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RONALD BAYOR: Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

ISABELLA HOLMES: Let me tell you, [whether or not?] this thing's on. This is when I was off last week. So this has been (inaudible) --

BAYOR: So I heard you were on vacation this week.

HOLMES: Yeah, it's been a hectic week for me. But I [can't?] catching up.

BAYOR: OK, let me first ask the positions that you've held. Now, I know you were the first black coordinator.

HOLMES: Yeah, you're talking at the state department? Because I was a teacher in Atlanta city before I came to the state [department?].

BAYOR: And in the state, you were the --

HOLMES: I was the -- I came into the state as a consultant for the visually impaired and all the (inaudible) handicapped or multi-handicapped, as we called it back in those days. And I held that position for a year and then I was a main coordinator of the [01:00] physical handicaps unit, which has speech impaired, speech and language impaired, hearing

impaired, or (inaudible) handicapped, physically -- (inaudible) handicapped [or the health impaired?], and we had -- still had hospitals (inaudible) I had the visually impaired, which --

BAYOR: And you were the first black coordinator that was brought into the system?

HOLMES: Yes.

BAYOR: What year?

HOLMES: Even though -- 1971. Because --

BAYOR: (inaudible).

HOLMES: And well, what happened, there were some two consultants within the state department for a long, long time who [assured that?] --

BAYOR: Coordinators?

HOLMES: Coordinators. Because I had just -- I'd only been here a year. And they were made coordinators after I was, and I think it was the kind of a [bonus position for them?], as it [02:00] should have been, because they had been long-time employees in the state department. And I --

BAYOR: I want to go back to the 1954 period and early integration. One of the things that I've heard is that after the '54 ruling, that new black schools were built to prevent the integration of white schools.

HOLMES: Yeah. All over the state. Not as much in Atlanta -- not as much in Atlanta as it was in other places in the state.

BAYOR: OK, but Atlanta less so. What I had heard from people is that as blacks would move towards a white neighborhood and get near white school, a black school was built real fast to block that integration.

HOLMES: Because you're talking about statewide?

BAYOR: No. Well, I'm mentioning Atlanta, yeah. I guess you were teaching here, so you I guess you would --

HOLMES: [03:00] Yeah, I was teaching here. But the schools basically were already there. Because we were already distinct, separate, because of the fact of the residential -- where you lived in a residential area. And so that ended as all black, so, schools were all black.

BAYOR: And no flurry of activity to improve the schools?

HOLMES: No, not to improve the schools. Because I --

BAYOR: That was before?

HOLMES: No. No. Not for a long time. Because when I was -- I can remember coming in through the Atlanta school system, you know, and teaching in elementary school. But the improvement was [saving some?] (inaudible) that, you know, and we knew they were -- where they came from. Because the school [was spent?] in the books.

BAYOR: The hand-me-downs.

HOLMES: So right. It was a long time. And then I worked for 10 years as a regular teacher. Then I went into a specialty. I started [04:00] teaching the visually impaired. And that was where, you know, you could really pick up some differences in what was given to us and what was given to white teachers.

BAYOR: And this is when? Before...?

HOLMES: This was --

BAYOR: Early ’50s?

HOLMES: Yeah, this was after -- no, no. No --

BAYOR: Or after?

HOLMES: -- I’m talking about ’60s.

BAYOR: So you’re still getting secondhand materials?

HOLMES: Right, right. Yes.

BAYOR: Do you think there was any effort at all to try, on the part of the Board of Education to try and keep whites in schools in transitional neighborhoods?

HOLMES: I don’t think so. I mean, I felt -- I was just telling you how I felt personally. Because it seemed to me if they really, truly wanted to integrate schools, they would’ve started them with kindergarten to first grade. And where did they start?

BAYOR: Fourth grade.

HOLMES: Fourth grade. That was what drove, I think, people away. Because if you had started down with the kindergarten, first [05:00] grade -- and of course, Atlanta [has always had?] kindergarten -- the -- and they're the only place -- and there have been some other places in the state, but they were the first -- one of -- well, they had kindergartens when I came here. Because my children were past kindergarten age, but they would have had kindergarten if they had, you know, needed it. But they started, and I know that was one of the things that I used to -- one of my gripes always was at where they started. And then I felt, as they -- as a black woman, it was intentionally done that way. That it was going to cause problems, and it would slow down the integration process.

BAYOR: What problems do you think [it influenced?]? Why --

HOLMES: Because you -- if you're starting with teenagers -- yeah, and I had had five teenagers, so I know they have problems anyway. (laughter) You know, just problems. And to suddenly foist a [06:00] group or put a group with another group that has such different patterns of everything -- living, learning -- that you're going to have problems. And they did. They had problems.

BAYOR: Plus it was one or two grade a year.

HOLMES: Yes, yes. Yes. Which was better than doing it several grades a year. I feel that was better.

BAYOR: So if they felt any real commitment, it would have been kindergarten up, right --

HOLMES: Right, yes. Right.

BAYOR: -- to twelfth grade?]. How about the freedom of choice part? How well did that work?

HOLMES: It worked. But in the beginning, it did not work as well as, I think, it should have. Even though they handpicked -- [I?] understand, I mean, the handpicked some of the kids that went into the transitional or went to other schools out of their neighborhood. But they found it very difficult, and [07:00] there again is what I'm talking about. Here are youngsters who've grown up through, you know, elementary school into -- because there were very few -- we didn't have middle schools then -- and up into high school with students that they could associate with, that they understood, and they could study together, and do all kinds of things. And then you put a few of them -- and there were just a few of them. And a number of them I knew from the high school where my students went, that went to, you know, other schools. My children did not because my husband had said enough was enough. You know, my -- they had been involved -- my husband had been involved in the

lawsuit with the golf courses. And one of -- that was at the time that [Hamp?] was going to University of Georgia. So he refused for any of my children to go. But I knew [08:00] the children that went from my high school. They were very, very [uncomfortable?].

BAYOR: So they were handpicked. And how about the Board of Education's efforts to either sabotage or implement this? Did they make it easy for them to transfer?

HOLMES: I don't feel that they did, but then, that's a biased opinion.

BAYOR: Well, my feeling, too, is that there was no real commitment.

HOLMES: I never felt there was a real commitment.

BAYOR: Sounds like [out of?] anywhere they could [scroll?] down (inaudible).

HOLMES: Yeah. Yes. That's what I felt. And it wasn't until my grandchildren came along that I feel that they really made a conscious effort. And then that was the parents, as well as -- not as much as the Board, maybe, as it was the parents who said, "This is going to work." And they made -- had a real commitment to it.

BAYOR: How about in terms of school buses? Let's say, here's a black child who wants to go into a predominantly white school, would he have transportation to the white school?

HOLMES: Yes, that was not a problem, [09:00] the transportation, so far as I know. Because I never had any of it. Because I never had -- as I said, it was only when my grandchildren came along did I know about the bus and the situation.

BAYOR: How about the other side of the desk? How was faculty integration?

HOLMES: That was, I think, a problem, too. Because again, they did handpick for those black kids to be going into white schools. I don't know whether they did that with the white kids that came to the black schools. I know a lot of them didn't want to come and a number of them didn't come. And some of them who came stayed briefly, and... But I don't think we had as much problem with the black teachers that went into the school. And I don't know what happened, as to whether or not that caused more parents to withdraw their students and send them to private schools. [10:00] They even moved their residence to suburban areas. Because as I said, right along that, I was not involved. I worked in a high school where we had very limited -- as far as I know, maybe four or five white teachers who stayed.

BAYOR: Which high school?

HOLMES: Turner High School. It's now a middle school, but it was a high school at that time. And that was -- at that

point, I was an [intern?] teacher and that was my base school. And it was also the school where my children had gone through, all of my children.

BAYOR: Did you get any sense at all -- and I've heard this from other people, too -- that they took the best black teachers to put into the white schools?

HOLMES: Right. And they did not do the opposite.

BAYOR: Right, right.

HOLMES: There were, well, some who -- a few -- that I think may have been, you know, pretty good teachers. And some of them volunteered. And then there were a few teachers -- [11:00] and I know we had two of them at Turner -- who were -- had -- they were to go back to the Peace Corps and they had some coups in places that they were to go. So they assigned them to all the high schools, and we had two or three of them in Atlanta. I mean, in the schools -- in Turner High School. And as a matter of fact, after about a year -- one of them lived with me for about three or four years, because he had problems with staying over in what is -- in an area where they, back in those days, were smoking pot, and he was concerned about it. And just over the conversation, he had said to me that he was really concerned. And I invited him out for [Thanksgiving?] dinner one day. I don't know how it happened, but later on

he stayed with me in Atlanta until my son came back from the Army. And then [12:00] I moved and so Bob moved. He's no longer with us. But even when he had a chance to go back to Peace Corps, he elected to stay at Turner. And he really seemed to enjoy what he was doing with the young people. He was an English language person.

BAYOR: One of the other things I had heard, particularly in the area, like, [Cascade?] Heights -- that transitional area -- the (inaudible) organization was trying to save it as a transitional area. And they pleaded with the Board of Education and the superintendent of schools, (inaudible) at that time, to upgrade that school -- that high school in that area -- so as to keep the white population and the black population there.

HOLMES: Yeah, there were two high schools in that area.

BAYOR: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) which one (inaudible). Well, apparently, their feeling was that the school was allowed to deteriorate so as to speed white flight out of the [13:00] area.

HOLMES: Yeah. And I knew it was -- it deteriorated. I don't know whether that was their plan, but the -- what is the name of that school? That's now a middle school. But it did. I knew it and it was an all-white school. Because when I was in the -- working with blind and visually

handicapped, we had a large number of blind students in that school that's now a middle school, right there on Martin -- not Martin Luther King Drive, onBenjamin Mays Drive. And it did. It was an altogether different place. Because we used to go over there a lot because, as I said, I was working with the blind and visually handicapped. We had meetings there and we did use some of the books and facilities. And I knew from the blind students I worked with and the blind students [over there?], there was a difference in what those [14:00] kids got. (laughter) The facilities, right. They were getting things that we had trouble, you know, getting, and I worked with high school blind students, too, so I knew about that. And then, it was amazing how [in just a?] short time that whole neighborhood went from white to black.

BAYOR: And there were efforts to prevent that type of switch, to keep it as an integrated neighborhood. So the white students were definitely getting more. I guess that's obvious.

HOLMES: Obvious. Very obviously.

BAYOR: But you know, again, my feeling is that the Board of Education didn't have the commitment to --

HOLMES: No.

BAYOR: -- integration.

HOLMES: No.

BAYOR: If they would have, they would have tried to [simply save?] --

HOLMES: To, yeah, save that school. Because there was (inaudible). Obviously, it's [southwest?] now. But and then there was the other high school (inaudible) near Greenbriar, that was another school that was, you know, in an area where all [15:00] whites lived, that just, almost overnight, it seemed to go all black. This -- I had never lived in a transitional neighborhood myself, so it was -- I never knew some of the problems that they probably had, yeah.

BAYOR: How was it -- since you were a teacher in the school system before -- during the period when there really wasn't equal school systems, black and white -- I certainly come across not to document how badly the black students were treated. The black teachers got less money, the students got nothing, really. What effect do you think the [dual?] school system had on the white schools? Any detrimental effect on them?

HOLMES: I really don't feel that it had any. I don't. Because it was -- and at that time, it wasn't really a [dual?] system.

BAYOR: Well --

HOLMES: Now, here, you're saying "dual," you mean this is all [16:00] --

BAYOR: I mean (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HOLMES: Yeah. I don't think that is. In fact, I'm still getting everything.

BAYOR: Wouldn't you say that was a little bit of an inefficient system, in the sense of -- I mean, there was still white schools that were under--

HOLMES: Oh, I mean, it was inefficient.

BAYOR: -- populated and...

HOLMES: Yeah, yeah. White. And that's why, you know, they closed some. And I remember when Dykes High was an elite school [on Forsyth?], and they would have had to close it, except for the fact that they made it a middle school. But I don't think it had any effect on -- oh, you're talking about the students?

BAYOR: Well, the students, yeah. Yeah.

HOLMES: I mean, it was very inefficient. Because if you've got a pot of money and you're going to divide it, and you're still giving more of it over here, that means there's going to be less for this group over here, with the dual system.

BAYOR: Well, blacks were getting less, no doubt about it. Well, yet, you still had [17:00] sometimes two schools that

were right next to each other. One was overcrowded -- the black school -- one was undercrowded -- the white school. It would have been -- made sense to merge.

HOLMES: Yeah, I had a case of that that happen when we were over in the area where there was a white elementary school and a black elementary school, and these black kids had to be bussed past this white school to go to the elementary school. And the most inefficient. And then, on this [other night?], there's this school that's -- DeKalb. It's that area that's DeKalb -- Atlanta in DeKalb.

BAYOR: Right (inaudible)?

HOLMES: Yeah. And that happened for a long time. And they began to put more money into the black elementary school. They kept making it larger. So then you couldn't split --

BAYOR: Why [18:00] [would they make it even?] larger then?

HOLMES: To take care of all the black students, so that they would not have to --

BAYOR: Well, that's what I was going to --

HOLMES: Couldn't go -- yeah --

BAYOR: That's what I was saying before.

HOLMES: -- to the most inefficient. So that meant that these kids over here, they got -- they added some rooms and they were, you know, nice. The building itself [wasn't cheap?].

What happened was you took an elementary school that maybe ought to have 500 kids and moved it up to 1,200.

BAYOR: Right. (inaudible)?

HOLMES: Yes.

BAYOR: So that's what I was saying before, about the fact that the Board of Education seemed to be more willing to expand the black school or build a new one, rather than --

HOLMES: Than integrate, yes.

BAYOR: -- integrate, yeah. So that was happening.

HOLMES: Right. Because I worked in an elementary school when I first began -- a three-story building. And we used it to call it the university because it was that many students in it.

BAYOR: When did you start teaching?

HOLMES: Pardon?

BAYOR: What year did you start teaching?

HOLMES: I started in [19:00] '50.

BAYOR: OK, so you go [way back?] (inaudible).

HOLMES: Right in the middle of it. And I had worked in (inaudible) school in what they called [Pittsburgh?]. They don't have -- that school is no longer used, but at one time we housed 1,500 to 1,700 students. Elementary.

BAYOR: Just (inaudible).

HOLMES: Yeah.

BAYOR: The whites I've spoken to -- I've spoken to a (inaudible) to name the high schools. And invariably, they name all the white schools and that's it. It was as if blacks didn't exist at all. It's just incredible. And I guess that was the attitude. And whatever crumbs they could throw...

HOLMES: Right, we got. And unless you had dedicated teachers and students who really wanted to learn. Because you'd take children -- of course, there are schools now that are integrated but have double sessions. We had triple sessions one time and I'll always remember, I guess, the small children who [20:00] came in at 12:30 -- these little tots, kindergarten -- and they gave them lunch. And what else was there to do for those kids but sleep the rest of the afternoon. They didn't get to sleep at home, so they slept at school. And how much could you do with --

BAYOR: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

HOLMES: -- children. Just a total waste. Excuse me. What?

F: (inaudible)

HOLMES: OK, thank you.

BAYOR: This won't take much longer. The Atlanta Compromise in 1971, you were involved in that, to a certain extent, I guess, in terms of being [beneficiary person?]. Instead of busing (inaudible) [for blacks?] to get 50% of the

administrative positions, and then, I guess, an [end-to-end voluntary transfer?].

HOLMES: Yes.

BAYOR: What was the reaction of the black community to that?

HOLMES: Well, for the most part, they, you know, welcomed that. I think it was the [21:00] white community that was more against it than the black community.

BAYOR: Really? Even though busing stopped with that?

HOLMES: Yes. Yes. I think the black community was, you know, more accepting of it.

BAYOR: Happy to get the jobs.

HOLMES: Yeah, yeah. And I guess you could say, I guess, that we've always been a more accepting people, who don't have anything, you get something. Unless you were one of those fiery people, you know, who rather have nothing than take a compromise.

BAYOR: Do you think it was a plan that worked for...?

HOLMES: I'll tell you, again, I speak totally from my involvement. When my grandchildren came along, all of my grandchildren were in there. And the three, and they'd go over to...[22:00] (inaudible) elementary school. Then they went from there to [Southern?], then from Southern to [Northside?], in that area, OK. And my daughter-in-law was very active in the movement to make it work. And she has

been all along. Of course, my grandchildren now are all in high school. But at that time, it was that feeling that it, you know, it had to work. So I really wasn't involved in it anymore, then, through them. But the -- there were some people in the community that who felt that instead of us supporting that, we should have supported building up the schools that were already in the black community. But my daughter-in-law and son felt that, you know, this was a good movement, [23:00] and that's where my grandchildren went to school.

BAYOR: I can't help thinking, though, (inaudible) school system was predominantly black. (inaudible) right away.

HOLMES: Sure. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

BAYOR: And it seemed to me that type of compromise was really the final coup de grâce, I guess --

HOLMES: Yes.

BAYOR: -- to the -- to the idea of integrated school system.

HOLMES: Right. So we don't really have it.

BAYOR: No. No. No, we don't.

HOLMES: And --

BAYOR: And busing might have been the way of achieving it, I suppose. I guess it would have to be cross-county busing.

HOLMES: Right. It would've have to have been [almost?], as I see it. Now, and I had one granddaughter who went through

the same process that my other two grandchildren went through, and she decided last year that she would choose Mays. Even though she had been tested and accepted at North Fulton. Because -- not because it was -- because it was the magnet school that she [24:00] thought had the programs she wanted. But then she decided she wanted to get into science and math, and the magnet school was Mays. And she has... But the other two have had more problems adjusting to Northside. But I don't know what the percentage is over there. But it still is -- I imagine in another couple years, it'll be predominantly black.

BAYOR: (inaudible) all about the (inaudible).

HOLMES: Yes, I came to work on that.

BAYOR: What do you think the attitudes were?

HOLMES: Well, hers was the -- you don't mind me [standing?]. This is where (inaudible), that kind of thing. She had, I would say, maybe two or three black principals that she was -- you know, would get things to (inaudible) one of them I think was principal of Washington High, and there were two or three other elementary schools. And I [25:00] would -- I couldn't say that for sure, so. You can edit that out. But I'm going to imagine those schools got more than some of [the other?] schools. And of course, they stayed on her

side. But I don’t think she was ever interested; I don’t think she cared.

BAYOR: About the black school?

HOLMES: Yes. Right.

BAYOR: And what (inaudible)?

HOLMES: Yes. Then (inaudible) [Lesson?] and I had -- I guess it was prejudice against him from the beginning, personally, because he had been principal of high school in my hometown, Tuskegee, and I knew... I didn’t know him personally, but I, you know, that’s home and all of my friends would (inaudible). And they knew [what they got?]. And he was -- and what they were able to get when he was principal and superintendent there. Because that stayed a totally segregated [26:00] school system. But in a sense, it had always been because of the school there, you know, that’s now a college there, that they had sort of prep schools that a lot of the students went to. So you didn’t feel the brunt of, you know, segregated school.

BAYOR: Because you don’t feel he had any great interest in integration?

HOLMES: What’s that?

BAYOR: You don’t feel less [Lesson?] had any great interest?

HOLMES: Oh, no. No. No.

BAYOR: And he was a key transitional point.

HOLMES: Yes. That's why he was the one who was there when they decided and it was [going to start at 12:30?] and come down. That was, you know... And I felt that he had a great influence on that. And that's, you know, a feeling that they didn't want it to work.

BAYOR: No, that -- I get that impression, too. Starting with the twelfth grade, the transfer (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

HOLMES: Next year, right. And then eleventh grade or tenth. And we used to say it in our little discussions with, you know, people I worked with and my friends, [27:00] that it was never going to work. And I don't feel that people would have fled the Atlanta city as fast as they did if they had done it that way. And I could be wrong.

BAYOR: That's interesting. No, I think the schools have (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) up to, I think, with what the whites were expecting them to do. Especially in the transitional areas, I don't think there were would have been any great [flight?]. Because I think that they seemed to have some people who really were committed to (inaudible), and it's great. I guess Ivan Allen didn't have much say in what [Lesson?] was doing, I suppose.

HOLMES: No, apparently not. And then, I guess, he got all -- even though he was considered one of the great mayors, you

know, he got off to a bad footing when he put up that barricade (laughter) right out there. I lived in that general area, and my church is, you know, right down the street from where the barricade was (laughter) that he built. And he -- [28:00] I think about that, and I don't know what he was thinking about, what anybody was thinking about, you know, to set off a section of the city like that.

BAYOR: I spoke to him, and he's still a little embarrassed about it. (laughter)

HOLMES: I'm sure he is. I'm sure he is. Because he was -- as I said, there were -- there are a lot of people who felt that he was a great man. I didn't have that much feeling one way or the other about him -- you know, about his mayorship -- but I knew that was a terrible thing.

BAYOR: Well, I guess everything's relative.

HOLMES: Right, right. Because it reminded me, at the time, I went to Germany when my son was over there, and to go from West Germany to East Germany was the same type of thing. There's a barricade.

BAYOR: A wall there.

HOLMES: But you can go through it. In Germany, you know, with the military, I have a right to go over there. But it [29:00] does give you a bad feeling.

BAYOR: I think that was really at the beginning of the end to try and restrict blacks to certain parts of town. Well, that's some of the things I wanted to ask. You were very helpful. I wanted to get in touch with your son eventually, Hamilton. Do you think he's -- I don't want to question so much about the Athens -- he's probably been questioned forever on that, but --

HOLMES: Oh, I guess enough about that. But --

BAYOR: But I am curious about his experience in the Emory medical school more than anything else. Do you think he'd be willing to?

HOLMES: I think he would, if you can -- you know, if he can schedule some time. You know, it's --

BAYOR: He's busy.

HOLMES: -- really strange. It's not -- it's something that we never talked about much at home --

BAYOR: Really?

HOLMES: -- the Emory experience. We never did. But I think it was quite different from the Athens experience, because of just, you know, all that that he'd gone ahead, naturally, with (inaudible).

BAYOR: Well, I'll write him. And (inaudible) busy, but [30:00] I'll see if I can get him. You have a very --

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