JOHN BROWN, JR.: I was born in Carroll County, Mississippi. That's one of the many counties in Mississippi, extremely rural. What we call the hill country, I guess, about twenty to twenty-five miles east of Greenwood in Carroll County. Born on a small farm that was owned by the grandmother. My father, my mother, my grandmother, during my early childhood days, lived in a typical farm house. No running water, electricity, etc., back in the 1926, of course, to my knowledge before there were any such things as running water electricity in rural areas. Our family was very close. There's nine children, three girls and six boys. So I think we did the typical things that farm folk do. I think the good part of our lives was that we owned our own little strip of land, 125 acres. That within itself made us a little different from most black people, in rural Mississippi in particular. I learned about racism early on in life, and I've had, I think, my detestation of racism, my hate for racism certainly has had a lot to do with all of my life developments, I'm sure. But what I remember most about my early childhood life is just how close our family was, how we did things together. The boys had certain outside chores to do around the house and on the farm, and the girls, of course, did the inside work. My parents were very strict, very religious. We were brought up, as long as I can remember, going to church. Our farm consisted of primarily dairy cattle and cotton production, bumper crops. We raised peanuts, sweet potatoes, corn, hay and stuff for the cows. So my early childhood, the most memorable thing is my relationship to the farm, farm planting and farm animals. I think I had this tremendous attachment for wildlife, too. I used to roam the woods and watch the birds and follow the turkeys to see where they laid and all that. So I've always been an outdoor person. Love the outdoors. Love nature. I have a tremendous affinity for plants of all kinds, but particularly vegetable plants, trees of various kinds. Just have this love for the outdoors.

RK: Did you work on the farm? Did you have particular chores?

JB: Oh yes. Very early, I guess as long as I can remember, I've been either walking behind or picking cotton or trying to learn how to plow. But I've always worked. When I got big enough to really work, my job every day, twice a day, was to milk fourteen cows, and my brother milked fourteen cows, by hand. We had to feed up and milk the cows. Get the milk on the stand or to the plant, and then go to school. Plus, we had to walk. I'm sure you've heard this before, but we were about three and a half miles from school, and we walked back and forth. But I've always had to work, every since I could remember. Hauling hay, we handled our hay loosely. Did'dn't had the balers and all that. So we would stack it or shock it in pens, and feed it to the cattle later on during the winter months. But pulling corn, picking cotton, plowing, no tractors. Our plowing was done with mules and horses. But yeah, I've always had to work, ever since I can remember.

RK: So it was a very characteristic farm family. Everybody pitched in.

JB: Family farm, typical family farm.

RK: Where did your father sell, I mean, did he sell cotton and stuff like that?
JB: Well, there were ready markets. For the dairy cattle, there was a plant, a Borden milk plant, I can remember. Everybody in the whole area that had dairy cattle, and some people only had one or two cows, you know. I think there were allotments, I believe, back in those days. Our allotment was twenty-eight milk cows. We had more than that, but we had twenty-eight that we sold from, and we marketed the milk at the plant. Everybody in the whole community marketed their milk at the plant. We'd put our milk on the stand. We would milk it, can it up, set it on a stand near the road, and then there was a person hired by all the farmers to come through and pick the milk up and take it to the plant. Once a month, of course, you'd get your milk check. Our cotton and corn, well, we marketed cotton. Cotton was a bumper crop, and we marketed cotton at the local gin. Everybody in the whole neighborhood, black and white, marketed their cotton at this one gin house. We raised corn for feed and for family consumption. There was a grits meal or corn meal that you'd take your corn and get it chopped up for meal or grits, and then the rest of it would be feed to the cattle and the hogs. We had, I guess, just about every farm animal that grew in Mississippi. Hogs, cows, chickens, turkeys, geese, guinea, ducks, the whole bit. But it was a typical family farm and we all worked it. And by being so many of us, periodically we would hire ourselves out to larger farmers, larger white plantation owners, to pick cotton in particular. Sometimes, to chop cotton, but to pick cotton. For us it was kind of nice because the money we made working out was ours, unlike many other families.

RK: Is that right? You got to kept what you made?
JB: You got to kept what you made, and that's how we bought our bicycles and stuff like that. But it was typical rural family life.
RK: Owning your own land made a big difference, I would imagine.
JB: Oh, very definitely, very definitely.
RK: Maybe you could compare your family to, say, some other black families in that area. Did you know that...?
JB: Oh definitely, there was no way you could not know the difference. The typical black family was a sharecropped or tenant farmer. In either case, a percentage of what you make and almost all of the profit, went to the landowner. What I remember most about some of our close friends and relatives in the area was that no matter how much they worked, no matter how hard they worked, no matter how successful their crops were, they would always end up in debt. Fact, I used to write a little poetry, and I remember one of my favorite poems was maybe this particular farmer that I quite well, who had this extremely large family. That family was probably one of the best farm families in the area, but no matter how much they made on the farm, no matter how successful they were, they would always, no matter what, they would always end up in debt. This poem was about this guy who, no matter how hard he worked, he was always in debt. But the typical black farm family was a tenant farmer, a sharecropper, could barely read and write, if they could read and write at all. Basically illiterate. But life was really hard for most of them. There was no way not to see the difference between the style, the family life that we had, and other families in the area.

RK: How would you family have gotten the land? Was there a history that went with that?
JB: Yes. My grandfather on my mother's side was a very aggressive, very aggressive, bold black farmer. The kind of person that
white folk call crazy. Crazy nigger, you know, because he stood up for his rights. But he owned, I'm not sure, probably came from the "forty acres and a mule" days. I don't know the exact history. But family that doled out the forty acres and a mule typically gave you the poor, hilly land, which was kind of typical of our farm. But my grandfather was also successful in buying up. You know, once these people got their forty acres and a mule, many of them just sold it or gave it away and went north or went somewhere else, went north, or went somewhere else. Got off the farm. There's a whole history behind that that I won't try to deal with. But because farming was generally bad for black people, many of them detested farming. Even when they got the forty acres and a mule, they did not see trying to make a living on the land as something that was all that important. Because they saw farming itself as a slave labor kind of thing. The few who saw that they could take the land and turn it around and make it useful to them were people like my grandfather, who took advantage of that and bought other land that other blacks were getting rid of.

RK: Did you know him?
JB: I barely remember my grandfather. I did know my grandmother, his wife, pretty well, who inherited the farm after he died. But very, just vaguely, my grandfather died when I was quite a kid.
RK: You talked a little bit before about learning racism at an early age. What were race relations like? What contact did you have with whites?

JB: From the time I was born in 1926 until about 1935, he lived in Carroll County. There were such few people. We were in a rural area that was very sparsely populated. Fact, I can only remember one white family that I knew well, whose place we would pick cotton on, hire ourselves out to sometimes. And race relations among us at that time, partially, I guess, because I was just a small child, was not too noticeable. There were no major problems. But, when I was about nine, we moved to ( ) County, which is in the eastern part of the state. We rented a farm there. My father rented a farm from a white land owner. Of course, we had to leave. There were no high schools in Carroll County. So the reason for leaving was to give his kids an opportunity to go on the high school. What I remember, first of all, is that the person we rented from seemed to have been nice enough, but for some reason he would not sell. My Daddy wanted to buy the land. My Daddy would afford to buy, but they wouldn't sell. They leased it. We got along well with them. But this is where I encountered racism, what racism was really like. The community was a little more heavily populated. There were more whites. We still had to walk to school. I guess the first, most memorable experience, was walking past this well equipped white high school, going to the black high school that was located down and around in a black community that was not well kept. No buses for the black kids, and white kids would ride past you in buses, sometimes splashing mud up on you. I remember distinctly being called nigger. I remember whites talking about you as though you were some animal, right in your presence. So I guess I'd say about nine or ten was when I really experienced what racism was really like. I can remember the hate, the hurt, that I had as a result of that. I've gone through some pretty bitter moments as a result of some of those experiences.

RK: How did you feel leaving that land, that kind of almost idyllic, although it was hard work.
JB: Our life basically was the same. As far as our family life, my mother died, by the way, right after we moved out of the hill county over the Knoxville County. I think I was about nine then, nine or ten. That, of course, made a big difference in our lives, because my Daddy now had nine children to try to raise by himself. And of course, he married again, and we had a stepmother that was a totally different relationship than your mother. And being a child, I never accepted a stepmother. I just never wanted to have anybody but my mother. So I think that had a lot to do with a lot of my attitudes and stupid things I did. But our life was pretty much the same. We were pretty independent on the land. We paid a flat rental fee, so what we made was ours. My Dad had a policy of not owing people. He believed in paying as he went along, or not borrowing from the person. His philosophy was not to get anybody's pocket. Stay in his own pocket. But he was a pretty independent person, and for that reason, I have never had to live in a setting where I was completely controlled by someone, which was so typical of many black people during the time.

RK: You said that you moved to take advantage of the high school. Sounds like your parents, that education was something that they valued very much. How did they see that or understand that? You didn't necessarily need it to be a farmer. Those kinds of skills you learned.

JB: Well, both my father and mother had a lot of respect for education. They thought that it was extremely important. That you could not "make it" unless you could read and write, unless you were smart. They always, as far as I can remember, well, we had an aunt, my mother's aunt, a great-aunt, who had two children who had gone to college. She was very instrumental in working with us at home, and sometimes with the school system as well. But as far as I can remember, reading and writing and working and arithmetic were just something that you had to do. And they also took pride. They would work with the schools along with us. They were kind of pushy. They wanted us to be competitive. They wanted us to be the best. So that, of course, just kind of ran in our family, I guess.

RK: Were you aware of people leaving, as you were growing up, the South, going to Chicago, going to Memphis? Was that kind of an issues? Did you ever think about that yourself?

JB: Yeah, definitely, no doubt about it. In fact, normally when you finished high school in Macon, Mississippi, where I moved to and was brought up, when you finished high school, you left to go to Detroit or Chicago. This was just before and right away World War II. The jobs were opening up in the factory. People would go north, come back driving cars, and dressing fine. Of course, I don't think there are many rural communities in the deep South where people at one time or the other did not want to move north. My people moved north. In fact, the person that we rented the farm from in Knoxville County died, and he didn't sell us the land before he died, and his family, after he died, was certainly not going to sell the land to black folk. And of course, the relationship with the people who inherited the land was not as good as the person who owned it. So at that point, my father left and went to Detroit. All my brothers and sisters went either to St. Louis or Detroit. I'm the only one out of the nine children that did not go north. I spent one summer in Detroit and that was enough of Detroit for me. I went into the military during World War II, back in the 1945, and I came out of the
military and went to school at Tuskegee. That's how I got here, and I've been here ever since.

RK: Did you just not like the city?
JB: Never did and never have. In fact, what I remember about Detroit, more than anything else, even though my family bought a house, a typical house in a transitional area, an area that had been occupied by Jews for the most part, big, two-story, sometimes three-story with attic and basement. But the thing I remember most about that was that it was a matter of feet from the next house. There'd be row houses from block to block out. And you could just even sit on your front porch and hear the neighbors or the kids playing in the street. And even though people were close, it was certainly not the danger that you could experience in cities now. But I had that affinity for the open space. I never wanted to be jammed up next to someone else. Just something about that that I really didn't like. But my other brothers and sisters adjusted fine. My Daddy adjusted fine. They got jobs in the factories, some professional jobs.

RK: So that was a really successful move for them?
JB: Economically, I think so, yeah.

RK: You talked a little bit also earlier about religion. When you were young, they were very religious. How important was the church, and the kind of spiritual issues that you dealt with, was that in your early life?
JB: Well, it goes without saying, that the black church in my judgement has certainly been the one institution that has probably been the life saver for black folk, because it's been the institution that has kept us together, whatever that means. I've known the church. I was brought up in the church, but I have personally always had difficulties with some of the religious concepts, and probably still do. I still go to church. I've always been in Sunday School and so forth. But in spite of the role that the black church has played in the black community and the black family, I have had problems relating a lot of what I've been taught religiously to practical living. To me, Christianity has to be practical, or any religion has to be a practical part of the lives of people. I think that is probably a much more deeper philosophical concept of mine than I have realized, except in recent years, because to me anything that's not practical--and I think I've probably been like this all of my life--if it's not practical, if it doesn't relate directly to what I have to do today in order to live or directly to what people have to do in order to live and get along with each other, then it doesn't have much value. By concepts of Christianity, realistic Christianity, is that involvement in the lives of people. If I'm a Christian, I make your life better, you know. I've had that problem relating what I hear and what I'm taught in Sunday School and in church to what I have to do in order to live and to make life better for other people. And to me, Christianity should be that. That's what it's all about. Most religions of all sorts are designed theoretically to make the lives of people better. Practically, it doesn't work like that. And I think that this is one of the ironies of racism itself. Is that how can people claim to be Christians on the one hand, and yet practice such inhuman practices on the other hand? I've always had difficulty with that.

RK: You said in moving, you were right outside of Macon?
JB: Yeah.
RK: So it's not as isolated an area as you are. You're still farming. You're still in the country, but you're going to a city school or a school in town.

JB: In town, yeah.

RK: How were you then as teenager and stuff? Did you find yourself being more rebellious or how did you respond to those new kind of circumstances?

JB: Well, you respond to them, I have to say, out of the background of experiences. You learn from what other people do. In order to survive in any culture, you get along. You have to comply with policies and practices at least a sufficient amount so that the system doesn't completely destroy you. So, sure, I was rebellious. I think that I could easily have been pushed to the point of real violence. In fact, I can remember times that just another little bit of weight would have pushed me over the edge. I can remember the fear. I can remember the hate. I can remember the anxiety that came. The least little racial incident, that someone called me a nigger for no reason, for an example, and that would happen a lot. Or to hear someone sit down and talk about blacks as though I wasn't there. Even at an early age, I can remember the resentment, the bitter resentment, I had. And there have been several incidences where I could have, you know, been lynched or killed, because there were just so many things I just could not taken. I'm seen maltreatment meted out to black folk that I would not have taken under any conditions, you know, staying alive. But at the same time, I realized that the choice was death or life. That if you retaliate, you knew death was going to come. So I can remember going through periods of wishing that, and consciously deciding, that should I ever have to strike, I'd just kill everything white I can because I know I'm going to be killed in the process. So I think probably the most memorable part of my life, my personal adjustment to the kind of inhuman treatment, was to deal with this fear of death that I had been taught in the church. You know, I'd been reading the Bible, and I remember certain passages in the Bible that I would hear preachers preach about. One in particular was that it was as hard to get into Heaven as a camel through the eye of a needle or something like that. Or something about a mustard seed, and I concluded early on that it was impossible for me to get to Heaven if there was a Heaven. So that could not be a worry. I had to adjust to a life after death that didn't include this Heaven that was impossible to get into anyway. So my concern was that if I ever had to--and I went through real periods of training myself so I could protect myself and could kill as many white folk as I could, just in case I had to. What I learned over the years was that hate, that extreme hate that I had, was more detrimental to me than those people I was hating. So I hope that somewhere in my sixty-five years of living I have overcome that deep hate, but I can remember going through hate that superseded everything else that I ever learned. It superseded my fear of death, my fear of anything else. Sure. I hope it's over. But I can't be sure.

RK: What outlets did you have? You moved to this little town. Your mother died, you're in this new situation. What kind of outlets or how did you channel your energy?

JB: That's a good question. There's always been something to do, always. I've always enjoyed the farm. I love farming. I love to see things grow. There's always been horses and cows and guns to hunt. I used to roam the river banks and the woods hunting and fishing. We
played ball. We did normal things that people do. But I have always enjoyed being alone with nature. I've never been lonely. I've never been short of something to do. Everything from watching animals to building something to roaming the woods to farming the land to fishing the creeks and the river banks. There's always been a world of things to do.

RK: That's a very spiritual experience in itself.
JB: Of course.
RK: That's a way of dealing with some things, getting some release from some of those other things.
JB: Oh yeah.
RK: You moved to Macon or to that area for schools. Were the schools better? You obviously did well in school. Was your father still very conscious of studying hard and seeing that as an outlet for you?
JB: Definitely.

[Interruption]

As I said earlier, my family has always been interested and supportive of education, pushed us. I used the term push because that's exactly what they would do. They wanted us to be the best. But the schools themselves were, I would say, meager, every meager. They had not even the bare necessities. The one school I went to in Macon through high school or through most of the eleventh grade until I went in the military, was called Macon Colored School. It went from the first, I believe, to the twelfth grade. That was the only school in town for blacks. A number of one room rural schools that was typical of the South at that time. But I guess the one thing that I can say about that school, the teachers there were dedicated. To me, they were really dedicated. They put their life on the line for you. I can remember, you know, several teachers who were never surpassed, even in college, in ninth, tenth, eleventh grade. Just beautiful people. One, in particular, that taught you, like some of the discussions that we often went through were a comparison of the black schools to the white schools. The white brick school and the buses, etc. against the black school over in the black bottom, with mud, and no buses, etc. And this particular teacher would say to you, "You have everything in this world to learn whatever you want to, right here. You have your mind. You have air, water, sky, and the best teaching material in the world is nature. So you apply what you have the best you can, and you will surpass anybody, no matter where." But I think it was that kind of motivation that I got both from parents, from teachers, not all the teachers, of course, but the few that made the difference, you know, was probably more than some of those white folk got in some of their schools, to be honest with you. I think I was a lucky person. I had good parents. I had good neighbors, people who I thought were interested in me, even from a kid. I think that the most important thing is to feel that you're cared about and loved, and that's what only friends and family can do for you.

RK: What was the military like? You went after high school, after the eleventh grade?
JB: I went in the military right at the peak of World War II. That was when Europe was at its worst. So I turned eighteen in November, and February, I was in the military. Right out of school, I mean, they were goggling up everything at that time. I don't think I could have felt worst. I don't know of anything, any experience that I've had in my life worst than having to go into the military. A number of reasons.
One is I had relatives brothers and so forth, who had been in the European theater and had gotten hurt or killed. The most degrading experience I've had is having to go fight for a country that didn't protect me. I mean, I remembered that more than anything else. Just before I went into the military, there was a young black soldier that had been in basic training, came back to Mississippi for basic training, and he left to go home, and his wife went to visit her parents on a bus. They had one little child, and the child apparently was ill. The bus driver kept asking this lady, "Nigger, can't you get that baby quieter?" At least my people told me this. I didn't see it myself. But I understand that this driver just eventually parked the bus, and took the baby and shook it to death, and then put it back in the mother's arms, and said, "You won't have no trouble with him crying now." All these white folk on the bus, nobody said a word. And then I'm going to go into a military to fight for a system that's going to do that to me was one hell of a bad experience. I thought many times about just deserting. I mean, it was really, for me, it was like going to hell, to be honest with you.

RK: Where did you go for basic training?
JB: Inducted at Camp Shelton, Mississippi, and from there to Fort Benning, Georgia for assignment to Fort McClinton, Alabama for basic infantry training, and was scheduled to go oversea when the war ended. So fortunately I didn't see combat. I did go to the Pacific, you know, in a clean-up campaign, but never had to see combat. And I'm really glad I didn't.

RK: Was the experience of being in the service, was that any better or worse?
JB: For me it was bad all the way, because it was a segregated army. You had black outfits, black everything. I mean, it was just, I guess the best way to put it was for me it was a bad experience. All I wanted to do was to get out.

RK: So when you came back out of the war, how did that happen or what was your thinking about what career you wanted?
JB: Well, initially, before I went into the military, I had hoped to be a doctor. That was my dream. I guess, fortunate for me, I went through basic training, and then after VE Day, I was transferred to a technical outfit where I took up what they call medical field training. I was a medical technician for the infantry combat duty. After the training, we were shipped into a little place in the Asiatic Pacific called New Caladonia, which was actually a supply depot. And a lot of guys that had been in combat, had gotten hurt, a lot of people got hurt loading the ships to send stuff back to the country or to dump it in the sea. That experience convinced me that I didn't need to be in medicine. That was not my profession. I didn't need to be confined to that kind of process. I needed to be something that was much more involved in the lives of people, and outside of a hospital. My intentions after that was to go into chemical research. I wanted to teach, so my bachelor's degree was in elementary education. But then I did a master's degree in public school administration and in science, and eventually got a master's in chemistry. And taught science for fifteen years in the public schools here in Macon County and Phoenix City. But later got into ( ), which is something I really wanted to do.

RK: What was Tuskegee like for you? Was that an important change?
JB: Very much.
RK: What did you feel like when you went there? What was the campus like after the war?

JB: Well, first of all, I had seen a film of Tuskegee, and I'd heard of Booker Washington back in high school, George Washington Carver, and Lewis Adams, and all of these folk at Tuskegee. So I just had dreams. I'd read up from slavery in high school, and I just wanted to go to Tuskegee. I had heard of E. Franklin Fraser and read his book, The Black Book of Bourgeois. Now, Lewis Jones, who was at Tuskegee at the time, and his book, Shadow of the Plantation. So my life dream was to go to Tuskegee. In fact, in early high school, I didn't even think about what I was going to take, I just wanted to go to Tuskegee. So going to Tuskegee was like, to me, like this dream come true. The campus was pretty much like I expected. People were professional. The buildings were nice. And I guess the most fascinating thing to me was that all this is owned by black folk, you know. All the teachers and everybody was black. That was a real good experience for me.

RK: Was it very supportive? You had resources, kind of a very serious atmosphere.

JB: Very serious atmosphere. Teachers were interested in you. The whole philosophy of education for black people was very highly expressed. The campus was loaded with soldiers, back in school on the G.I. Bill. So it was just a totally and completely atmosphere. But it was an atmosphere of people, unlike in the military where you had so many black soldiers who couldn't read and write their name, some of whom were sergeants over you. Somewhat similar to the plantation where you had the boss man, a black overseer that kind of told you what to do. But here, it was all black. The atmosphere was such that you really get down to the business of learning. We were talking about abolishing segregation, so it was important for blacks to learn. We needed black lawyers. We needed black teachers. We needed black everything. So I think the one thing the Tuskegee Institute did at that time was to instill in its students the new role that they must play in this changing society that we were hoping to see come, which eventually came. So that was a big change in my life. I think somewhere in that four years at Tuskegee and fifteen years of teaching, I lost a lot of the hate that I had built up against racism. Even though it didn't change that fast. I think that kind of took me out of that atmosphere of having to come in constant contact with it. But it was a major change in my life, it really was.

RK: So there was a sense of optimism, a sense that things in the South were going to change, perhaps, and that you were kind of being prepared to change things.

JB: Not so much that. Certainly there was a sense of optimism, but I think I sensed early on that young black men and women aren't going to teach their children the kind of fear of white folk. They aren't going to teach their children to be submissive, to turn the other cheek, for an example. There was no way, as a young person, going through college and getting ready to marry that I could possibly have taught my children the kind of submissive acceptance of racism that I learned from my parents and from my community. I'm grown now. I also realize that there are things more important than life itself. Freedom is more important than life. You begin to develop your own concepts and your own philosophy. College is a hotbed for developing concepts of your own, for challenging teachers that you don't agree with, for challenging religious systems. You're beginning now to make decisions for yourself. And I
think that was, for me, a real conscious effort to develop into the kind of manhood that I was going to be for John Brown, not for my Dad or for anybody else. So it was a time for philosophy building, conceptual attitudes, shaping of systems. How are you going to fit into this system? What role must you play? And a lot of us were involved in the civil rights movement long before, in fact, right after World War II. A lot of us came out of the military determined not to live in and accept the kind of environment we left before we went into the military. So I was a complete changed person. I was must more fearless than I was before I went in. I had recognized the fact that at some point, I was going to die anyway, and that nothing was going to change that. So that I think I started developing this philosophy to live, or what I call a living philosophy. Taking your life, where it is, as it is, and making out of it what you want it to be. And I think it was at that point that I began recognizing that I had control over my own destiny. I probably would have gone through that had I gone any place, you know, because of the experiences I had in the military, the concepts I had about a number of things in life, racism only being one. But recognizing that, you know, I'm growing up. I'm a man. I've got to take the role of manhood. One day I'm going to be a father. I've got to make a life for my family and my children. So I think it was a part of coming out of the military and going to college, but it was also a part of growing up, the process that all people go through in growing up.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A
RK: Your decision to teach school, to be a teacher, how did you see that fitting into the kinds of things you wanted to do with your life and the changes that you wanted to make?

JB: Well, my decision to go into education was twofold. One is, I felt then and I feel now that the younger children are, the more you can influence them. That's why I really chose elementary education, and probably where I should have stayed, because I think you really can influence young kids a lot. But ended up teaching in the high school. Most of my teaching career was science, because of my background, and where the science areas were taught. But I know how much influence teachers can have on the lives of students, and I feel that fifteen years in education, I can say with all assurances, I influenced a lot of kids. I've taken a lot of youngsters whose lives would have gone in a completely different direction had it not been for me as a teacher. But equally as important, I know, I can go so far as to say, I know that teachers have a tremendous influence on the lives of youngsters. My desire to influence lives, to make changes in areas where I knew changes had to take place--politically, socially, economically--was what motivated me to go into education. In fact, that's the only thing that I've ever done that I really love. I tell people all the time, teaching is the only thing I've ever done that I personally enjoy doing. I do what I do now because I feel it's something that has to be done. But teaching quite rewarding. If you can just see one kid that you know was going in the wrong direction, that would not have ever been anything, that you can say, "I know I'm responsible for this kid," when you look and see that he's gone on to college. He's made something out of himself, and you see the fruit. That's probably the most rewarding feeling you can get, in my judgment.

RK: Kind of like farming, raising young people, like raising good squash.

JB: See the end result, yeah, see the end result. It's rewarding. You've accomplished a goal, and that's what life is all about, I think.

RK: I was very interested, while you were in Tuskegee, you also ran a little restaurant?

JB: Oh yeah, I've been a workaholic all my days [laughter]. In fact, in college, I think doing my sophomore year, I opened up a little diner where we sold footlong hotdogs and sausage sandwiches and cheeseburgers, hamburgers. Just a little short order stand. I can remember kids, after basketball games and football games, they'd be lined up all down the streets, getting in to get these goodies we had. I've always been a hustler. I've always made my own money, let's put it like that. [Laughter]

RK: ( ) just like when you're on the farm. Having the ability to make that money and keep it and spend it yourself, you develop a kind of incentive.

JB: Oh yeah.

RK: So did you just do that during college?

JB: Right after college, well, I think one semester after college I ran the diner. During the summers I would go north to Detroit or New York somewhere to work, either waiting tables. I remember one summer I drove a big bulldozer for a construction company which I enjoyed doing. But in 1955, I ran a drive-in theater, and I did that for about fifteen years until I started ( ), in addition to teaching. But I've always
had something else. This is the only job I've had where [laughter] I didn't have something else or some other business involvement on the side.

RK: You don't have any extra time in this job?
JB: No, no, this is a twenty-four hour a day job [laughter].
RK: So what was the experience like teaching, you were in Phoenix City?
JB: I taught for thirteen years here in Macon County in a rural school out in the western part of the county, and two and a half years in Phoenix City as assistant principal. They built a new high school up there, trying to avoid certain issues, I think. And I went there as assistant principal under another person that I knew that was principal. I got that school opened up, and I worked there about two and a half years, and then I started with (   ).

RK: How was teaching in the county schools, the rural schools?
JB: It was good. It was a typical black county school, very poorly equipped, not sufficient number of teachers. Teacher-pupil load was extremely heavy. In a farming community, it was like the kids had to work the farm. They would not go to school until the farms were gathered. So you would have, say, the first two months of school maybe eight or ten kids in the class, and then when all the crops were in two months later, you would seventy. A classroom would have seventy or seventy-five students in it. So it was a bad experience, in terms of really being adequate. But I felt so good about the opportunities we were able to make for them. I taught chemistry, for example, and I had a chemistry lab, in a rural area, with portable everything, but it was a complete, well developed laboratory that you could do all basic chemical experiences. We used a lot of natural products. We were right in the middle of a rural area, so we could go out in the woods and gather anything you wanted. So we made do, and kids learned. But we were always aware of the lack of adequate equipment that was provided for the other schools.

RK: Were you aware in that period of time, you were so close, by the mid-50s, the emerging civil rights movement, the bus boycott, things that were going on? How aware were you, just a few miles out here, Montgomery, all of that? Did that start having an influence on you?
JB: Oh, well, let me tell you something. You're aware of racism forever. I mean, you know, there's no doubt about that. So to see what was happening in Montgomery, I was very much involved in it. In fact, before the Montgomery bus boycott, was the Tuskegee Gerrymander Case which reached the Supreme Court, and I was instrumental in working with other blacks to form the Tuskegee Civic Association. So that by the time the bus boycott came, blacks were very much involved in civil rights, even the late '40s, right after World War II the process started. But it escalated, and of course, there's always one or two straws that break the camel's back. But there's no way you could be black in the South and not be aware of the extreme racism and the effect it would have, not only on just your life, but the life of everybody. So to answer a question like awareness, you know, all my life [laughter] I've been aware of it, of course. But I think the hope of really--I don't know if the term, hope of doing something--we've always known. There's always been hope that you could do something about it. In fact, as long as I can remember, there's
always been blacks, no matter how difficult things may have seemed, who would not take that stuff. There's always been some blacks who just would not take it. Would rather be dead than to live with it, and that's what kept things in as much check as they were. There have always been blacks who, no matter how many Klans rode or what they did, the only way I'm going to be submissive is through death. So sure, in 1938 when I went in the military, in 1945 when I came out of the military, the two years I spent in the military, the racism was all around you, all around you. And you've always been aware of the fact that there has to be a better a live. I don't know of any blacks who have ever lived in complete hopelessness. We've always known that there was a better way. There could be a better way. There was a better system. And there have always been blacks who have constantly worked toward that end. And blacks know who those blacks in their community, who are going to stand up for their rights, no matter what. And you, as a young person, I can remember being quite a young kid, but having these role models, the Big Buds and the Little Buds who would cut a white man's throat as quick as he would anybody else. And I longed to be like--if they ever mess with me, I'm going to do what Big Bud did to them, you know. But you're always aware. There's no way to live in a racist society, there's no way to be a slave, or be a second class citizen, and not be aware of that role, because the system makes you aware. They don't make you, they keep you aware, even today.

RK: And Tuskegee was, in some ways, a forerunner of a lot of the civil rights.
JB: Definitely.
RK: Stuff was going of here in the late '40s that didn't start happening for a long time in a lot of other places.
JB: That's true.
RK: You really were in a sense on the cutting edge.
JB: Definitely.
RK: What was teaching, moving to Phoenix City and teaching, was that different? Was that a good experience?
JB: Not that different. You teach. You've got kids in front of you. You're going to teach them wherever you are. But when I went to Phoenix City, the whole civil rights movement, 1963 when I went there, things were beginning to happen. Supreme Court decisions were being made. The (      ) vs. Lightfoot decision was ruled just before I went there. And of course, the Brown vs. Ferguson had already been reached. And whites all over the South were beginning to try to do things to evade integration. So Phoenix City, like a number of other school systems, put an ultra modern black school in a black community in hopes that blacks wouldn't want to go to white schools. And in other words, they tried to practice the separate but equal process, a little too late, of course. So when I went there, I went there to be assistant principal of a very modern physical plant that the Board of Education in Phoenix City had constructed for blacks in hopes of keeping blacks out of the white school. So that the situation then was totally different for all of us, because that particular situation had not developed before. So that now you've got a different, even though you've got students that have to learn, but now you've got that extra mile to go to teach them how to cope with the problems, the evasive process that white folk are trying to come up with. So extra curricula activities were organizing parents to deal with that issue. To petition, first of all, for everything you need in
this school, because the streets were paved and all that. And we wanted to make sure that we weren't going to settle for anything that was second class in this particular school, but to continually press for equal educational opportunity, which means coeducational opportunities. We were, not just me, blacks concluded long before World War II that separate but equal could not work. We'd been advocating that for years. There's no way you can separate me from someone, and class me as a second class citizen, and then claim that I'm equal to someone else. That doesn't work. That's a facility from square one. In fact, we knew that from square one. Plessy vs. Ferguson Supreme Court decision in 1890 was a good example. That was just a way to evade equality. So in 1963 when I went to Phoenix City, things were in motion. I mean, they were in motion then. White folk were scared to death. They just saw the handwriting on the wall, and they were doing everything they could, like the gerrymander case at Tuskegee. Those niggers are going to have to vote anyway. Let's put them all out of the city limits, so we can at least control the city. So when I went there, I was involved in a process. Of course, nobody knew how it was going to come out. But we knew things would not ever be the same again. We knew that. We knew that.

[Interruption]

RK: So what was the situation that led to your firing there? Can you describe that a little bit?

JB: In Phoenix City?

RK: Yeah.

JB: Well, it was quite interesting. I was considered a very popular teacher. 1963, I think I'm getting the time correct, I had a homeroom class that graduated in probably May of '64 or '65, I'm not sure right now. I was asked to deliver the commencement address for this class. I really had planned this typical work hard and success kind of message, and was prepared to deliver it. Unfortunately, when I went to the school that night, the whole Board of Education, which was normally invited to black commencement, but this particular time they came. The board on this huge beautiful platform. The superintendent, the board members, and their wives were sitting on the stage. When I got up to make my presentation, my normal opening, and I've always been a fiery, very fiery, bold kind of guy. But this time, all while I was sitting there, I'm really, really pissed [laughter]. That's the best term to use. These white folks sitting up here, and, you know, and the principal and other blacks who preceded my message, were, in effect, honoring these guys because they have come out to this black commencement and, of course, showing their support, etc. And I'm sitting up here, my head telling me that these folk are here because they want to keep things like they are, you see. When I got up to speak, I told them, I made my opening statement, and I said to my students, "You know, I had planned to come here and give you a beautiful message about how important it is to work hard, to study hard, and to make out of yourself what you want to be. I wanted to talk to you about the kind of world you're going to live in, but I think that I'm going to do something different. I think I'm going to tear this up, and I'm going to talk to you like a father would talk to his children. And I want you to just sit and listen." Then I said, "I want to say to the rest of you, the parents, the adults in the audience, that this message, what I'm going to say from this point on is for these students who I know will be going out into the world tomorrow.
And I know that the world that they're going to face is different from the world we faced, and therefore, I want to talk to them. And I'm going to talk straight to them. I'm going to tell them what to expect, what really to expect. So if some of you might feel you might not want to hear this, you might want to get up and leave." [Laughter] "I'm going to tell you that upfront." Then I proceeded to speak. In the process, I said something to the effect that I wanted these students to understand why, for the first time, you see your superintendent, your board members, every one of them, and their wives sitting here. "I want you to understand why you have this ultra modern physical facility sitting down in the black bottom." Then I explained to them, with them sitting there. And people started applauded, black people. And I said, "Now, please, don't applaud. Just let me say what I got to say and get it over with." So they remained quiet and I laid it on. [Laughter] Afterwards, everyone of those board members came to me and said something to the effect that, "I know you're right, but all white folk aren't like that." I said, "I know it. I never said they were. I never said they were." They were very apologetic. But I understand later the superintendent told the principal, "I don't want to see this nigger any more, not even to visit. I don't want to ever see him." But fortunately that was the end of the term, and I didn't intend to go back anyway [laughter]. So I wasn't really fired. I just don't think I would have been invited to come back. I really don't think I would have been invited. Now, I was fired in Macon County. I was given the ultimatum to resign or to be fired, because I was very much involved in the boycott, a member of the NAACP anyway. It was supposed to have been outlawed. I was what do you call it? A radical, black person. I threatened to file suit to get my job back, and they chose to settle it out of court, to give my job back, and then I quit. But I was never really fired.

RK: That kind of activism (            )
JB: Oh yeah.
RK: Couldn't do that.
JB: No, no.
RK: And count on having a job.
JB: No, no. But I could have gone into court. A lot of teachers did to get their job back. But I just felt that it was time for me to go on to something else.
RK: Then you go over to Tuskegee to work in community activities?
JB: Well, actually what happened, right in the middle of the 1965-66 school term, I was offered to work for a program on the campus called the Tuskegee Institute Community Education Program. I worked for that program during the summer of '65. It was then called the Tuskegee Institute Summer Education Program, which was a program funded by the then Office of Economic Opportunity to provide basic tutorial training for blacks who had previously gone to all black schools, who were expected to go to newly integrated schools. The Tuskegee Institute operated a tutorial program, starting the summer of '65. So I worked for that program during the summer of '65. We applied for funds to continue the programs during the school year, but we didn't get notification of funding until around October of 1965. So I went back and worked in the public school until the end of the first semester. So I planned to, it was at the end of that year, even though I left in the middle of the semester, I really technically got leave to work with this program for one year. So it was at the end of 1965-66 school term that I went back
and delivered my famous address. But I had already, in effect, I had not been working there for the whole semester. So it wasn't like spontaneous. I felt pretty sure that I wasn't going to go back to the school system anyway. I took advantage of the opportunity to say what I felt like saying, that I felt really needed to be said. So I think it worked out fine.

RK: So once you got the federal monies to expand this, was it just a kind of straight expansion of the program? Were you still providing (     )?

JB: Basically. During the TISEP days, that is the Tuskegee Institute Summer Education Program, which operated during the summer of 1965, and then it picked up in October of '65, through the rest of 65-66 school term as the Tuskegee Institute Community Education Program, which it was extended without additional funds to 1968. Then we applied for funds for (     ), which is to do this community development kind of thing. One of my reasons for working for the TISEP program in the first place was to fulfill a dream I've always had to organize cooperatives. I had this life long desire and belief, and still do, that people can organize themselves, using their own resources no matter how poor the community is. You have sufficient number of resources. If you pool your resources and work together, you can improve your life. I had seen, even back in Carroll County, when I was quite a kid, my mother, my daddy, some other neighbors, gave an acre of land, used to call God's little acre, and the people would come in, all the people in the community would come in and plant a garden thereon, and improve their money. So even when I was in preschool, we had a hot lunch program, and it was done completely voluntarily from food that parents raised for their children, to volunteer cooking. And my mother or some of the mothers were every day at that school to fix hot lunches on a voluntary basis for their kids. So somewhere back in that area, I got the feeling that you get people to work together and they can do anything. I wanted this opportunity to form, you know, I started (     ) out with the intention of forming a cooperative, a farmers' cooperative, but it ends by being what it is today. But the idea has been something I wanted to do for a long time. So I took advantage of this opportunity to work while Tuskegee University had college students serving as tutors to low income, rural and urban kids across a twelve county area. I wanted the opportunity to organize these parents, so that my job was to work as an education coordinator. In that process, I organized parent-tutor associations. Each of the centers that we had across these twelve counties, so that by the time (     ) was terminated, which we knew the funds would eventually terminate anyway, we had gotten a core of people together that we could call in and formulate what ended up being (     ). That's how that whole concept got started.

RK: I suppose that you're seeing that the problems or the concerns and needs of the people that you're working with in rural areas, not just equal educational opportunities, but there are a lot of other issues that need to be--health care, housing, and stuff like that.

JB: Of course.

RK: Maybe you could just explain how it affected. . . ? That's a very important transition, say, in the direction of the civil rights movement or in activism, because there was an earlier concern that we need the voting and education. Where the two most important in this kind
of transition to more economic issues takes place in a lot of places at this point.

JB: Well, how do I deal with that? First of all, legalized segregation, of all kinds, was what the civil rights movement was all about. It just so happened that education, for an example, could easily be attacked, because it was legal. It was practiced. It was physical. It could be seen, etc. Job opportunities, much more important, but a little more subjective. That this white person owns a factory, and he hires who he wants to. There's no law that says a black can't own a factory, but he doesn't have access to economics, etc. So the more you get away from those things that are concrete, like education, like restaurants, like bus stations, like train stations, and public transportation, the more you get away those concrete things that you can see and understand and feel and deal with, the more you get into the subjective type things. The subjective racism that has existed all over this country, and perhaps in many parts of the world, all the time. Segregation has been just as prevalent in the North as it's been in the South, forever, you know. But it's been subjective. In the South, it's legal and it's open. So when you start dealing with the integration of schools, it's never been the intention to just leave it there or anything else. If you had economic opportunities, what do you need education for in the first place. Everybody that goes to school, naturally you want to be a little smarter. You want to know how to discuss issues, etc., but the bottom line is to get a better job, to better yourself. So that economics is always, in my judgment, been more important than anything else. But the question is how do you get economic opportunity. There have been a lot of misnomers about that, you know. This whole concept of mainstream, as far I'm concerned, mainstream is making a living for your family, however you can do that. In dealing directly with your question, we attacked education because it was easy to attack. It was a target sitting there that you couldn't miss, or public transportation, etc. But the whole bottom line has always been to improve your economic condition, your social, your political status, so that you can serve. You have opportunities to serve as a first class citizen in your environment, and first class citizenship entails everything, every human factor in a community is what first class citizenship entails. So if you're subjected to police brutality or anything else that's unfair or unequal, it's what we were concerned about. And that concern is just as prevalent and just as important today as it was in 1965, in 1945.

RK: When you got out into this twelve county area and started talking to people and traveling around, I'm interested in the kind of physical conditions, the kinds of lives that people were living. How would you describe that? How would you describe the problems that you, as you're setting out and setting up ( ), that you're seeing that you need to address?

JB: The conditions have been a part of my life, all of my life. Every time I go visit a friend, a neighbor. Every time I drive through a community, I see the dilapidated houses. I see the outdoor toilets. I see the filth. If I go through a public housing project in any city, I see people living on top of each other. That's there. So the problem of dealing with that is mute. I mean, that's there. You see what's there. The question is how do you deal with it. How best can you deal with it? My feeling has been, for a long time, that one of the best solutions to any problem is for those people who are experiencing that problem to,
first of all, do what they can to improve themselves. So that my job, my concern, was to try to see how I can influence people to do something for themselves. Now, sometimes that means pressuring someone else who has the responsibility to provide for some of your needs. Sometimes it means utilizing your own strength and your own resources, pooling your resources with someone else, working together as a team to solve a need. So when we started talking about community development, to me that's what it was all about. So the first thing I did, you know, John Brown did was just--it's amazing, for about six months, every night for about six months in a row at one point, I was at a rural church or somebody's house or a lodge house or somebody somewhere with some people in these local communities, many of whom I'd never seen before. But just talking about what could happen if people pooled their resources. If we don't do nothing but come together and talk about cleaning up this little community. But do something. Get them involved in doing something themselves. That's how we started. That's what our pitch was. That's what we were talking about. This whole concept of self-development through self-help is what I think--I still think, I've always thought--I've always known that the real progress comes when people begin to do something for themselves. My judgment is that this is what the government, this is what everybody who believes in human development and human dignity should be about. Is creating opportunities and resources whereby people can utilize what strength they have, what resources they have to improve themselves. Sometimes in the process of trying to do that we do just the opposite. Sometimes we create dependency. Sometimes we hope to eliminate it. And we're all guilty of that, because no matter how much you think you've got the answer, you don't have the answer to other people's problems. Nobody has. And, to me, the best thing that any of us working in community development, the best thing that we can understand is our own limitations. You just know that you are limited in terms of dealing with the lives of other people. Because whatever it is you think, whatever it is I think about what your problem is, at best it's not what you think. And you act on the basis of what you think, not on the basis of what John Brown thinks. And that's hard for people to understand. We just have a tendency to think that we have the solution to other people's problems. Therefore we come in and we built houses for people. And the way we think is the cheapest way and the best way to build houses for people end up a few years down the road to be the absolute worst thing you could have done, because you just created a hotbed for crime and prostitution and everything else. They weren't involved in the process in the first place. B.B. King has a record, I don't remember what it says, but it's where he was at city hall, and they say, "We're going to build some apartments for y'all." Well, the problem is they were building some apartment for y'all, for them. If they built those apartments, whoever built them, and built them as though the person who's designing it is going to have to live in it, it wouldn't be designed like that. But we're all guilty of doing something for other people. No matter how much we think we aren't. I believe that the best house you can give to anybody is one that he owns himself. I've always believed that, and have done a lot of work towards developing single family home ownership. I think, see, I think [laughter] it's all right for elderly people who cannot, many of whom have their own houses, need to be next to some neighbors, some friends, like themselves, have somebody to talk to and to do things together. If you plan the right
kind of infrastructure activities for people like that, it can be an advantage. Can't be no advantage for young, energetic, productive age people to live right next door, right in each other's mouth, you know. That's not advantageous and not ( ), and it has proven to be--I think I'm proven to be right [laughter].

RK: How did people respond to this notion of self-help and more cooperative activity? I mean, there are certain traditions in these rural communities that are like that, but there are also things pulling people in the opposite direction. There's a dependency on the landowner and a dependency on the county officials. How did people react to the message that you're bringing?

JB: The honest truth, people react just like other animals react, any animal. If there's some food right here, the animal comes and gets it. If there's not food, they go where the food is. What I'm saying here is that people want to improve themselves, and they want to do it, I think, as independently as they possibly can, okay? But cooperative development as we conceived initially, does not work. Let me put it like this, it has not worked for us, okay? I think we were very successful in a cooperative "Feed a Pig" program, which is the first cooperative we had, but we were successful when the price of pigs was up. When the price of pigs fell down and the farmers started losing money, he pulled out of the cooperative. I think we designed a farm program that would have worked anywhere. We designed, and got a temporary commitment from the government to fund the Family Farm Cooperative, that I believe in my heart, if the government had followed through on its commitment to fund it, it would have worked. It could work any place.

RK: This is the Marvin?

JB: This is the Marvin community that I talked about. I believe in that concept, but I do know--I don't say I know because you never know anything--but I feel so strongly that if the government made a commitment, would have followed through on the commitment it made for the Family Farm Cooperative concept that we had, it would have worked perfectly. The problem with the way the government works is many fold. But one is, first of all, if you get a grant from the government to do something it's generally for one year, not more than two years. That's the biggest problem. No way in God's world, you can undo in two years or ten years or twenty years or fifty years what it took 400 or 1,000 years to develop. [Laughter] It doesn't even make sense. And our government is not geared to deal with long range problems. Our political process does not work like that. This administration makes a commitment, and four years it may not be there. At best, four years is about all you can count on, and hell, it take two years to get anything started. Our political system is not geared to dealing with the economic problems. It's just not. It could be perhaps, but that utopia never comes. And the initial resources needed is not in the community, because the resource that it takes, in my judgment, to really work is time. And people don't have time to stay hungry. They're going to try something else, whether it be using drugs or whatever. You can't go hungry forever. People's patience is short. So regardless as to what you think about what ought to be or what ought not to be, the real, hard, cold fact is that if you don't come up with something that works fast, people don't wait for you. You can't wait four or five years, or ten or twelve years, and that's what happened to most groups. Most community development corporations that were formed back in the '60s, mid-'60s and early '70s,
were funded, heavily in some cases. ( ) got millions of dollars in
grant funds for one year periods to some, what I call, ( ), but we
never were able to get the money that we needed to go out and buy land
for farmers, and show them how to farm it, and show them how to set up a
"Feed a Pig" cooperative or intensive farm program. Never got that kind
of money. We spent a lot of time trying to get that kind of money. But
we never got it. We were thinking that you could develop people to the
point that it would get to the point where they wouldn't need the outside
help. I think maybe if we had started differently, started small, stated
with a few farmers who had foresight, and worked up to where we thought
we started out [laughter], we probably would have been successful. But
we got a big grant to do a plush idea quickly, and that was a mistake.
If I had to really look back over it again, I'm not sure I would take
that approach at all.

RK: Can you explain the concept, I know that you've written about
it or it's been written about before, but we could just explain the
concept of this family cooperative.

JB: Okay. What we designed, after looking at various kind of farm
cooperaives across the world, particularly in developing countries,
Africa, ( ) in Israel, several of us went there and saw that. We
concluded that the ( ) was closer to the kind of family farm
structure that we thought could be developed in this country. It'll take
too long to talk through the whole process, but I can give you a few
highlights. One is, we know you can't operate in a vacuum. When I use
that term, people in America believe in and practice, aspire for, private
ownership of property. Every man looks forward, I mean, there's a common
saying, "Every man wants to own his own. . . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B
JB: The idea, in summary, now understand that this concept is so broad that there's no way to summarize it in a few words and give you a full picture of what we're talking about, but basically what we designed for family farm cooperative was a community of farmers with each farmer owning his own house, each farmer owning his own land that was deeded to him. It's not owned in cooperation with someone else. But they jointly own a production system. They have a systematic control over the production, so that they're producing what can be marketed. So this is what ties you to the community. The market system, what this community, what this family farm cooperative is able to do in terms of improving your economic condition. So that if you get out of the system, you lose that economic tie. With that in mind, we had developed a farm set-up where we were to buy a large tract of land. In fact, we actually purchased 3,195 acres of land in the Marvin community to be subdivided into 25 to 40 acres parcels. Now, another brief piece of that. Why 25 acres? Why 40 acres? If you say 40 acres, you know from the very beginning that you're not talking about commercial mechanized farming. You're not talking about the production of cotton or peanuts. You're not talking about the production of soybeans. You're not talking about the production of cattle and so forth. You're talking about the production of intensive crops, crops that you can get a large yield per acre, vegetables, fruits, animals under confinement, "Feed a Pig," quail. You know, that kind of thing. But you're talking about a farming program that gives you a large yield per acre of land, compared to typical commercialized farming programs. So that our idea was to buy this parcel of land, subdivide it into smaller parcels. Select a group of farmers who were interested, take them through a training period by putting them in temporary homes, trailers or something, but introducing them into this community. Each one owning his own land and his own house. Teach them cooperative farming concepts, not only concepts, but actual, how do you produce the intensive crop? How do you produce vegetables, fruits, livestock to give you a large yield per acre? And evaluate these farmers as they go through at least a two year training process. And those who work then are able to go borrow money from the Farmer's Home Administration, build their interest up for the house, get a farm operation loan, just like anybody else, at Farmer's Home. Farm their land, pay off their note, and live in the community. Pay their bills, make a living on it. The idea being that you can conceivably produce fruits, vegetables, and livestock that are marketable. And you're flexible. You move with the market. If the cucumbers are going to sell this spring, you've got a good market, that's what you grow. But that control mechanism, that farm nucleus, that staff that you hire, is studying the market, sufficiently in advance, so that each farmer knows that this year we're going to produce so many bushels of sweet potatoes and so many bushels of whatever. You have some permanent crops like pecans or pears or apples or fruits, grapes. So you're going to have five acres of that. If the market is down, of course, you just suffer the down period. But your above crops, your vegetables, your annuals that you grow once a year, twice a year, some you can get three crops a year off of. This is the kind of production you're going to be doing. So that when you get a vertically integrated, intensive farming program, it means you have a variety of crops and livestock and animals that guarantees your income, if your control system is working like it's
supposed to. This is what we had designed. We had gotten four agencies of the government to agree to fund three communities. One in Alabama, one in Florida, and one in Louisiana. We went so far as to buy the land. We, when I say we, the Ford Foundation, the Southern Cooperative Development Fund, and other groups, spent several millions just planning for this whole process. But once it got to the point where we thought it was ready to go, it just so happened that in the Marvin community where the ( ) farm was to have been located, it was right in the middle of a big cotton production section of Alabama. And once those farmers, almost all white, discovered that we were black, and we were talking about selling to blacks in that community, they hit the fan. And the whole idea just turned. We were getting excellent support until we were really getting ready to move in.

RK: How did they prevent you from doing it?

JB: Well, what happened, they started complaining to their Congressmen and Senators, who had supported us initially. And of course, when that started happening, these farmers [laughter] had much more clout with the Congressmen than we do, because they're the wealthy farmers. But once you start, I don't know need to tell you this, once something becomes a political hot potato then the administration just kind of backed off. It didn't do anything. So we're sitting here with 3,195 acres of land that we can't even raise the interest on, not to think about paying the principle. The Ford Foundation, the Economic Development Administration came in. Let's see, OEO, the Community Services Administration made the initial down payment on the land, and held the land. Then the Economic Development Administration was supposed to provide infrastructure facilities, the training facility, some central buildings and so forth, and assist with the development of central water, gas, sewerage, and stuff like that. But the community was designed in such a way that the houses would be in close enough proximity to take advantage of central utilities. Then the farm would be sprawled out around that, and very neatly developed. But once we started getting our position, as most political hot potatoes do, the government lost interest, and we ended up having to sell the land for $100 an acre less than we paid for it.

RK: You said earlier that if you had to do over again, you'd probably start smaller. It was maybe too grand a concept. Do you still think it's a viable?

JB: Oh, I think the concept is viable. God knows I do. In fact, look, people have to eat. There's no doubt about that. And food is being consumed all over the place. We were going to sell forty families on forty acres of ( ). That wouldn't be enough food to service the eastern United States. We probably could service three or four states like that. But the food is still coming from somewhere, other places in this country, offshore, Mexico, and other foreign countries. So the concept, in my judgment, is extremely viable. There's no doubt about that. But I do not think, now, with the experience I have right now, I just do not think it's practical to expect, even though I think it would save everybody, but I don't think it's practical to expect to get the long term support needed to develop this kind of concept, based on the structure of our current political system. To develop that kind of concept, I don't think it was realistic that we could expect to do it in the short period of time we were talking about. It takes longer than that to train people, to orient them, to develop them into a systematic
way of doing something. You know, it's almost like changing the system. These people were used to raising cotton and corn and peanuts all their lives. So you don't pick people up and change them fast. I mean, I think that's the one thing that those people who have been anywhere close to successful in community development, have been people you just realized—you have to learn the hard way, some of us—but that people just don't change fast. I mean, being what we are, being the kind of social organisms we are, we just don't change fast. And there are no programs that I know of, even the foundations, the Ford Foundation was extremely helpful to us and provided unlimited funds for almost ten years. That's a long period of time for anybody to fund anything in this country. But it's nothing compared to the length of time it took people to develop their current attitudes and their current thought patterns, and this is what you're dealing with. Theoretically, economic development is easy. You can take several hundred people, pool up ten dollars each, and you've got enough money to start almost anything you want to, but to deal with that attitude, you know, that mind-set, what it takes to get people to do that is what's hard to deal with. Poverty is not a condition of money. It's the condition of your mind. It's a thought problem that you've got to deal with, and it just doesn't happen fast. If we made mistakes, it has been in my judgment because we've acted as though we thought you could do with human beings what you could do with animals. You can control organisms that don't have that capacity to retain memories and to carry over from one generation to the other, and animals are organisms that don't have attitudinal problems. You can deal with that. But with organisms that can think, that can remember that I've stepped on this stove before and it burned. Hogs can't do that. They'll stick their head right in the crack right next to where they had it, and get hung, and squeal like hell. Soon as you turn them loose, they'll stick their head in another crack just like that one. People don't work like that. We think. We don't make the same mistake twice. We've been stung one time [laughter], we don't want to get stung any more. So that's what you're doing. You're dealing with attitudes, and attitudes don't change fast. I don't have the answer to that, but I can tell you what doesn't work. And I know fly-by-night projects just don't work.

RK: This flexible marketing, flexible crops, that's an interesting idea. That you're sensitive to the market about what you need to plant, and you really plan so that, one, that helps you with the kind of vagaries of agriculture where you never know what your crop's going to sell for until you sell it. To some extent, you kind of deal with that, but you're also doing all these different crops. You've got fruit. You've got animals and stuff. If one thing fails or one of the prices fall, you don't fail.

JB: That's right. That's the point.

RK: I think there's ( ), certainly in manufacturing it's the new rage, flexible manufacturing, where you can get in and out of a market for different kinds of things. The concept that you had, a lot of people are thinking, even in terms of the South, in terms of small scale manufacturing and small businesses, using that very same idea to try to create economic growth in regions of the South.

JB: But you see, it's not as speculative as it may have come through. You have a marketing arm of your cooperative, and what you're doing if your marketing arm is working like it should, you're hedging.
In other words, you have sold your produce before you plant it. That's one of the most important parts of the process, that you've got a market for it. For an example, one of the easiest things in the world to do is flood the market, with watermelons, for example. When they first come in from Florida, everybody wants watermelons. But then when the watermelons from Alabama come in, everybody is producing and the market is flooded and the price goes down. But if you've got a contract with a buyer to buy so many pounds of watermelon, and it's a signed and sealed contract, and you produce these watermelons knowing that they're going to be paid for. And the same thing is true with sweet potatoes and everything else. So that you're going to know before you plant what's been sold. You've planted what's been sold, and that's a lot of difference between trying to sell what you've grown. I think we had a system developed that would have worked. I don't know why it couldn't have worked. I don't know of any reason it couldn't have worked, except that the time factor would have, I'm sure, would have taken much longer than we had projected.

RK: Did you know Booker Watley?

JB: Oh, quite well. In fact, Dr. Watley played a very important role in our farm mix. One of the, I think, justifiable criticisms that the people who opposed our concept had. Most of their opposition was just simply because we were black. I really know that to be the case. But there was one, what I think was justifiable criticism, and that is, we had not proven that this concept could work. Once we went through that process and we lost it, ( ) applied to the community service for a grant to do a demonstration farm. And we took a forty acre tract of land that we owned and developed an intensive farm program, just for the purpose of seeing if you could actually physically produce the crops that we were talking about. We were very successful at that. In fact, we were probably in a sense more than 150% successful, because what we did, we were able to produce one acre of water chestnuts. We actually were successful in producing and harvesting a part of it, but we actually produced an acre of water chestnuts. And as far as I know, with an exception of a group over in Georgia who came over and helped us. They helped us avoid some of the mistakes they paid. We got unlimited cooperation, I mean, from a lot of places. But water chestnuts were selling at $2.25 a pound at the time, and we were successful in doing 40,000 pounds on that one acre. We dug out a small section and harvested. The problem, we never designed a way to mechanically harvest them, and we didn't design a way to mechanically peel them, which is where the real labor comes in. The ladies sit there and peel those things. It's nice. But I think if we'd had, given a couple of years, with all the technology we have, and all the peeling and harvesting equipment that we've developed for other crops, there's no reason we couldn't have done that. In fact, we developed a harvester for those chestnuts that all we needed to do was put a vibrator on it, and it would have worked. The second year they came up voluntarily. But that one crop alone would have exceeded our goal. Our goal was to get $3,000 per acre of land. We put in one acre of water chestnuts at 40,000, even a dollar a pound, that was $40,000 right there on one acre. So you could lose on a number of other acres and make up on that one crop. Now, if you had gotten successful in doing water chestnuts, then the market would have been flooded and price would have come down. So we would have had to then switch to kiwi fruits or something else. But the idea we had of
being flexible gave us the opportunity to just hit the market where it was the strongest.

RK: Dr. Watley, his concept of intensive gardening, I've read a fairly good bit about, trying to improve my own garden. I mean, that's the way to use the land.

JB: When you have small land holdings, there's no way you can compete with commercial farming, producing soybeans, corn, cotton. There's no way. It's out of the question. But here, you're talking about getting, oh, I'd say, if you get 40 bushels per acre of soybeans, you're doing good, especially in this section of the country. I'm not sure what they sell for a bushel, but they don't touch, there's no comparison between what you get out of an acre of soybeans or cotton or cattle, and what you would get out of an acre of beans or tomatoes or greens or hogs under confinement, quail. We had a heck of a market for quail. Now, you can produce a million quail in a little area the size of this room, in a little coop the size of this room. So there's just no limit to what you can do on an intensive farm program. Squabs, quail, hogs, catfish, or whatever other kind of fish, or whatever else sells. You've got the resources right at hand.

RK: What other areas did you go into in terms of trying different tactics for economic development in this area? With not being able to do that, not being to actually put that in place, what direction did your thinking go? I know you've done a lot of other things.

JB: (       ), along with many other cities, (     ) done a lot in housing, basically because of a need for housing, and because of the extent to which HUD has come up with various programs in housing. We provided jobs in housing opportunities, probably more than anything else. Because of the extent to which we would have had to get subsidies in farming, we finally just had to bail out of trying to do anything in agriculture. At one point, we owned about 600 acres of land out in what we called our ag coopt site. But we've sold, we don't have any of that any more. We just have never gotten the support for agriculture that we thought we should have gotten. I can see a part of the reason. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has always operated at every county level. They had the Extension Service, the Farmer's Home Administration. That, incidentally, was a part of the opposition that we got, because our extensionists are funded to provide education, and they feel that you're treading on their territory when you come in with farm programs, you know. So that was a part of the opposition as well. But we've done housing, credit and finance, you know, where we have a revolving loan fund to provide for minority business development, which has been pretty good. And of course, we organized and developed a community development credit union where the common bond was membership in (       ). We were successful. Our credit union merged with an existing credit union, but one of the conditions of merger would be that they would service the same field of membership as (       ). So that has been, in terms of service to our members, a source of credit that they normally would not have gotten elsewhere. We've done exceptionally well in that. But the single family housing, housing renovation, and multi-family housing for elderly and handicapped have been one area that we have been more successful, in terms of generating jobs and services as well as income to (      ). Because we make money out of construction as well.

RK: What about health care? I know that was one of the early things that (       ) was involved in.
JB: We have never personally, you know, ( ) itself has not gotten too much involved in health care facilities. Some community development corporations have. We had worked with the THEA, Tucagara Health Education Agency, and the consortium, we're members of that. We have a small preventive health clinic for our senior citizens over in one of our senior citizens projects. But we haven't gotten personally involved in a lot of health related. I think partially because we're in an area where, until recently, there was a hospital run by ( ), and there have been a number of other health, the V.A. Hospital here, and other health related activities that we have not personally gotten involved in. But the need for health care is definitely here though.

RK: Very real. One of the things I was interested in was your reaction. I have a picture of you with the former governor.

JB: [Laughter]

RK: This was the late '70s, I guess, and even maybe more so in the '80s when there was this recognition of black political power in Alabama.

JB: Oh, definitely.

RK: And the formal ways of thinking and everything started to change a little bit. How did you feel about sharing the stage with Governor Wallace?

JB: You know, I wish you wouldn't have asked me that, because I have to answer you truthfully. My image of Governor Wallace stemmed from my involvement in civil rights activities. And I see this man, this vibrant, feisty guy, really, I've always seen him as a good politician. Governor Wallace knew what to do to get votes. You just have to give him credit for that. He knew the kind of rhetoric that white folk, and particularly poor white folk in the southeast, loved to hear. And he used that. Fact, Governor Wallace, a lot of people don't know, was a liberal judge down in Barber County before he ran for governor. The first time he ran for governor against Patterson over in Phoenix City, Patterson beat him pretty bad. And Governor Wallace, I understand, I didn't hear this myself, said, "Nobody will ever out-nigger him again," and nobody did until he got shot. So I never had a lack of respect for the man, to be honest with you. After I got involved with ( ), I met with the governor a number of time and listened to his views, when he's not running. And of course, we invited him to participate in the ground breaking for ( ), which is the picture you have now. It was kind of like at the insistence of my board, because they had to let me recognize that this is our governor, whether I like it or not [laughter]. But I liked it. I enjoyed talking to him. We talked privately a couple of times, and he's a very principled person. I have to be honest, at one point in my life, I would have had very little respect for him. But over time, I learned to respect him. I really did. He's a smart man. He's a smart politician. You have to give him credit for that. He got votes, and no telling what would have happened if he hadn't got shot. He got votes. He was saying what the people who voted wanted to hear, which was the typical, average, white American.

RK: I have a couple of general questions, assessments, looking back over a long period of time, and another, looking forward. One of the things that this project is dealing with is trying to understand and assess the importance of leadership and vision in trying to come to grips with some of these various issues. This is kind of a vague question, but I wondered what you think about the importance of that and what we need to communicate to younger people who will be taking the
kinds of positions and are going to have to be the next generation that
tries to deal with a lot of the issues. What kind of lessons, in you
were addressing a graduating class today--that's actually a nice way of
thinking about it--you were giving a commencement address at a high
school in a rural area in the South, what would you tell young people,
black and white?

JB: I think my message would probably be basically the same as it
was twenty-five years ago, really. I would hope it would take on more
meaning now, but it would be basically that people have to live together,
whether they want to recognize it or not. There's no way progress can be
made in any community unless there is harmony and peace and the people
are recognizing each other as human beings and that we're working toward
common goals. You know, if we had to deal specifically with talking
about what you can do in the particular area that I'm involved in, it
would probably be one kind of advice. But I think that flexibility in
the American society today is greater than ever before. Job
opportunities, I would say probably at least 35, and I have no statistics
on this at all, but I suspect that 35 to 40% of the jobs that are held by
youngsters now, going into the job market, didn't exist 25 or 30 years
ago. You understand what I'm saying. And I expect that those changes
are going to continue to come. So I think there has to be flexibility in
human relationships. There has to be flexibility in terms of preparing
for job opportunities. Flexibility in terms of political changes that
have to take place. So I guess the best way to answer that question is
to try to let people understand that you're going into a flexible job
market. Relationships are flexible, different. But the bottom line is
you've got to work with people. You've got to deal with people. We have
to support each other. Racism has no more place in our society today
than it had 25 or 30 or 100 years ago. Man's inhumanity to man has
always been an issue, throughout the history of mankind, and there are
issues now that we have to deal with. And technically, I think that the
world community is probably closer together today than it's ever been at
any time in history. There are a lot of problems, a lot of problems,
that have to be overcome. But I think that young people today, in terms
of world unification, in terms of world cooperation, are facing a much
better world than we ever faced before. While some people like to paint
this bleak picture that the world is almost ready to come to an end, I
think that's a ( ) thing. I think the opportunities are unlimited now
for everything, for political cooperation, for economic cooperation,
economic development. The kind of economic development that we never
dreamed of before is much closer than, I think, we realize.

RK: What about for an organization like ( ), where's it's
future? What kind of particular issues? You're a very practical person.
What kind of practical issues over the next ten years or so do you think
this organization will be dealing with?

JB: I think that this organization, like all organizations, has to
deal with our present day economy. We've got to deal with what's
practical, what can happen. And I don't think I would want to even try
to spend time garnering government support to do cooperatives. I think
that it's very likely that if you were successful in providing job
opportunities for people in any area, that within itself gives them the
resources that they need to do some of the things that they want to
experiment on. And I think that cooperative development in rural
communities is very likely, very highly possible to me. You may not be
producing farm products, but you certainly can have--instead of calling it a cooperative, for example, you're talking about, what do you call it when people own their own businesses? Group ownership of businesses, ESSOPS, employee options. (    ) can easily divert, and I suspect there will be, they're already been talking about developing industries or employment resources that are owned by the people themselves. And I suspect that if we're going to be around, we're going to be moving in directions where success in possible. So we certainly want to be trying to do some of the things that we've done in the past. There seems to be opportunities in housing. People are always going to have to live someplace. I still think there are unlimited opportunities in food production, and it can come. But I think it's going to come when people do it themselves. I don't think it's going to come through governmental subsidies. I've give you a good example. We started out talking about and conceptualizing, to Heaven and back, on self-development through self-help. But at the same time, we were running all over this country trying to find a grant dollar wherever we could, because that was the thing to do at the time. So some concepts have to change, too. I suspect that if we had just simply stayed in one place, or stuck to our concept of self-development through self-help, and started small, as I indicated earlier, work with a few people and grown from that. Well, we tried to start too big with these big grant dollars. Who knows? We may have had one or two small successes that we could build on. But I'm not sure I could have afforded my time on a voluntary basis without going out somewhere trying to make a living for my family. But what I'm saying, in so many words, is that we need to still explore ways, because the concepts are basically good, and they have worked in other places. They have worked in other places. How we went about doing it, how we did what we tried to do may have been the reason for us not being any more successful than we were. And fortunately, a few of us are still around to hopefully profit from the mistakes we made earlier. But we have not been without mistakes. I would be the first to admit that. If I could go back, start all over again, I'd do a out of things different.

RK: What role is there for foundations? I know the Ford Foundation was very helpful with (    ) at various times. Is there a different role for foundations for the non-profits?

JB: No. I think foundations, governmental agencies, are run by people, and people do what they feel is best at any point in time. If it hadn't been for the Ford Foundation, for example, we wouldn't be here today. So we wouldn't be around to say what may have happened or what might happen. If I had to suggest that foundations do something different from what they have done in the past, I think I would probably suggest that they focus, at least to some degree, on a more developmental type approach. That is, fund activities that can provide training, and I guess I need to say, orientation. That is to help people to understand how things are done. In spite of the fact that people involved in community development probably read books on top of books and traveled all over the place trying to learn how to do what it was they wanted to do. I think there are a lot of ways that first training and orientation to workshops. . . . There needs to be some place that someone can go and get that specific detail, other than that workshop needed in order to develop a structure or a system of economic development or community organization. Resources where we can get help in terms of organizing and doing this whole concept of self-development through self-help. It's
easy to talk about that, but to conceptualize a process that works, takes
time and energy. And I don't have the answer to that, but I do think
that if I look back over the time I've spent, the 25 years that I've
spent here at (     ), I can think of a number of areas where I could
have used some outside assistance without having to go dig it up myself.
So I think foundations can do that. And I think foundations, like
everybody else, ought to always look at proposed activities that they
think will work, that somebody else thinks will work and submits to them,
and provide funding for it. I think there's one problem and that is in
the southeast, in particular, you know, I kind of view the southeast in a
sense as you might view an undeveloped country, especially from a
foundation viewpoint. You go in these northern areas where most of the
foundations are located, large cities, and of course, their interest,
generally, are in their own environment first. And there just aren't
many resources in the southeast, an area where I think potentials are
unlimited, especially for minorities. Because right now, minorities
don't like the city. They want to move back. I think a lot of emphasis,
just on the part of the government and foundations now, would be much
better spent. It might be because I'm in the southeast. But I think
that the southeast has unlimited potential for development, and I think
that if foundations and the government and church groups and interested
person focused in this area, especially in rural southeastern
communities. I would say a large percentage of the houses we have sold
over the last several years in particular, have been people moving from
the north, coming back. And I think that concept ought to be explored.
At least, foundations and governmental agencies ought to begin focusing
on, if nothing more than conferences and communicating with each other,
focus on the possibility of developing certain under populated areas in
the southeast and western part of the country, where people are sparsely
populated, but where the land--like in the southeast, for example, the
land is very productive. Plenty of rainfall and so forth. So the
potential for development is unlimited in my judgement. And from where I
sit right now, it looks like they're shying away from small communities
in certain parts of the country, and trying to solve problems in large
urban areas. If you solve those problems in urban areas, what's going to
keep people in rural areas from moving where the resources are better,
okay? It looks to me like as least as much attention should be given to
undeveloped sections of our country, so as to possibly pull back people
who have migrated to urban areas in the past, and a residue of what's
happening to the mass movement out of the South after World War II. You
just think about it, that's where your real, urban inner-city problems
are. To me, this would be a good time to try to reverse some of that, to
reverse that trend. The South is not the South they left 25 or 30 or 40
years ago, and people know that. So I think foundations should certainly
give some thought to that. Let's put it that way.

RK: The solution to these urban areas is maybe not in the cities
themselves, but in providing opportunities for people to go someplace
else.

JB: Of course. Or providing opportunities for them to survive
where they are. If you can survive where you are--that is, I don't want
to use the term survive, because when you're breathing (     ) survive--
but if you can enjoy a reasonable comfortable level of living, wherever
you are, without the fear of violence, etc., you have no need to move.
But if you're in a community where you're constantly afraid, for whatever
the reason, you want to get out of that community. And the problem is people don't have no alternative. They don't have nowhere to go. They severed all their ties with the South. They don't have nobody back down home that they can go back to. They don't have nowhere else in the city to go. So they're tied to, because of economics, many, many low income inner-city people are tied to that ghetto. You can talk about them all you want to, but what the hell can you do? Where else can you go? Where is there to go? So you got to live. People are going to eat. They've got to eat. If they have to steal, they steal. If they have to rob, they rob. They're going to eat. So you can't just wipe things off on the grounds that these people are bad folk, or they should do better. They should go get a job. You can't get a job if there's no job to get, if you have no marketable skills and nobody providing any. So to me, a wise thing to do, at least, would be to look at, don't completely turn away from, undeveloped areas of this country.

RK: You see a real possibility for the rural South to be a place where growth and development. . . .

JB: It is a place where growth and development is taking place. A lot of southern cities are growing. A lot of people are coming back to the South, but everywhere can't be in Atlanta, for an example, or Huntsville, or Miami, because you've got the same urban problems. Urban problems are urban problems wherever they exist. But there are so many moderate sized towns and rural communities, states that are predominantly rural or have a large rural area that can be developed. Wide open for development. Development, for example, in suburbs, is equivalent to developing a community, say, 20 miles from Montgomery down in the heart of Lyons County. That's 20 miles from Montgomery. And areas like Macon County, Alabama, and they're just all over this country. Where people are there already, and a lot of people in urban areas have migrated from these rural communities to urban areas. It's easy for them to move back home, and they're doing that.

RK: Is there still opposition to that kind of development? If you tried something like the Marvin community now?

JB: No, I don't think you would get opposition for it at all. You wouldn't get opposition certainly from the people there anymore. I don't think you would. I think the likelihood of getting interest on the part of someone to do it is not too great right now. And if I were going to personally be involved in it or advise someone, I would have to say that unless you're committed to the long haul, don't start it. It's much worst to start something and stop it, and I don't think it can be done over a short period of time. But I think if foundations or governmental agencies wanted to make a long term commitment to development, you know. We have the capacity. This country has the capacity to do anything it wants to. I think Huntsville, Alabama is a dern good example where you just simply made an urban area out of a rural town. Because, for whatever the reason, development came there. And I'm saying you could spread people out over this country in any direction you want to if the commitment is there. And to me, that's much better than stacking everybody up in one or two large cities. Real estate would come down. You can imagine how much real estate would fall in Los Angeles if people started moving out, going somewhere else. And I think the real estate is probably higher than anywhere in this world. A house that you'd pay $50,000 for here, you're paying $200,000 or $300,000 in some sections of
the country. So they're all kinds of good reasons, in my judgement, to reserve the development.
END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A
RK: You’ve talked about worker owned businesses. Has ( ) started thinking very concretely about that? It is a potential strategy, I think, that has a lot of attractiveness for people.

JB: We have talked. I'm in constant meetings with people from the Southern Cooperative Development Fund and other groups like us across the country. We've seen a few examples like the National Cooperative Bank, where employee-stock ownership plans have worked pretty good. So we've talked about it, of course. I have not had any first hand experience. Well, that's not quite true. I have worked with one or two groups that tried to own--in fact, I don't know of any area that I've worked with personally that's been successful in stock ownership plans. But I know of groups that have done it. I've heard of a few areas where it's been reasonably successful. But I think the possibilities are pretty great.

RK: So you see both a ( ) and real prospects for continuing the types of efforts that you have been doing for these 25 years. That an organization like ( ) still has a real . . . .

JB: Oh, by all means. We are a typical community development corporation, and no organization of any kind is any stronger than its leadership. So if leadership is flexible, taking advantage of opportunities, making changes with the times, when it's time to change, which is what we all hope we have, but we don't. Nobody ever gets it all. But there is no doubt that community development corporations are very much in need. There will always be a need for them. What we do has to change with the times.

RK: This kind of attraction and commitment and passion for the land, for the South, that you had as a child, seems to have stayed with you in a way that has had a great deal of influence on the kinds of issues that you've dealt with, your commitment, and in some sense your passion for these issues. Is that a fair statement?

JB: Passion? I don't think it's an unfair statement. Let's put it like that. I think that I would ( ) for the rest of my life be attracted to space. I like open space. I like the countryside, but I like to see things development. I like to take a raw piece of land and develop it into something, and know I had something to do with it. And being in a small town, rural community like this provides opportunities for that kind of development. We're also located in an area of need. So put that together, I feel pretty much at home, [laughter] pretty comfortable.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW