to take drugs, or whether taking territory, so it's all drug related, not related to the Civil Rights Movement, not a progress of blacks. In some ways that type of crime has been a detriment to the progress of the community. And I say the community, because it affects the total community, not just the black community.

Melinda Roundtree: Where was your first job when you came to Champaign-Urbana?

Alvin Griggs: My first job was at Hays School. You know where that is? That's now Martin Luther King School. I started working there with Henry Meares, and John Bustard was the principal then, and Ozella Kelker was also a fourth-grade teacher then. That was my first teaching job in Champaign-Urbana.

Melinda Roundtree: Could you give us all the jobs that you've had since then? If you can remember.

Alvin Griggs: Yes, let me start with that job at Hays School, the Urbana Park District, the University of Illinois instructor in the fitness program, in the physical education department, the Champaign Park District, the Unit 4 Schools. I taught at Gregory, which is now closed; Marquette, which is now closed; Washington Elementary School, which is open and a magnet school. And that was before they integrated the Unit 4 schools. Centennial High School which as a, served as a football coach, assistant football coach, head track coach, head cross country coach, Champaign Park District, I guess I mentioned that, and then at Edison Middle School, presently. Other jobs I've had since I've been here, and other odds and ends. I owned a business, so I guess you'd say I worked for myself, Colony Square Cleaners, also.

Melinda Roundtree: Could you tell us names of the organizations or clubs that you've been a member of in the past or still a member of?

Alvin Griggs: I will try. One would be Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, which was the start of the Cotillion Ball that presently is in Champaign-Urbana, which is a service fraternity. Next would be the Urban League, long-standing member involved in this youth movement back in the sixties, all the way up until the eighties as board president. The CETA program; PIC (Private Industry Council), serving as the chairperson of that, and the chairperson of the council now. Family Service Board member, Title VII board

member, which is the Unit 4 Schools. I am a member of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. I'm a member of the Illinois Principals Association. I'm a member of the National Curriculum - ACDC, which is the American Curriculum organization, national curriculum organization. Several professional organizations, and that's about it, that I can think of.

Melinda Roundtree: Could you tell us a little bit about how you started the Cotillion and why?

Alvin Griggs: Oh, that's a long story. I didn't start it on my own. There were several fraternity brothers involved which includes: Willie T. Summerville, Bob Wilson, Theopolis Harrington, and several other fraternity brothers that are now removed from the city. I guess the idea came up from observing young black people in the community and not seeing viable activity for young black girls. And at the time we saw a need for such an organization, for such an activity, because of things that we saw black youth getting involved in. And I think that during that time there was an onslaught of young black ladies having children in their early ages, and not really being actively involved in the school activities, high school activities.

What we tried to institute was an event or some type of event at the end of their high school career that would motivate them to work hard academically, and to strive for some type of an achievement. And to also avoid that pitfall of having kids at an early age, which can be very damaging to them in the future, which can be a detriment to them, a yoke. And so we worked to do that. Similar to the balls in the South.

Basically they have them all over. A coming-out type of affair. They have them in town but usually at the country clubs. They have them also in the Jewish Church, in the temple, if you're familiar with the type of ceremony they have for the young Jewish kids coming of age, basically, that's what it is. And we took off on that idea, because there was a need.

We didn't realize at the time then, males, that we couldn't handle such a deal. It outgrew us and we felt very threatened by picking up young ladies at night and driving around in the cars. So we decided that we would look for a lady organization. We looked for several sororities and then we finally asked some of the ladies in the community to help us which included: Kathryn Humphrey, Margaret Smith, Jean Davis, and some more ladies in the community. And we began to really back out of it then, after they got themselves on the ground and knew the ropes of the organization. And it's been a very successful thing since then. In fact, every year it continues to grow. It's something that was needed, and there was a place for it, and it serves its purpose.

Melinda Roundtree: What year was this?

Alvin Griggs: Oh, I think it was 1970 or '71, I have all the booklets, and I think the first one was in 1970, 1971. So it's been going now about ten years or more.

Melinda Roundtree: Have the objectives continued to be the same?

Alvin Griggs: Basically the same, quiet as it's kept: scholarship, academic performance, and I would hate to, with all the feminist movement, get into the other parts of it. It can show some conflicts now, but, yes I think it's the same, bringing young black ladies out, and being recognized for their achievements, and it's serving its purpose. It's also had a family tie into it too and we tried to avoid that because there're some pitfalls there.

Because a lot of black families, you don't have the total family, and we recognized that from the start, but we were hoping that it would bring the families closer together to where the father, or the brother, or the uncle would present the young lady. Or if not, in some cases we sponsor, we have sponsors that would sponsor the young lady. But in most cases the mothers were involved, or the brothers or the sisters involved in the whole thing. So it turned out to be a family type affair. And family members bought tickets. They were involved in the advertising of the event, and they participated. But we've tried to avoid saying you have to have your father to present you because we know the time that the structure of the black family was a little different in our world - which isn't bad, but it's different. And a lot of the ladies really didn't have a sponsor - a father to pay that money. So we've found sponsors at the time with money. And when we first started we found individuals in the community with $50 or $60 dollars willing to sponsor a girl. So I would say that the structure of it is about the same today, and nothing's really changed except for maybe the scholarship money.

Melinda Roundtree: Has it ever been an effort to get an organization for the young boys?

Alvin Griggs: Well, we thought about that, but if you notice black males, I'm sure you noticed that they tend to function quite well in the schools and in the community. They're able to cross lines very easily into the white society, white community, and back into the black community. We didn't see it a real problem with the males, other than academic work in the high schools. They just would not work hard in the classroom, which was a put-down to them working hard because we saw black students putting each other down when they performed in the classrooms, but that was the only problem.

A lot of black males participated in sports and things, and they had white friends. They did quite well. In fact, they dated white girls. I'm quite sure you're aware of that, which took some of your guys away from you and mess with . . . We knew that the black males - that it wasn't a real threat to them in the community - they could survive it. We were worrying about the females that were left totally out of the social picture and they still are somewhat. With girls, sports things are changing now, they're getting involved in sports now.

With the boys, we did include them in the escorts, and the dance routines and things like that, so they were a part anyway. During that time we chose the fellas and had a, I guess you would say, a reservoir of group on hand for the girls to select from. If you needed an escort we suggest that you don't get your boyfriend because you may fall out a week before the cotillion ends, or this is a way for him to get even with you

and quit on you, and you don't have an escort. So we suggest that you pick someone out this pool, a brother or an uncle. We suggested that which is the best way to go. So, we didn't start anything for the black males. We didn't feel it was necessary, and I don't know whether they had the time, with them involved in sports so much. Our biggest concern was academic work, and we found a solution for that. We didn't find a solution, but we found something for that.

Melinda Roundtree: With the girls, when they first started, did they lean towards the grade-point average more, or community involvement, or all that together, because I know when I was in it they . . .

Alvin Griggs: It was a struggle, it was a struggle because you got into a lot of political games. Some girls were highly community involved and didn't have the grade-point average, but someone in the community pushed them very hard to get them in. We had a lot of girls high academically with the grade-point average, but didn't care to get involved. So, it was a combination of things. We did tend to stress that more and more, and wanted to hang onto it. At one point we almost lost the grade-point average. Someone wanted to kick it out. They said it was just too much, and we're losing a lot of good girls because of grade-point average. But that was important to us. If you go with three or four girls with the grade-point average, and we're talking about C plus, we're not talking about A's or B's, we're talking about C plus. We didn't see anything wrong with holding on to a C plus, so we attempted to hold on to it.

Now, the ladies wanted to reduce that, and we said no, we wanted to hold on to it. But, I don't know where it is right now. I think you have enough black females now, and males with a C plus or better to fill that every year, because I don't think it's a problem now.

Melinda Roundtree: Do you think that having this motivates the young girls to want to try harder in school?

Alvin Griggs: Yes, I think back then, and I don't know the trend now. I would think with the feminist movement it may be a way of stepping out of it. I don't know how they feel about that. I don't think that movement is affecting the black community as much as the white community though. I would say it was a motivating factor. A lot of girls were out there looking forward to this at their senior year, and it was something better than the prom. So I would say, sure it was a motivating factor.

Patrick Tyler: Are youth in today's time more motivated than when you first came?

Alvin Griggs: Yes, young people, black youth today improved so much - the number going to college, the number involved in activities. The number involved in the community is so great now that it is unbelievable. When I first moved to the community you could count the number of kids going to college on your hands. In fact, it was disturbing to me to see very few leave the high schools going on to college. Now, I would say over 50 or 60 percent of black youth coming out of high are going on

to some type of educational program beyond high school. So yes, youth today - they're sharper, too - they have more on the bone, they're getting more out of the educational system. So, yeah.

Patrick Tyler: Where did you get your motivation from?

Alvin Griggs: I think role models, basically. When I first moved to Champaign-Urbana . . . and you think about the number of black postmen, professional people, teachers, administrators - zero. And then when you start thinking about the ones that are here now, lawyers, doctors, young black people can see the progress. "I have a chance," you know, although the jobs are hard to come by today for them, but they still see some hope and some light at the end of the tunnel.

Back then it was difficult to see. I never thought I could be an engineer. When I was growing up, I didn't see any black engineers. I saw black teachers, and that's what I headed into. Now you don't have to be a teacher. You can be an engineer, you can be a doctor, you can be a dentist, you can be a lawyer, so you have the role models now and that's very important in the community. You need the proper role models and when you have them it works. You may not think so when you're in high school, or when you're in grade school, but when you get out you're going to look back because I see my black principal, and I never thought I was going to be a principal. But when I see McDonald Hughes at my high school, I see that big black man standing there, and I would say he inspired me to do something, and so it was to continue to go to school. Just his presence saying that, "Hey, you got a chance to do it, too."

And like the guys watch pro basketball on TV, they see those guys playing basketball, and they think about being basketball players, and they have those role models on the floor. And the same thing with baseball, same thing with football, same thing with a black doctor. You see that guy working and you think, "By George, that's what I want to be." And eventually you will have some black kids from Champaign-Urbana in the medical profession if you don't already have some. If you look hard enough you probably have some, but you will have some. They may not come back to Champaign-Urbana to practice, but you'll have some. But I think the role models make the difference.

Patrick Tyler: What kind of things have you encountered as principal or associate principal of Edison?

Alvin Griggs: What type of things I've encountered? Oh, so many. Are you talking about in terms of the community, as a black person . . . ?

Patrick Tyler: In all aspects.

Alvin Griggs: Oh, gee, what I've encountered. As an administrator you encounter everything. I guess the most positive thing I can think about would be helping students grow, and also building a program - those are positive things. Putting ideas in and seeing those ideas work - your ideas - which is one thing everyone gets some type of satisfaction out of. The other thing is to see youth mature and grow. I go back to my

role as a coach and assistant principal at Centennial. I've seen people come through - young people through - they're professional people now. They come back and they stop and they talk, and "I'm doing such and such." Those are the kinds of things that are positive.

There're a lot of negative things like the political games that are now in education. Those are the negative things that I don't enjoy, because it gets in the way of education, and there're a lot of politics now involved in public education. I don't particularly like, I hate to work with the same old problems over and over and over where you're continually trying to improve something and you see no progress. I can give you some examples dealing with discipline problems that you hope would dry up and fly away, you know, but they don't. One discipline problem leaves at the end of the year, another one comes in. And you would like to live in a perfect world where students come in, and like a sponge soak up education, and leave, but you don't get that. You know, that's what you hope for and wish for . . .

[End Side A]

Alvin Griggs: [remarks joined in progress] . . . education and it's the need of the child, basically, what I was saying that interferes with my thinking. I come to school and I'm not properly fed, not properly clothed, and I can't think education. I think those are the negative points I see in education. I see it everyday. Those are the ills of society that I can't deal with, and I can't solve, but it interferes with my program. Johnny's mother isn't working - no job, or poor housing. And we know it's affecting the child and the family, something I have no control over, and it affects my program. It affects me as an administrator, but it's nothing I can do. And those are the negative points I see in my job, things I encounter all the time.

There's so many movements and shifts going on in the community that deals with education that it's unbelievable. And now we're having a board raised in Champaign and probably the same thing will happen in Urbana, that people are making moves already to move people out. And they're for minor petty little interest groups, not thinking about the whole educational program, but we want to close down this school or we want to open this school, or we're not going to let this school close. And I'm getting on the board just for that interest, not thinking about the total community. That's the sad part about the public schools, and that's why we're not going to grow the way we should grow, because of that.

So, I've encountered a lot of things, I've learned a lot of things, but you always as a black person wonder whether you can run a building or a school building or any

other type of job, 'til you get in and you find out it's not difficult at all. Fairly simple: if the people will allow you to run it. People get in your way everyday and try to interfere and disrupt and that includes students and staff, and also community people. And it comes for a lot of reasons.

Edison was a building that they used to close down Franklin, and they sent a lot of poor kids to Edison. Edison served the wealthy part of Champaign, which was a white predominant area, south area, Windsor Park, Devonshire and other parts within that community. When they closed Franklin down a lot of people living in town didn't want it to succeed, because they didn't want the poor part of the community coming to Edison. I knew that when I got the job, the superintendent knew that, the community people knew that. It was my thing to get it going right, and to make sure these communities work together well, and a lot of people say it's not going to work. You know, they just, "Those kids will never get along." If you leave the kids alone, they will get along, and they did, and they are getting along. But still there're people out there trying to stop that progress. So those are the things you encounter, those are the things you have to deal with, those things get in the way of educating people and kids. So if you ask me what I encounter, I encounter a lot of stuff, a lot of stuff that's not even connected to educating young people.

Patrick Tyler: Are parents more involved with their children than when you first came or when you were teaching school?

Alvin Griggs: That's a fallacy. Parents always have been involved with their kids. I hate to hear people say that, parents aren't interested, they're not involved. I don't care who they are, there are parents in the community that are wealthy, that can stay at home, they don't have to work and they can come to the school every minute. Okay? But there's a parent who's out there working, and care more than that parent that's staying at home, but "I can't get there because I have to work and feed Johnny when he gets home. I can't come over there," you know. And they care, but it's the position that they're in and what the resources they have to show that type of caring . . . so all parents care about the welfare of their kids, about the growth and development of their child. But there may be something interfering with that to show that: maybe a job, it may be family problems, maybe housing, it may be a number of things, but parents care and they've always cared. My mother cared, my father cared, but it was a different way of showing it, and they just couldn't drive over in their nice car, park it, get out, come up to the school, and sit and chat and say, you know, "I want Johnny to have this subject or that subject."

And some of it entails education, too. Some parents feel uncomfortable coming because they're not educated, and sometimes school officials, and school staff put pressure on them by their language, the way they're dressing, and put them down. They feel uncomfortable when they come so they tend to stay away. But they care, they've always cared. I haven't seen a parent yet, that didn't care. They may not show it, they may be upset with the child, but if you mistreat that child you'll find out. They come out of their bag then, so yeah, they care, and they've always cared. There's no difference now than 50 years, and mother nature put that in a mother, whether you

know it or not, mothers are just natural, caring people - whether it's for their child or for their husband, or for people period. Not I would say mother nature didn't put that much in a male . . . of caring. For some reason we can go to war and kill each other, and I don't think mothers can do that, you know, they're too loving and too caring. But they care, okay. That was a long sermon on that, wasn't it?

Patrick Tyler: It was quite a bit.

Melinda Roundtree: What would you suggest as a solution to this problem, between the parents and the administrators. What do you think should be done?

Alvin Griggs: There are a lot of solutions to it. One is that communication should be open all the time - total communication - each end. The parent should feel comfortable in calling the teacher. The teacher should feel comfortable in calling the parent, and that should be established early, and the school should establish that. Teachers should get on the phone and say, hey, or a letter should be sent home, if you have any problems call. Or an administrator. There should be meetings, conferences, times set aside that will accommodate working parents plus those parents that are not working, like evening conferences. We do that now. We don't hold all our conferences from eight to five. We will hold one on Thursday from seven to nine, and then the next day from eight to twelve, which will allow working parents to come in from seven to nine and then those parents who are free to come in from eight to twelve the next day, so we do that.

We put in instituted programs where we have what we call parent-aides. Parents in the community come in and we pay them. Those that are familiar with the community and they work with parents in the community . . . those who can communicate with people. We wouldn't dare send some teachers out in the community, they wouldn't know how to act, tied up in their own world. They would not address some parents, so we use aides to extend that communication. We have phone calls, we make home visits, we encourage staff members to make home visits.

When I went to Hays, one thing Mr. Bustard said, John said, "Alvin, before the semester is over with, you have to make two home visits to all your parents." I had 30 kids, about 30 kids in my classroom, and before the end of the semester I went to each home twice. They don't do that anymore. They don't do that because the contract says I don't have to go, so I'm not going. But it was a good thing then, and a lot of schools are getting back to that - we expect for you to go out. I make home visits all the time.

I made one last night, first day of school. I drove out to Bradley-McKinley and chatted with a young man. He had some trouble getting in Central High School. I was there, he called me up, and I told him I would be over as soon as school was out. So we do those things which are important, and you have to sometime meet your public, and you have to understand why they don't meet you all the time, and not put them down for not being bright enough, financially well off enough to take care of those needs.

So, there're a lot of things you can do. And they're simple - they're not costly items. There are little simple things that you can do to extend that warmth, that caring,

from the school to the home. Even in the child, you know, the biggest publicity advertising agent that you have in the school is that child, and if you mistreat him he is going to put you down. If you treat him right, and if you're warm to him, if you're caring, he's going to say something good about the school. But if he leaves there thinking, "I got a bunch of rum-dums," you know, that's going hurt you more than anything. But sometimes you have to do that with some kids now. You can't always pat them on the back, you have to spank them on the tail sometime, too. But, you know, still students understand that, too, they understand discipline. And there're some schools that are not warm, there're some schools that are cold, and not just the black kids, kids that you come in to period. And we have to learn to be warm and caring.

Patrick Tyler: I was wondering about Edison. I don't know very much about it, but do you have courses that prepare the child for, you know, high school and the future?

Alvin Griggs: Yes, coming out of the high school, and I spent ten years at the high school, and so I'm quite familiar with the high school. And coming back to a middle school, basic what we're preparing for, basic skills we stressed that the reading, the writing, and the math, and if we get a child at a certain grade level in reading, math and grammar and English composition, we then know that child will succeed in high school. For example, if we can get him into an eighth-grade level in math, get him to a seventh- or eighth-grade level in reading, coming out of middle school he's going to perform quite well at the high school. It shouldn't be any problem.

If he comes out of there reading at the fourth- or fifth-grade level, we know he's going to have problems. So what we work very hard to do is to get him to a level of basic skills, and then we go from there. We can turn him loose anywhere then. If you at age thirteen or fourteen can read at a eighth-grade level, you're okay, but you're thinking about now the average adult reads about the junior high level. So he's reading what the national average is of all the people in America the average comes out to about eighth-grade level. So he's performing quite well. And if you can get him to handle his math that's no problem.

Now what you talk about, you talk about other things. I work with the Upward Bound Program, and we had several kids in the Upward Bound Program this year from Edison. In fact, we had about seven or eight. And in the Principal's Scholar Program we had two or three. So we've been pushing that at the middle school level. If we get them started early so when they get to the high school they come on as a freshman with the idea that, "I know I'm going to be in a program, I know where I'm going, I know what I want to do, and I know what courses to take. I know I need that language, I know I need the math, I know I need the science, and the English composition," so they got that down pat, and they know where they're going.

Now in terms of careers, we have a career program, and that's taught by the counseling department and also taught by the science teacher. And at the end of their eighth-grade year they will get that package program of careers, what type of careers, what they offer, how you prepare yourself for them. So, yes, we do. You have to bridge that gap, you just can't leave the junior high/high school level and say this is what we're going to teach, and we're not going to worry about that high school or

college program. If you don't do that there will be no connection, and the kids will be left out there alone.

Melinda Roundtree: A lot of students get to the high school, they don't know . . . well, they bypass the things that they need in junior high, and learning really starts younger, at a younger age.

Alvin Griggs: Yes, basic skills, right. And if they can get that, they're on their way. But basically, once you get to high school you got . . . basically, all your basic skill should be intact, and you should branch out to your higher math, your different types of English and Lit. and your different subject areas - your drafting, anatomy, physiology. You're not going to get a lot of reading in high school. You'll get different types of reading, but you're not going to get reading skills.

Patrick Tyler: Do you find many black children today use more cop-outs? You know, as far as education is concerned?

Alvin Griggs: I have to compare that to past years and say that I've seen a drastic change in the direction of black youth in today's society, and I have to compare my high school career to that, and say you see very few black kids copping-out. What you will see is black kids struggling, trying to make it and there're other things in the way that's preventing them from dealing with the situation, such as, family background, or jobs, or everything related to money basically. If you look at education this world now

is not going to be a racial thing. Down the road it's going to be a socioeconomic type of thing, and that's what it's getting to be now. You see those kids who can't cope with that copping-out. And they cop-out because they know they can't cope.

At the middle school level you see your social groups beginning to develop and I can point them out now the second day of school at Edison. You see your social groups that are from nice middle-class families begin to polarize each other. Different friends that eat together in the cafeteria, those kids who are involved in drama, band, they're doing it not because of their interests, they're doing it because their parents directed them in that direction. And then you see the poor kids - black or white - and you have a lot of poor whites in Champaign-Urbana, especially at the school I am in. You see those poor black kids, poor white kids being left out. Then you begin to see them copping-out. Then they figure, they begin to get the picture, "Hey, I don't fit. I don't have the money to buy that horn. I don't have the money to have the social parties. I don't have the money to wear those clothes or Izod shirts, or Vans shoes." I don't know whether you've seen those shoes that they wear. Tennis shoes that you pay 35, 40 dollars for, and some of them are the jogging shoes, too.

And they begin to figure that out, then they begin to take a different role. They begin to get attention, to seek attention by other methods. And what you call copping-out is what I call their way of coping with the situation. They either turn to alcohol, they either turn to drugs, they either turn to violence, and sometimes they will just abstain from everything . . . just move themselves away from just everything and just be themselves, or they get with a group that likes certain things and you see them copping-out.

But that's not copping-out. That's beginning to recognize your place, and it's not that way, but beginning to recognize the place the society put you in and you begin to assume that role. And that's what's happening when you say copping-out. There're some wealthy kids in the world that deal with the world the same way. They see their parents working hard not enjoying themselves, busting their butt to make the dollar. Son of a medical doctor. And they see the family unhappy, the mother unhappy, and he may be unhappy with his father because of lack of attention or time, and he may cop-out, too, but he's got all the money. He's saying, "Hey, I don't want to be like that dude he doesn't love me or my mother." And so he begins to cop-out, too.

So you have to go back and find out the underlying cause for the behavior of an individual, and that behavior can come to be caused by a number of things in society. So I wouldn't call it copping-out, sometimes, survival and coping. I don't think alcohol or drugs would be the direction to go, but that's the choice they make, and that's their way of dealing with this world.

Now I'm going to be honest with you, a lot of them try to go the suicide route. So some decide, "I'm not going to deal with it," and just don't want to live in this world, and they take their own life. But I don't think it's copping-out. And they'll tell you, "Well, why I should work hard? I'm not going to get a job, and I won't be able to go to college." You know, but they need that there's always a chance, and they need to be given that, I guess that feeling that you can always make it, that you don't give up, you keep trying.

You know, had our forefathers given up in slavery and said, hey, you know, like the American Indians, and they did, they gave up, the American Indians, they just

wouldn't decide to fight it, and it just wiped them off the face of the earth. Had we done the same thing they would've wiped us off the face of the earth. So, we didn't give up, we kept trying, we kept working, we kept thinking, we kept moving. You know, thinking there's hope and I think black people are motivated to that type of thing, but we lose a few on the way. But we can't save them all.

Patrick Tyler: Are teachers more sensitive to the child, than in the past, or what's different?

Alvin Griggs: I don't think there's a change in the needs, I guess the sensitivity, of the teaching. I think there's a change in the educational level of staff people now, and I would say after the seventies, the people going into education now are not your top college people. Those people who are bright and sharp are going into medicine, business and engineering, other fields where they can make more money. I think what you're seeing in education today are young people getting away from teaching, and they're getting away from it because of a lack of funds, a lack of control. You know what I mean by control? School districts are controlled now by the public, and people aren't going to get involved in all that politics and all that stuff you have to go through now.

So what you see now is a different type of teaching. I think the sensitivity is the same, but I think the educational level of intelligence of that individual may be a little different, where in past years you've had the very, very bright, sharp people in education. We will get back to that. Eventually, we will get back to getting sharp

people in education. But I didn't encourage my son to get into education. He's over at the University now, and I did not encourage him to get into education, although he wanted to be a coach. I told him he was crazy. I encouraged him to go into engineering. And he's not in engineering now, he's in industrial design because he loves art and artwork. I did not encourage him to go into education, and he can come out in industrial design and get a job in the industry somewhere probably starting off with $20,000. Whereas, starting off as a teacher you get 12 or 13. So that's what you're seeing, the change in education. But I think teachers are sensitive. I think people are sensitive to the needs of people. Sometimes there's nothing they can do about it, and I think there are people in the field now that are following the contract, and the union contract says that you work from 7:30 to 3:15. "At 3:15 I'm going home."

Now that's the way society is turning now, everybody works by a contract and education is _____. When you start dealing with human beings you can't work by a contract. Any type of humane organization, or structure, you don't work by a clock, you work by the needs of the individual. When you get into working by contracts, you begin to interfere with needs and not think what you're saying about sensitivity. Those people are sensitive to those needs, but they're also looking at that clock, and they're thinking about that contract. And they say, "You follow the contract." You know, if you don't follow the contract you begin to get . . .

For example, all the cuts you've had in Champaign-Urbana, you will still find teachers working just as hard with more kids, fewer dollars, and you will see them even make the system operate with less, and they've been doing it to teachers for years. Teachers been the lowest people on the totem pole, they're the people, they

couldn't socialize in the community, they would fire you if they caught you in a bar. In fact, they wouldn't hire one of the football coaches at Centennial because he was hanging out at the Lockeroom (Lounge). I don't whether you remember reading that in the paper this summer. That's the type of people they want. They want a nice goody two-shoes, and other professions you can do your thing. You can wear a mustache, you can wear this, you can do that, you can go places. But for years they wanted people they thought at times because of their actions had a good moral upbringing, standards, and values, and they put some teachers on the spot. But the teachers are changing that now. I think the profession will get better.

Patrick Tyler: What churches do you attend?

Alvin Griggs: My wife is a member of Bethel. Let me give you my long story. Since my father was a Methodist minister, he burned me out on the church. I lived next door to the church. I went every day. My grandfather was a deacon in the Baptist Church, my mother played the piano. By the time I got sixteen or seventeen years old, and I said, "If I get away from home, I'll never go back to church." I didn't really say that, but that's the way I felt. And he was a United Methodist minister.

There's no United Methodist black church in Champaign-Urbana. There's a couple on campus. They don't need my money. So I will go to Bethel with my wife and family when they go, and basically that's the only place we attend. Occasionally we go to church on campus. And when I go stay with my mother, we'll go to a . . . She lives in Tacoma, Washington, we'll go to her church in Tacoma, Washington, which is a

United Methodist, and she's the only black face in the church, but we go. And I sit there and we enjoy the service, the same service, but in the South they split off, the two churches split off.

Black ministers left the white United Methodist Church and formed their own United Methodist. And then the A.M.E. and C.M.E. Church split off from the United Methodist Church and they started their own group. So there are three splinter groups of the Methodist Church, A.M.E., C.M.E. and United. United in the South _____ back to integration now. They're predicting down the road in the next hundred years that A.M.E. and C.M.E. will be back together, and they will merge back with the United Methodist.

One reason is because of retirement and funds, they're drying up in the churches now, so you'll see a lot of consolidation of churches. That's a guess, and that's what I've been reading, and that's what the black churches in the South are doing now. Because they do get good benefits from the large body that they used to be with back after slavery. But they are back now, and they do get excellent benefits, ministers I think.

Patrick Tyler: What's your wife's name?

Alvin Griggs: Mildred.

Patrick Tyler: What's her maiden name?

Alvin Griggs: Her maiden name is Mildred Barnes.

Patrick Tyler: When did you get married?

Alvin Griggs: Early, when I was a sophomore in college, ah, she was a senior so we married in undergrad in Arkansas. She's from Arkansas, a small town in Arkansas. Her father was a cotton farmer, had thirteen kids, sent everyone of them to college. He didn't have an education, in fact, I don't think he finished grade school and that's about all, but he was a super man. She's in town, she's a full professor at the University. Has a Ph.D., she just finished serving as the president of a national organization, which was the American Home Economics Association, which holds about 4,000 members nationwide and nationally, too. She served on national companies and boards, she wrote for J.C. Penney's in the educational department. Also, she structured and put together the state curriculum for Home Economics about a year ago, and now she's working on another project. So, she's a super person.

Patrick Tyler: How many children do you have?

Alvin Griggs: Two boys, that's enough.

Patrick Tyler: What are they?

Alvin Griggs: Paul and Scott.

Melinda Roundtree: Did your wife come here before you did or did . . . ?

Alvin Griggs: We came together. She had a fellowship at the University, and we moved here, and then her goal in the undergrad before we got married, that she was going back to school. She enjoyed school, all the way through first grade. In fact, she started school early in first grade. She started school at age four or five, that's why she finished ahead of me. She was in college, finishing before I got to my junior year, and that's because she started early. So when she finished undergrad she wanted to go back to grad school. She knew that, and she was an excellent student. So we both moved here, and we both got in grad school, we both got our masters. And she did quite well in the masters program, so they invited her back to work on her EDD, and she completed that, and after she completed that, they asked her to stay and work.

So she built a home for herself in the Education Building, and she's on the Athletic Board right now, and she's on the College Executive Committee, which carries a lot of weight in both departments. Being on the Athletic Board is quite powerful, because she's making decisions for the Athletic Department, and being on the Executive Board, she makes the decision in salaries for her peers. So, she's overly involved, in community and school.

Melinda Roundtree: Has your wife influenced you in any way?

Alvin Griggs: I think we have a good mix, we've influenced each other. We're supportive of each other, and I think, it works both ways. Yes, she's had some influence on me, and I hope I've had some influence on her. She'd never been outside of Arkansas before I moved her outside of Arkansas. She'd never eaten fish or seafood before I purchased it for her, so we had influence on each other. We've been good.

I lived in a big city. I knew the ropes, I mean, I was street-wise. She lived in a small town, she knew the workings of a small community, and how families should be structured, and how to live and preserve your life. And so that influence rubbed off on me, and I've shared some of my street wisdom with her, and some of my savvy. I don't know whether it's been good, but I think it's yes, we've had influence on each other.

[End Side B]