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Interview with
J. C. Matthews
February 18, 1977

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas
Interviewer: Robert Mangrum
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Oral History Collection

J. C. Matthews

Interviewer: Mr. Robert Mangrum

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Date: February 18, 1977

Mr. Mangrum: This is Robert Mangrum interviewing J. C. Matthews for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on February 18, 1977, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing J. C. Matthews in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was president of North Texas State University during the period of integration, 1954-1958.

Dr. Matthews, to begin this interview would you just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself.

Dr. Matthews: I was born in northwest Grayson County on October 16, 1901. In northwest Grayson County there was not a Negro. Whitesboro had not permitted blacks to get off the train for some time when I was acquainted with that area. That was brought about by the fact that a Negro man was lynched, burned. Tempers were high and that practice was begun.

Just about a week before my eighth birthday, we moved to Foard County. It was all-white. That continued until three or four years later when blacks were brought in to

pick cotton in the fall. Sometimes they were driven off; sometimes they were allowed to stay. No one knew they were going to be driven off or when they were going to stay. It was all a matter of whether or not there got to be a discussion that followed into a group action. This went on until sometime when this practice ceased. There was no killing, no fighting; it was all a matter of giving warning--the owner of the cotton-picking--and taking the people back to East Texas.

In the summer of 1912, I spent six weeks in Grayson County. My grandfather and I sold apples in Sherman, and there were blacks in Sherman. He and I took the apples to Sherman, picked up a black boy who had been helping him for quite some time--the boy was about my age--and we took either side of the street and went from house to house and sold apples. We worked as a team--no problem. This was my first direct contact with blacks. He and I were good friends by then--this is summer. In fact, we went right to work from the very first meeting.

For quite some time after that, my connection with blacks was at a distance. I majored in history. I studied the problems of race and segregation and integration and had formed an opinion, I think, early.

I went to Prairie View in 1935-37 as state curriculum director. There I was surprised to find that the head of the institution was called principal, not president; that he had an overseer in the form of the administrators at A&M College. There was a loft up over the store--what we would now call the union building for the school--which had, I think, a bedroom or two and a dining room and kitchen; and all visitors--all white visitors--were taken to that place after leaving a classroom or an auditorium and were served or given a room or whatever was in order. That was unusual in many respects. It was a complete cut-off from the association with the members of the Prairie View staff except in the formal occasions and classrooms and lecture halls. I thought about it in terms of the overseer, the landlord, and the slave. The more I became acquainted with it, the more I thought of it in that light.

Following my experience there, I visited schools all over the nation, first, as a member of the staff of the Southern Association Study, next as a member of the Advisory Committee of the Kellogg Foundation Study in Health, next as an Advisor on the Sloan Foundation for Applied Economics, and then as the professor in a team of professor and president of a college to go to eight institutions in the nation to study teacher education in 1940. In all of these places,

I ran into the matter of integration-segregation, whether it was North or South that we were visiting at the time. The integration in some places was still in isolation in a lot of ways--by practice and by attitude. I became more and more conscious of the problems blacks had in high education and more and more, I think, sympathetic with their need to have a different kind of opportunity after they got inside an institution. That was before there had been a concerted effort to make a change in the law and the practice and the use of the law.

In 1954 there was a whole new system so far as the federal government was concerned. I started talking with our board members informally as soon as this issue came up and particularly when it was settled. I said, "We are going to have someone appear some day and want to enter." I talked with the board informally about what I thought would be a good way to proceed.

Mangrum: Would you elaborate a little bit on this as far as your position as president and your relationship with the board concerning integration.

Matthews: At this time we were not . . . we didn't have an issue--specific issue, so we were visiting in light of a principle, and I was saying that I thought it was better if we had a person admitted without any necessity of a court order. I

thought that my position was that when you got into the matter of having to do something, you're in a worse position than you would be if you did it on a voluntary basis. There was no debate, as I recall, then. I don't think there was even a show of attitude necessarily. The situation was not critical at that moment. But I was taking the prior step to the occasion when we would have it and anticipating that this was going to happen.

Mangrum: When was this. . . about what time?

Matthews: This was in '54.

Mangrum: In '54. How did the Supreme Court decision in the Sweatt vs. Painter case--going back a little ways now--coming at the same time that the Board of Regents had approved plans to offer the doctorates in education and music? Did that have an impact on North Texas?

Matthews: Not at the time when we were setting up the degree in some areas because I don't think anyone had anticipated this as a means of speeding up the problem. The problem already existed, as a matter of fact, as soon as the Sweatt case was settled for institutions that had this same kind of thing. The University of Texas already had Ph.D.'s in the areas we were offering. We were not the only institution in the state offering it. There was no black institution in the state offering it. That was the point in the Sweatt case.

That came about so normally that I think I should tell you a little in detail about that. Tennyson Miller had been principal of the Negro school here in Denton. He was, at this time in the summer of '55, principal of the Negro school in Beaumont, Texas. But his wife still lived in Denton and ran a beauty shop, and he was spending the summer in Denton. This was, I guess, the first year he was in Beaumont. He had a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin and was eligible in all academic respects for doing work towards the doctorate. Also, there was a course that he particularly wanted in public school law. He did not come to see me, but he told someone that he would like to take this course. Whoever it was volunteered to remind me of that.

As soon as he came, I said I couldn't answer it, but I would find an answer. So I got in the car that afternoon and went to Dallas and talked to Mr. Wooten. He arranged for an extension for me and one for him, and we called board members, and I told them that I thought there was no question but what this meant. According to the Sweatt case decision in all particulars, he was eligible to take doctorate work; doctorate work was not offered at a black institution. All of the elements that went into do this thing were present. So it was decided by telephone that I should go to Austin and check with the attorney general to make sure that my

analysis was correct. I went to Austin and he said, by the time that I had said as much about it that I have said to you now, "Yes, indeed, you're right all the way--no exceptions. Nothing at all will stand in the way. It would be routine --only routine." I came back and reported that, and they said, "Very well." I came on over and told Tennyson Miller that I had arranged for us to admit him to take this course.

Mangrum: From the Campus Chat I'm looking at during that year--1954 --it looks like in the spring and summer of that year that the student body was pretty receptive already to the idea of integration. Is this accurate?

Matthews: I'd say that's a good assessment. I think that if you were looking at the situation, the attitude here was as fine as you could have expected to find it--anywhere in the South certainly.

Mangrum: Were there any problems encountered?

Matthews: No, no. Not a single thing all summer. Just as routine as any other activity on the campus.

Mangrum: Did Miller complete a degree here, or did he just take that one course?

Matthews: That was the only course he took--the only one he asked to take--and he went back and he was principal at Beaumont the next winter. I really don't know what he did after that, but, as I recall, he never did take any other work here.

By that time others were taking it, though. If he had wanted to come back in the summer, it would have been routine because he would have been one of a number that summer.

Mangrum: Were there any overtures by black groups, like the NAACP or anything like that, in an attempt to create a test case at North Texas after Brown vs. Board of Education?

Matthews: No. The next thing that happened, so far as I know, was when Joe L. Atkins came to the campus to say that he wanted to enroll in the fall--fall of '55. He was an undergraduate student, and I went the same way that we'd done before. I checked with Mr. Wooten, and we called some board members. Then in a very few days--this was summer--no registration coming up immediately--we had said we'd find out. We took his name, address, telephone number, and everything. We had a board meeting, and at the meeting we had an informal discussion. Out of that they said. . . I deferred to them. It was my judgement that here was a person who was going to sue if he were not admitted on our own initiative. They said, "Let him sue."

And he did. But, you know, the federal court is slow, so he didn't get his suit completed in time for (fall) registration. I think I'm right about this--he never did register. If he did it was done without any connection with me, and I don't think he ever did register. But we did meet with the

judge in the Sherman district, and he was permitted. . . he was given an admission permit to be admitted--or we were given an order to admit him, whichever way you want to say it. But he never did come.

The spring semester (of 1956). . . the order had already come before the spring semester, but only one person registered, and that was Mrs. Sephas. Mrs. Sephas' registration had to be, and there was no question about it, and she was admitted.

That was the same semester that Miss Lucy, as she was called in the news all the while, was to register at Alabama, and Governor Wallace stood in the door--you know the story. So Mrs. Sephas registered; lived in Arlington, I believe; commuted to Denton; and took undergraduate courses in the spring semester of 1955. . . spring of '56, I guess that was --spring of '56. Everyone was saying, "This is such a contrast to Alabama." There is an editorial in the Denton Record-Chronicle that says, "NTSC Attitude in Direct Contrast to Alabama Case." They were saying that "the students' attitude here is fine"; they were saying that "North Texas is going about the thing right. We commend them for it," etc., etc. But this was a thing that was going according to plan, that is, not to make a big affair, not to make a lot of headlines, not to do anything that you didn't do either adversely or in

any other way with any other student. We wanted to treat the person just as any other student would be treated.

That went on until a reporter for a TV station--and I do not know which station that carried it; that could be found, but I do not have that at my fingertips--went first to her home and asked her how she liked the work and how people were treating her. She said, "Dear old North Texas, I just love it!" and this kind of thing. That was the first time that there was any noticeable reaction on the part of people wishing she hadn't said it quite that way. Some people were a little bit uptight about that. That was amusing to other people, but there were some people who were uptight about it.

But they evidently didn't get all of the things out of that newscast that they wished, and so the reporter came to the campus. The first I knew, someone was with him--I don't recall who it was that was with him--and he had his camera and so on, and he was wanting to go to the class and go around with the microphone on and put it in the person's face and say, "What do you think about having Mrs. Sephas in your class?" and so on.

We told him that we didn't think that was the way to go about it; we never had had that kind of thing happen in a class, and if there was any kind of feeling, we were going

to deal with it in some other fashion. We tried to talk logically about it for awhile. Finally we just had to say, "You are not going to go to the class," (chuckle) period or exclamation point or whatever. He did not go. Of course, he was not too happy about that, but that was. . . I think we could have had at least unhappiness and maybe other things had we done that. We would have been not doing what one ought to do in a classroom--not a good classroom situation. I think I would still stand on that without any criticism. I don't believe that that's the way to go about it.

Mangrum: Let's go back for a minute here. There are a couple of other points that I would like to cover. Is there in this period --1954 to, say, about 1957 or maybe even more general than that--what was the student body like? How was it composed, or who composed the student body at North Texas? How did this generalized or average student during this period react to the Atkins suit or Mrs. Sephas coming as the first undergraduate?

Matthews: They did very little reacting. I think there was an unusual amount of just taking the thing as a matter of course. I think we couldn't have hoped for the student body to have been any better about it. In all of that time, I think if you had written a script for them, you wouldn't have been able to do any better during all of this time. It was a

matter that we were feeling, "It's coming. Let's make a go of it," and that was the general attitude. I think you could say that for the staff with a little less finality than you'd say it about the student body. I guess the generation gap showed (chuckle). Anyway, I believe it would be fair to say that at that stage the students were more receptive, and I think it would be fair to say that that continued all the while with all the stages that came after that--that the students were in a greater percentage receptive and a lesser percentage concerned and worried through the whole bit right on down to today (chuckle). I believe it's still probably so at this time. I haven't seen any tests lately, but I still think that probably would be true.

Mangrum: Well, who composed the student body?

Matthews: The student body was composed of undergraduate students in the main in the wintertime and graduate students in the main in the summertime, or at least in much greater proportion in the summertime. Doctoral students were small in numbers. We had only two departments that offered the doctorate work at the early stages here. The on-campus people doing their doctorate were very scarce at that stage.

Mangrum: Were these students from the upper class? Middle class? Lower class? They were, obviously without saying. . .they

were white, I assume. Could you give a description in that sense--just in general obviously?

Matthews: Well, I think they were maybe more native Texans than you would find today. I'm not positive of that, but I think that's so. I think that probably a greater percentage lived in a radius of 200 miles than you'd find even today. The transportation business has stepped way up since that time, I think. And the commuting was almost nil. The commuting to Dallas and Ft. Worth and so on was, oh, nothing like what it is now--nothing to compare with it. The number of night classes was much less. These are daytime, full-time students more than. . . part-time students would be 200 or 300, and now there are a couple of thousand of them--part-time people.

Mangrum: You said something a minute before that some people were uptight about Mrs. Sephas.

Matthews: That was about her response to how she was being received and so on. You know, she was sort of gushy in her response. I guess I didn't make that clear.

Mangrum: Who are these people?

Matthews: Staff members, I think, mostly were the only ones that I can think of. I don't think the students were worried about it. I don't think I recall any students being concerned about that, but I do recall someone saying, "I wish she hadn't said that," or "hadn't said it that way," or something.

They thought that it was maybe weakening the dignity of the situation. But I think it was just a way of reacting to a situation that they may have been reacting to it a little all the while. That's the way I really read it.

Mangrum: This reaction. . . you mentioned a Denton newspaper comparing or trying to compare favorably North Texas to the University of Alabama. As this contrast became apparent--obviously during the first months it appeared around here and then the Dallas-Ft. Worth area and then statewide, then nationally --did you have a lot of national news people descend like hordes on North Texas, or was this the case?

Matthews: No. No. We had a good many people calling attention to it, and we had notes saying, "We have seen that you're not having the kind of trouble they're having there," and all that. But the main thing that came out of that was our notion about not putting on a premature celebration. Here's my attitude, I think: "This is student number one on the campus outside of Tennyson Miller. . . this is student number two--let's put it that way--on the campus, and this is not any time to celebrate (chuckle). We haven't really gone over the whole works yet. We must think of this as a problem in process of solution." That was my concern all the while as we worked with it at that stage--was not to overstate the case and not to make any claim that "We're not like Alabama." We had

yet to prove ourselves all the way. This was, I think, the attitude that most of us were taking. But people outside were not as aware of the "in-process" kind of thing, and they were wanting to say, "Let's point this up; let's tell the world about it; let's brag a little," and that type of thing. My counsel was, "Let's be sure we do the thing as it should be done and stop at that."

Mangrum: Would you elaborate a little on your relations with the board during this period after Mrs. Sephas comes on campus? You mention this was an "in-process" thing. What specifically do you mean when you say "in-process?"

Matthews: That had nothing to do with the board, as I recall. After the Atkins suit, we had a court order to live with. We were in process of complying. That was the attitude of the board. Their attitude, I suppose, was, "Let's move cautiously. Let's be sure we're aware of all the different elements and so on." But the board was not involved in that semester, not even in the summer following that spring semester, as much as the faculty and the students who were here during the thing all the while. I think, so far as the board was concerned, the big thing had been accomplished. The only thing now was to work it out, and I had the assignment to do that (chuckle). So the board's action was already over by that time, so far as whether or not we would do it.

Mangrum: So in 1956, then, you were carrying out this injunction. . .

Matthews: Right.

Mangrum: . . . to become integrated at North Texas. Would you relate the process by which various aspects of the college were integrated, such as the dormitories?

Matthews: Yes. Let's take the dormitories first. In the summer of 1956--I believe that's right--we had some women who wanted to live in the dormitory, and they were sent to me. They came individually because, I guess, they made their appearance individually, and I suppose neither one of them knew about the other one. I did the same thing with both of them. I talked about the situation--how this is new to us and that no one had done this before. One of them stopped me and said, "It won't be new to me. I've lived in the International House at the Teacher's College at Columbia." I said, "Well, it will be new to us, at least, and I think that it will be a little different for you in that it's new to us." I had a three-page letter from her (chuckle) in which midway in the summer she wrote me and said, "Things have gone well." She thanked me for altering her, and everything was just fine. But part of it was due to the fact that I had altered her that it was going to be different for her. She had many friends now, and she'd had a good experience, and she appreciated our letting her come. Midway in the six-weeks she

wanted me to know that she appreciated the way in which she had been admitted to the school, received in the dormitory, and made a part of the dormitory family. She used the word "family."

I had the same kind of talk with the other one, and I had the same kind of reaction from her in a visit in the hallway as we happened to pass one day. That was a thing that a good many people watched, and several . . . it made things easier for everybody concerned.

But there was no tension, no resentment. . . nothing to be alarmed about in connection with that whole procedure.

About two or three years later. . . maybe more than that, Harry Ransom called me one day and said. . . he was president of the University of Texas at that time. "What is your board's dormitory policy," I believe he said. I said, "It doesn't have a policy, Harry. We just have blacks and whites in the dormitory--period." He said, "Bless you!" (Chuckle) He meant that if you had a policy, you'll have a situation some day that tests the policy, and you won't have a chance to bend it or whatever you need to do with it at that moment. Then you're in worse shape than if you had a policy that you had to use as the law of the Medes and Persians.

So that is just one example of the kind of thing that was done all the way up and down the line. See, the board

was not writing this out. That put more obligation on me (chuckle), but it also gave me more free rein to work with the situation. We did sit down with people from time to time when we thought we had something new coming up. We did try to stay as far away from the written word as we could.

Mangrum: What were the ages of these two women?

Matthews: These women were about thirty-five. . . thirty or thirty-five.

Mangrum: They were above the average age of the student body?

Matthews: This one that had been in the Teachers College at Columbia was a masters degree student. I think the other one was an undergraduate student, but she was thirty or more.

Mangrum: You think the age of these two women was a factor?

Matthews: Well, I think it was very fortunate, indeed, that they were mature and that they were trying to do good college work during the semester. They both taught in the Wichita Falls area. I'm going from memory, but I think that's right. I know one of them did, and I think they both did.

Mangrum: How about with athletic teams? We talked about dormitories.

Matthews: The athletic matter came about in. . . I guess it was the fall of '56. In the fall of '56 Abner Haynes and one other fellow, whose name I don't recall at the moment, went to the football camp which was held on the campus that summer and reported to Coach Mitchell. And Coach Mitchell said, "This

is new to me, fellows. I don't know what to say. Let me check this."

And he came up and I reminded him that the fellows, by walking on, could not be given a scholarship after they'd gone through camp because that was against NCAA rules, and that we had a problem of making sure that they understood it was not because of race or anything else. He said, "They've already told me they didn't want a scholarship." I said, "Yes, but you are going to have to be sure that you explain to them that you can't let them have one even if they decide they wanted it because we have our hands tied on that matter from the NCAA." He said, "Well, I think that's all right, but I wish you'd come and go with me and explain that to them." He said, "We'll know then. We'll have witnesses and everything. We'll know for sure because you know how the NCAA is--it will want this thing all down so that more than one person's word will have to be involved." So I went down and met them and explained, and they said, "Don't worry about it. We've already made arrangements. All we want is a chance to make the team." They did make the team in a big way. Abner went on and was a professional player. I don't think the other fellow ever was a professional player, but Abner was with the Kansas City Chiefs.

I do not recall that that first year we had a traveling problem. The first time. . . we did have a dining hall problem in a visiting town a little later on--I think it was the next year--in which the team as a group went in to be served. When they saw that the blacks were there, they were not served. In that instance, the coach and one of the leaders in the white group and the two or three blacks--however many blacks there were--went to another place and had the meal, and the other people stayed and had the meal. On one other occasion a little later on--and I guess the fellows had had time to think it over and say, "If this ever happens again, we'll do so and so"--they all got up and left the dining room and went somewhere else and were served. I think they went to a place like McDonald's--I don't guess McDonald's was in business then--but anyway, they went somewhere to a hamburger place or something and had their meal. Everyone in the traveling group went to that place.

They stayed one night, as I recall, on the pullman car rather than stay in a motel or hotel where they had to be separated--one stay in one motel and one in another, that kind of thing. Those were the kinds of problems we had in regard to travel. We had what we called "skull practice." We sat down--Abner and the coach and I. "Now what if so and so happened? What would be the kinds of things that would

be appropriate to do so that we would not reflect on the situation or reflect on the school we are visiting, reflect on this, that, or the other thing?" We tried to be reasonable.

The only time that I recall any difficulty in that was not in athletics--I mean, in so far as the reaction of the students concerned--but was in A cappella choir. One little girl (chuckle) who had been on a trip or two, in a theoretical situation, said that something needed to be done because some people were not going on A cappella choir trips because they were black. It was true that when they went on a trip to East Texas, in the center of the segregation area, the two or three--however many blacks were in the choir--did not go. But that would have been just asking for trouble because they're going to have to spend the night. . . they're spending the night in homes. That raised another kind of problem--are you going to spend the night with a black in Marshall; are you going to spend. . . expect to spend the night with a white in Marshall, etc., etc. It got so complicated they decided not to do that. And this little girl. . . it was one of the few times when the students on either side raised a question and got adamant about it before we got down to the crisis area. I think that she stated her case so one-sidedly (chuckle) that she soon lost ground and saw that we were trying

to do things.

This would come later, I think, but what we were trying to do was establish a reasonable procedure that reasonable people would recognize as a reasonable procedure, and to do it for students and faculty and anyone else we were going to work with. When it was of such a nature that we couldn't work with the others in advance, like some community outside of our own, then we'd work there. Also, somewhere in this should be a little accounting of the Denton community as a part of this whole matter.

Mangrum: That's a good way to lead right into it. I will stop here and ask you what was the community attitude throughout this period? How segregated or integrated was Denton?

Matthews: The first reaction. . . I suppose the community didn't even think about being involved itself. The first reaction was, "It's being done on the campus." That was favorable in general without any question. I do not think that Mr. Perryman across the street realized that this was going to be a problem for him sometime; I do not think that the picture show man realized at that stage that this was going to be a problem for him sometime. So the typical thing that happened in that stage was for the Denton people to come around to me and say, "That's such a fine thing you're doing," and so on. That was just the first couple of years or so.

Mangrum: 1954, '56, somewhere in there?

Matthews: Well, on down to '58 and '59. . . '60.

Mangrum: Did you get any feedback from various individuals in the community throughout this period?

Matthews: Oh, yes. The first one I've already mentioned, but they said to me, "That's a fine thing." That was the first feedback. The next one was to . . . they started coming in pretty good-sized numbers by '58 or '59 and on down to '60.

Mangrum: "They," meaning the blacks.

Matthews: Yes, yes. There were 250 in 1960, for instance--a pretty good benchmark to go by. Now when they (Denton community) saw that kind of numbers, I think they started to realize--and they also probably saw other kinds of things--they started to realize their involvement.

But the first thing I remember about people in business involved Mr. Perryman, for instance. He ran the drugstore just across the street--there's still a store there--just north of the art building--on that corner. He came to me and said, "I like the way you're handling this. I would like to do it the same way in the store. Do you have any suggestions? We could manage it better to keep from having an incident if it were done when it was not in the middle of a rush hour. Should I stage one?" My judgment said, "No, don't stage it." My judgment said, "Do the thing naturally."

I asked, "No one has offered to go in the booth and sit down?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, I wouldn't stage that occasion for somebody to go over to the booth." He said, "Aw, I was just going to say wouldn't you come in with somebody?" I said, "No, I wouldn't do that, nor would I encourage anyone else to do that because we're not promoting it; we're not asking you to do this. We are integrated, but you are in business. That's your business. Our jurisdiction ends . . . we're not asking you anything there. But just as a friend I would say to you that I would do it on a normal basis sometime when it occurs."

Mr. Harrison--strange as it may seem to people who read of the things later on--the director of the motion picture . . . that was a chain thing, and he was manager but he's not owner. He came and talked the same way, just as if he and Mr. Perryman had talked it over--I don't think they had --and he said, "Will you tell me what you would do in this case?" And I said, "I would watch for some time that when the people walked in, I'd just let them walk on in." He said, "Well, I wish I knew how to orchestrate that." I believe "orchestrate" is the word he used. I said, "I wouldn't orchestrate it (chuckle)." This was not very long before the thing (Campus Theater incident, 1961) came up. I guess

it must have been over a year before, but he hadn't had an occasion when that they had lined up and gone in.

In another case, the students were asking me, "What would you do in case you went in and were not welcomed?" and so on. The little store north of Hickory Street and west of Fry Street, in that corner, was an eating establishment at that time. There was a group--I think we need to talk about it sometime--there was a group that met with me on Friday afternoon quite regularly, and it raised the question one time about, "What did I think?" They went over there, and they went up to the cash register where he was standing, and they asked him what he would do if they went over and sat down in the booth and waited for an order. He put them off and didn't answer them, and they asked him again and said, "Suppose we just went over now?" Finally, he pulled the drawer out and showed them--they said--the biggest gun they ever saw. They said, "What would you have done?" I said, "Well, what did you do?" They said, "We left." I said, "I believe I would have left, too." We had a little laugh, and then we talked about how you get into more serious problems sometimes than you expect. You go in just in order to make a point about eating at the place, and you end by someone's getting shot. That wasn't a very good type thing to do. Evidently, he was uptight about it already, or he

wouldn't have the gun there. Ordinarily, there would be no gun in the drawer of the money cabinet, but there was in his case. So that ended by their not bringing it to a head at that time.

Mangrum: Did you or any of the students--black or white--or any of the faculty or staff ever receive any threats or anything like that from outside or on campus?

Matthews: Well, you would call a burning of a cross a threat, I guess. There were two crosses burned in front of my house at night; there were three or four or five nights in which a cross was burned in front of the union building, which faced the north, right out here where this union building is now; there was one night when there was a cross right out at the steps here (gesture) down by the street.

Mangrum: That's right in front of the administration building.

Matthews: In front of the administration building. Those are the main ways in which threats and that kind of thing were indicated.

Mangrum: You didn't receive any mail or phone calls or anything like that? Were they abusive or threatening?

Matthews: No, I received letters. I have a letter from a fellow in Nacadoches. There weren't many or I'd have had some more in my folder. There was one from a fellow in Nacadoches, and he told me what he thought about it. But he was one of the few that I got a letter from. I had one letter from a person

in Tennessee who assumed that I was against blacks coming. I don't know what made him make that assumption, but he somehow. . .or he assumed that I should be against it, maybe. He was telling me how to manage the school. But back through my files are not many instances of that kind of thing. There are literally hundreds of ones from the other side saying, "I don't know exactly how you managed it, but it looks like this is the way it ought to be done," etc., etc. But there were some like that.

Mangrum: Related to that, do you know of any incidents where black students on the way to school or around the town--just in the normal pursuit of activities or whatever--were threatened or accosted or met with angry crowds or groups that could have come into a crisis if cooler heads hadn't prevailed or whatever?

Matthews: No. I think that this will give you a clue on that as much as anything else. After we'd gone on down to '61, the attitude was that things were doing so well here that (there was a) need to stir things up. That gives you a pretty good idea. There wasn't much going on either way. There was no bragging about it. There was no standing in the way of a person. There was this fellow who continued to make his turpentine--gasoline or whatever he used--torch and put it around at various places.

Mangrum: You mean like crosses or bombs?

Matthews: No, it was a cross. He had a system. We have not talked about the committee that came on Friday afternoons. I think that that committee--the kinds of things they talked about, the fact that they came to me in place of going to somebody else, the persistency of their coming--they had the initiative. They were not called to come, but there was an occasion when I sent for them. Never, I guess, were there more than six--anywhere from three to six--though the number of people who had been there in the course of a semester would tend to be more than fifteen or so. That gives you a sort of background.

They were working on, "What do you think about our doing this?" or "What would you think if we did so and so?" It was not a belligerent sort of thing; it was a conference or give-and-take arrangement that was as good a relationship as you could imagine between a group of undergraduate students and the president of the institution. No rush--we took all the time we needed; no appointments (chuckle)--they just walked in. They didn't say, "We'll be back next Friday." We just got down to a conclusion. I don't know whether you've been down to the president's office. I guess it's the same size it was. Maybe they have cut it down some. Anyway, it's a big office with a fireplace over on one side, settees and

whatnot. We sat around the mantle and talked and worked back and forth. We didn't have notebooks. We just sat there and talked. That happened. . . it must have been a two or three-year period in which this was the vehicle for me and for them. They got messages to other people, and I got messages to other people and so on. We were thinking things out; we're doing a problem-solving kind of thing.

Mangrum: Was this about 1956? '57? '58? When did it start?

Matthews: Well, I think it started. . . you see, it would have been after '56 because there was not that many people. It started in, I would say, '57 or '58 . . . maybe '58 or '59. No, I'd say '57 or '58 would be more likely the year in which this started being a regular sort of thing. We worked on living outside of the university--more about ways of working in connection with looking for a place to stay and so on than about rules and whatnot. I think we had pretty well agreed that rules were not going to get us anywhere; rules were going to be in our way.

In here (Matthews' folder) there's one place where a student--president of the student body--explained to the students in general what the policy was: "Integration Policy Defined" (headline of article in Campus Chat). He was saying that "We worked with the people off the campus who have a house to rent, whatnot. We do not have a rule saying we'll

ask them or we'll pressure them to take someone. But we will try to find out who they are and work with them about conditions under which we'd like to see them work," and this kind of thing. He said he was representing me--and I don't find any fault with anything he said in this whole thing--but I don't remember his having any kind of a permit from me to take that position. I didn't find any fault, as I read the thing the other day, with the position he was describing, so he knew what the position was at any rate.

Mangrum: You bring out a point there that is maybe unclear. The women's dorms were integrated that summer of '56, I believe. When were the men's dorms integrated, or was this a slow process? If so, where did the blacks stay until then?

Matthews: Very soon. . . the first time somebody applied (chuckle), he stayed in the dormitory with men. . . so long as we had dormitories. We didn't have as many dormitories for men then as we have now, so that was harder to do so. We had to go outside. Outside was a bigger problem. Number one was finding the places; that's so for both the whites and blacks. If you went outside, the lists and the distances and all those things were involved. So that got to be a more complicated matter. In our policy there was not going to be any distinction made so long as we had a place, beginning with the two in the summer and coming on down the line. It was only a matter of a place and so on.

Mangrum: What I understood from some of the articles I looked at was that Abner Haynes and this other walk-on stayed with relatives. Is that correct?

Matthews: Yes. I think that was. . . see, we already had people in the women's dormitories at that time. To have stayed with the football group would have been easier to handle than to have been a regular member, so it wouldn't have made any sense for us not to have done this. I suppose it was partly a matter of price. I don't think that they had made the arrangements--all of their financial arrangements--before they came to us at all. The living arrangements and the financial arrangements were of their own making.

Mangrum: So it wasn't because they couldn't enter the dorm due to a previous policy?

Matthews: No. No. Right.

Mangrum: Moving from dormitories, athletics, and music and theatre groups or other campus organizations--unless you care to comment on campus organizations and the integration to them --I would like to look at any problems, if any, which developed among the faculty or the staff concerning academics and discipline--the normal problems any student might face at college.

Matthews: Well, we didn't have any separate policy brought about because of this. I think we probably should make a statement of what our general policy was and then discuss how we worked it into our everyday activities. This sheet (gesture) dated June 18, 1956. . . this is after two women are in Marquis Hall and after Mrs. Sephas had completed her semester and we had a summer school with--I don't know how many--several people in summer school. I don't know the background of just how this statement happened to be made. It was made to the faculty, and I think it was at a faculty meeting. But I think it was one of a number of things on the occasion of the faculty meeting. I said, "Whenever a public school or a college or university has been integrated, either by court order or voluntary action, the students and the faculty, the community and individuals of both pro and con views, have all gained when the step was taken with a minimum amount of discord. It behooves all of us to make a special effort to stand behind the board in this step, as we never have stood behind it in any other." Now this was the heart of our policy business. I know that is general, but that was the way we kept it, as a matter of fact. We went, then, from individual cases to this as our backlog, and we built on these things one by one as they came along.

Then we never did have any incident of any kind or consequence at all until some members of the faculty--two or three--said to the students. . . they started meeting with a group similar to this one that I had been meeting with, only they were saying to the group, "Things are too quiet here. You need to stir things up." Then they started thinking about ways in which they could stir things up. One of the things they did was to work with people outside. . . this was a situation outside. In other words, they didn't work on what was happening to blacks on the campus; it was what was happening or not happening to blacks off the campus.

The picture show incident is the one that came about on account of this activity. It was some time in the making. The whole semester of the fall of '61 was used in this conferring with the students and promoting an idea of doing something. They went to the Campus Theatre, and there were about twenty in the line. They got in line to go to buy a ticket, and a boy--white boy--would go up to the counter with his arm around a black girl and say, "I want two tickets--one for me and one for my date." This was to antagonize and to bring about difficulty and so on.

Mr. Harrison had already been to talk, and he was trying to find a time, but he decided this wasn't any time with that kind of thing going on. So he formed another line for people

to go in who were not in this one.

I was not there, but the people who were there were from twenty to sixty people that was favoring going in and opposing going in. Now the ones who went in were lined up in one thin line outside. Across the street there was a two-story building with a sort of deck above the two stories. On that deck there were some ten or twelve or more fellows with high-powered rifles. In the glove compartments (of cars) of the people in the line, there were guns of various sorts. As far as I know, there was no gun on anyone in the line, but I'm not sure about that.

At the curb there was a car parked--I guess the parking was done for a specific reason, but it was also done in violation of the law, so it was maybe done in order to try to provoke another element into the thing. He was on the north side, when this was a two-way street, facing east, which made him on the wrong side of the street facing the wrong direction. The people were leaving the line and coming to him and then going back and doing another kind of thing that they hadn't been doing before. In other words, they were getting instructions about what to try now.

So Mr. Cross, the owner of the Denton Record-Chronicle, was there. I don't know whether Tom Kirkland, the editor,

was there. His letter says Mr. Cross was there all the time; it doesn't say he was there. I suppose he was not there, but Mr. Cross was there. He was working to cool the incident down to keep from having anyone killed--this kind of thing. Now I think I ought to tell you a little bit about his background. He was owner of the Sherman paper when (a mob in) Sherman burned the courthouse in order to burn a black who was on the fifth floor of the courthouse.

Mangrum: In the jail?

Matthews: In jail. He, at that time, had much the reaction that I had on other things, except it was more acute, being as involved as that was. But early in this matter, he and I started working with each other. We had not worked to any extent before, but this brought together two fellows who thought that the thing should happen, but that we should do it in such a way that it demonstrated how this kind of business ought to be done.

He was going saying to them, "Now I think we need to go on home and forget about this. This is no way to do things. This is not the way. We've not come down to this point." They were saying to him, "What do you think the president would do if we stormed the place and went in there and took our seats?" He said, "I think you would be in the same trouble that the fellows on the other side over

yonder would be if they stormed across the street and took you fellows and manhandled you and so on. I think he would be in favor of the ones, on whichever side it is, that try to do the right thing and against the ones, whichever side he was on, who didn't do the right thing." They said, "Will you go call him?" He said, "Oh, I can just tell you now that'll be the way he stands on it. I know. We've talked about this a lot of times. I'd just been a little hesitant to say it that way, but that's the way it is." So they stood around a little while and went home.

The (Denton) paper had a very mild report the next day, trying not to incite anybody and not to cause anybody to do something that they'd regret all the rest of their lives. He (Cross) says here, one, "Mob action is not the proper way. The Campus Theatre is a private business and has the right to operate the business." And he says that "The Record-Chronicle has known about this demonstration since last Thursday about the plans for going sometime." This happened to be the time. They (the students) had made two dates among themselves at which they would go, and they didn't have enough people to show up to go, and they would adjourn--three one time, four or five another time. This time there were about twenty according to my understanding of it

Mangrum: And you're quoting from the Record Chronicle--an editorial?

Matthews: Right. The day after the stand-in. The Dallas Morning News or some other papers--I think the Dallas Morning News was in that because there is a letter to Mr. Joe Dealey and he was with the Dallas Morning News--wanted more information and tried to get more information. There was a series of exchanges between the Record-Chronicle and the Dallas Morning News and the AP on proper procedure for this kind of thing. I have to say that Mr. Cross and Mr. Kirkland came through with that, living up to the principle I've been holding myself, as consistently as if I'd been writing the script right on through. Now I think they had much to do with the fact that the other papers didn't do as much about it as they would have otherwise. But they worked hard on that, and they went all-out on it, and they withstood their own impulse at the time to tell all.

But in Tom's letter--Tom Kirkland's letter--to Joe Dealey, he said, "It was a much more serious matter than has been hinted in anything that has been published. There was no violence, but as you might guess, the air was tense to the point of being razor-sharp." Now he did not say anything about guns, but it was the guns that concerned everybody, and particularly Mr. Cross, because he had seen what can happen when you have a mob turned loose.

Mangrum: To sum up this particular incident and then to broaden it a little bit, the Denton Record-Chronicle--its role, its attitude in the whole matter of integration, not just North Texas but, I guess, it laps over into Denton, too--how would you describe this newspaper's role?

Matthews: When you say "into Denton," I think that Mr. Cross would have said, as he said, I think, in that editorial, that a private firm has the right to have something to say with its policies and so on. That made that a different matter. But he was proud of the fact that Denton had allowed a good base for an integration to take place here, and he was proud of the fact that we had been willing to do that without fanfare and that we had, in fact, resisted the fanfare all the while. I don't know of the times when he and I sat down and had a cup of coffee and just chatted a little while. When I left, I thought, "This would never have happened had it not been for the fact that we had had the background and experience that had brought us to a point that made us a team on this occasion. And I couldn't have had a better teammate." That's the feeling. And Tom Kirkland was almost like a son to me--had been long before this and was long afterwards. You will find a whole page--after this whole thing was over--having nothing to do with this unless it came up incidentally, where he was doing a story about my

administration at North Texas. He and I still write. He's in California and has been for quite a while. We are very, very close friends, but we had been when he was an undergraduate student and had gone on through the same way. Was there some other thing there?

Mangrum: No, I think that answered that particular question. Moving to another area to just get a little bit more detail out of it. . . going back to the faculty and the academic standards, were there any problems? Was there any resistance on the part of the faculty to the idea of integration?

Matthews: When the students first came, their attitude was, "I just want the opportunity to come. I don't want any favors. I want to do the work," and this type of thing. That was . . . the first couple of years the only thing I ever heard was the students' point of view. Now and then, of course, the faculty would normally say, "Well, that one didn't do very well, but he tried hard, his attitude was good, and I'm glad I got to work with him," and this type of thing. The matter of readiness to do the work came up often because, well, some of them were surprised that they couldn't meet the competition they found with their fellow students. They realized they hadn't met it and so on, and they said, "We're going to have to dig in and work and do something about this."

I would say that went all the way down to the time when this fellow started saying, "Things are going too well. Let's stir things up." Then when you stir things up on one side, you also stir things up on the other side. People started raising questions about it and moved in to say, "I'm disturbed that all but two of the eight or ten in my class are going to have to have an 'F.'" I want you to see this grade sheet before I send it in," you know, that type of thing more than a matter of saying, "Oh, he just wasn't ready to do it," and passing it off--a conscientious matter, real regret that the grade couldn't be any higher. But I do not recall one that would say, "Well, he didn't earn any more than an 'F,' but, of course, I had to give him a 'C.'" This came only later.

Mangrum: You didn't have anybody, then, who would give them a "free

ride" as far as a grade?

Matthews: That came later (chuckle).

Mangrum: By later, you mean the 1960's?

Matthews: Well, way into the sixties. Yes, that was not a thing that was done. I guess that you would have to get into the student dissident area to get down to that point.

Mangrum: How about any faculty. . . when integration first started, obviously, this is an all-white school. Were any of the faculty so resentful of the fact that the school was going to

integrate that they just said, "Well, we'll just flunk them to prove that they're inferior," etc., etc.?

Matthews: No. No, sir. I don't know that. . . I think that I could probably say there were a few that assumed that they weren't going to be able to do good work or that most wouldn't be able to do good work. We were fortunate in that Tennyson Miller was a good student. He had a masters degree from a recognized institution. If you'd meet him and talk with him, you didn't have to be told--you knew that he knew how to use the English language. The two ladies from Wichita Falls, Mrs. Sephas, all those early ones except Abner (chuckle). Abner had a real trouble with English. I don't think he ever passed it. But I know he was having real, real trouble with English. He'd get excited, and he would go into a language (chuckle) that you wouldn't recognize. It just was pouring out. He was a very excitable sort of fellow. It was the same way on the football field--an exceptionally good player if he didn't drop the ball (chuckle).

Mangrum: As more black students began to enroll at North Texas, was this noticeable that a large percentage of them were coming from a poor educational background that they were having difficulty, or is this an assumption on my part?

Matthews: I'm not certain how that chart would run, but I think that as the numbers got up to as much as 250 that the percentage

--not just the number of people but the percentage--got higher because you're cutting across more. At first you're getting people who'd gone to other schools and who'd gone to first-rate colleges outside the state, etc. Next we were getting people who were coming straight from black high schools. When we started getting people in any sizeable numbers from black high schools, I am sure that the documents would show that not only the numbers increased, but the percentage of the people who couldn't do good work increased.

Mangrum: Was there any policy in determining the number of black students that were allowed to enroll at North Texas?

Matthews: The policy was to admit them as you admitted everybody else and to admit them only when they had the "book" documents that a white person would have. Now you couldn't go back of the book document that came to you because at the first there was not a standard test that all students took and so on, and you had to depend on the grades of the sending school. Now that, therefore, was quite a different thing because the grades at the black school was comparing blacks with blacks, and also the upgrading of the faculty in the black schools hadn't taken place at that time. So there was a weakening all the way across the board. I think everyone recognized that. But the attitude . . . the policy, if you want to reduce it to a policy thing, was, "We will not do anything for a person because he's black

or just because he's black." That stayed. . . that was still there on the books--you can't keep a teacher from doing a little differently--but the policy, stated time and again, was, "They haven't asked to be treated differently; they've asked to be treated equally." That's the way I think it still should be because they're going to have to do the work when they get out that this document says they can do, or they'll be up against another problem that's maybe bigger than the one they had before.

Mangrum: So there was no quota or anything like that.

Matthews: No quota.

Mangrum: Once integration had been--for want of a better term--successfully implemented. . . I mean, that's an ongoing process. . .

Matthews: I challenge that part (chuckle).

Mangrum: . . . it was noted in several documents, newspapers, etc., that the number of black students enrolled at North Texas continued to increase. As increases continued to be faster than any other state school, it is now (1977), numbering in percentage of black students, higher at North Texas. Why do you think this is so?

Matthews: Well, we are within thirty-five miles of two cities. They are two cities that have a rather high percentage of blacks in the community, and I think that the attitude that people developed about North Texas in the '50's carried over to them and still,

I think, carries over to them, and they felt like they'd be welcome. They knew friends who'd gone here. For instance, the ones at Wichita Falls knew the ones in Dallas, etc., etc. And no one has changed this statement on policy. Today we still are trying to deal with them as fairly as we can, I think. I imagine there's some instances where that isn't so, but that's the general policy. These things get around from mouth to ear (chuckle) until it gets to be understood. They tell each other what they found and so on. I think that is basically what it's all about.

Mangrum: To sum it up, you might say North Texas has a "good press" in relating to how black students are treated or their place within the university community.

Matthews: I would say so. Yes, I would.

Mangrum: One more question and then we'll wind it up. Going back for a moment, the motive for Atkins trying to come to North Texas, the motive for Mrs. Sephas and other black students coming-- would you say that's the same? Or specifically was Atkins trying to make this a test case, or did he honestly wish to come to North Texas?

Matthews: The woman who came with Atkins when he came to the campus for the first time was, as I understand it, Mrs. Tate. As I recall, Mr. Tate was an attorney in Dallas who handled some integration matters later on. That is all I can say for certain about

the background. Now it may be that the name is not right, but the woman who came had an association with an attorney, and she let that be known to Dr. Sampley, the vice-president, who was the one who first saw them. Then he came in and said, "Come in. We need to have a visit here." So I would say that he came intending to get in, even if he had to sue. Our hands were tied because we had the board say to us before that, "Let's be sued." So. . . well, we knew that'd be the answer. I think I went to them assuming that was going to be the answer. As I said it awhile ago, I think that I went to talk with them afterwards. I would have hoped that they would have said, "Let's do that the way we did Tennyson Miller." In fact, I recommended that, but I knew then that I was probably going to be representing a losing case because they'd pretty well made up their minds about it before that time.

Mangrum: Is there any reason that the board wanted to take the case to court or be sued?

Matthews: I guess they didn't realize what I thought was a fact--and I still believe was a fact--that when you do a thing under orders, you're at a loss; you're handicapped. They were not on the grounds and having to be on the grounds, and I think they didn't realize the full impact of going under an order. The Alabama case is another matter. They were going under order, and I think whenever the people went under order, they went with more

handicaps than if they'd come voluntarily and were admitted without any contest. I think it was just a matter of not having the conviction that this thing. . . I think they had a conviction that "this thing is going to happen," but that "we ought to make it happen the best possible way if it's going to happen; we ought to take some initiative about how and when and where we do that." Our volunteer ones in front of Atkins were good things to have in the background--helped us out a lot, I think.

Mangrum: Did the board members, when they instructed you to refuse Atkins admission. . . I believe they had already or were in the process of approving a plan of integration of the campus. Did they feel that was the way they desired for the school to integrate?

Matthews: Well, that was the recognition of the thing being before us. See, we were very crowded at that time--in buildings, in staff. We had gone from 4,300 to 7,000 or 8,000 in three or four years' span; this nearly doubled in the three or four years' span. That's fast growth. At the same time, we were not getting to grow with buildings and so on. This building was the first one that was built after the regular ones were completed quite some time back.

Mangrum: This building, meaning the new administration building.

Matthews: The administration building, yes, on campus. We were short of office space, short of teaching space, short of space all over. We were not in the difficulty of having doctorate and masters degree level people come as much as we were undergraduate people. Especially in the wintertime. A doctorate class would be five people or something like that, and we'd be glad to have five more, you know. Masters degree classes were smaller. So they had a reverse--start with the doctorate people, masters people, seniors, juniors, etc.--and in the meantime we'd be building buildings and whatnot and be ready. That was the basis of their plan.

Mangrum: So it wasn't actually--from what you've said, I get the impression --it wasn't actually opposition to integration per se; it was more "we have to do it slow because we just don't have the facilities."

Matthews: Right. In the summer of 1935 when we had the first masters degree people on the campus, we had 500 people. We were remembering that. We were just beginning to get the doctorate program underway. Suppose we had just an on-rush. In addition to the on-rush we had in the undergraduate work, we were growing faster than we wanted to, and we needed some kind of logical steps--manageable steps. This we saw as a means of doing that. They had developed the gist of that plan just weeks before Joe L. Atkins--while Tennyson Miller was on the grounds (chuckle) and everything. I think, because of the way

in which the Tennyson Miller matter was handled, that they took that step, and then they didn't want to be pushed beyond it. But they were in the process of developing this step. We had not adopted it, but we were all pretty well agreed on what could happen and the need to have some kind of policy like that and trying to get some refinement into it, etc.

Mangrum: Finally then, from the benefit of hindsight, looking back at it from 1977, would you have done anything different in the 1950's concerning the issue of integration at North Texas?

Matthews: (Chuckle) Well, I'm not sure that I would. When you take into account that what you do might also cause other people to do something opposite to what you would hope. . . we saw that in several different cases. This matter of the TV--the fellow was in favor of integration, you see, but he wanted to be in favor of it more than anybody (chuckle). That meant that he was going to do it harm. He could only do it harm by causing some students in the class to look at Mrs. Sephas as they wouldn't look at her before, for instance. They'd do Mrs. Sephas harm and do the student harm because he might take an attitude that he'd have to stand by or feel he'd have to stand by. So it was that kind of thing you had to bear in mind as well as. . . "If you leave it alone, it'll move slower or it will move faster in some respects," whatnot, "but if you tamper with it. . ." this was what I was saying to the faculty at

first and then what I was saying to the town people later on that. "If you tamper with it, you get an artificial situation and you get one in which some people will take harsher means of responding than they would take otherwise, and the opposite of what you want them to take."

Most of the people in town agreed academically. I'd say they would come into third echelon--students first, faculty next, townspeople next in the matter of acceptance or an actual basis--not on theoretical basis, you see. Some people surprised themselves when they got into the actual. . . one person. . . we had the first black elected to homecoming queen.

Mangrum: When was that?

Matthews: I'm sure. . . I don't know.

Mangrum: Was it prior to 1960?

Matthews: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We'd crossed all kinds of hurdles before 1961. This matter surprised some people. When they found out there was a nominee, I was asked, "What are you going to do about it?" I said, "Just what I do about all nominees. I've never raised any question about a queen nomination." And they looked at me but didn't quite agree sometimes.

Then their next surprise was that the students elected her--not only elected her but overwhelmingly elected her. The next reaction was, "Oh, that dear little girl who didn't

get elected! What will she think of herself?" I said, "She understands the mood of the students better than you do, I think." There was never any complaint on the part of the students about it. It was a landslide election and taken as such and that was that.

But Mr. Wooten was over here, and he and I rode in the car together. I'll never forget the look on his face when he saw this black girl, with a crown on her head (chuckle) and so on, sitting on the back of. . . the turtle back of the car to go into the parade. Well, he said after while, "Well, do you think that's going to be all right?" And I said, "I think that the students are ready. I don't think they're going to worry--they elected her." "Oh," he said, "Yeah, that's right."

Well, we went down and around the square and so on. I do not recall any kind of incident, any kind of embarrassment for her, anything of this kind. I guess there must have been 10,000 people out to see the parade, and there was no incident.

No, I don't believe that I could, even with hindsight, go back and say, "This ought not to have been done," or "We could have avoided this one." Suppose I had gone to Mr. Ritter. I knew what he was saying to the students, and I didn't choose to go to Mr. Ritter and say, "Look out now. You're getting off base."

Mangrum: He's the one that was involved at the Campus Theatre crisis?

Matthews: That's right. You see, I didn't go to see him. That would have been a normal reaction, I guess, but that was not consistent with what we were trying to do. He knew what we were trying to do. There's no doubt but what he knew what we were trying to do, but he didn't agree with that, and he was going to take it another direction.

Mangrum: He wanted to do it faster?

Matthews: Yes. He wanted to do it more dramatically; he wanted to have a more violent reaction and so on.

Mangrum: And the national media would be involved?

Matthews: National media and whatnot.

Mangrum: You mentioned Mr. Wooten's reaction to the black homecoming queen. Was he normally in favor of what was going on, or was he. . . what was his reaction?

Matthews: Oh, yes. Surprise, you see. This thing, in the reality, for the first time in a person's life, is a little different to what. . . he's not ready. He thinks he is, you know, but he's not ready. This is what I meant. No, he was originally from deep East Texas--Kempson and so on. His background had been quite different than mine on that score. No, he had gone along on all of the steps. You see, we had not written any script saying, "Homecoming queens may be black"; nor had we said, "Blacks may be on the football team"; nor had we said, "Blacks

may be in the dormitory"; nor had we said, "Blacks may do this or that," you know--other kinds of things. But he had been in favor of the way in which it was turning out.

The whole board. . . see, I started out saying. . . no board member, I thought, was in favor of this business to begin with." At the end I'll say, "I do not know of a board member who is opposed to the way we did the thing right on down the line." I never did get chastised for a single step that we took on down the line, although I think nearly everyone of them would have been a little bit tense about it if it had been a decision-making thing in which they made the decisions to do it. I think an administrator has a role to play over and above the leadership of his board--to get them to go in directions that he thinks they ought to go when they wouldn't go that way otherwise. I think that is the biggest obligation an administrator has--is to get his board to see things it wouldn't see otherwise. There is a give-and-take thing, and they're trying to get him to see things he might not realize (chuckle) because they see it from the layman's point of view, etc. Through all of this, I wouldn't like to create the impression that the board and I were having trouble--we were not. This is not part of the problem. But there were occasions when we didn't agree, and we laid the thing right out on the

line and came to grips with how we'd go about it and what we'd do. They were. . . I think "proud" would be the word you'd have to use. They were proud of the way that whole thing turned out. They were proud that North Texas was the leader in the state of Texas on this. But they never would have nominated themselves for that role, I don't think, on their own. Not only as a board, but no one else.

No faculty member, no student, no one else was pushing me to take this as a thing to try to accomplish. That was on my own initiative strictly--backed up, of course, by the time in which we lived, the conditions under which we lived, what I thought would be the consequences if we didn't do this. I thought it would be much worse if we had to drag our feet at every step. I wouldn't change that.

The only thing about that is that I would change the board's instructions on Joe L. Atkins and would have had him come on without contest. But I think that worked out just as well. See, I didn't make any to-do about it. No one knew . . . I guess Dr. Sampley was the only one who knew what was in my mind and so on at that stage because I wasn't saying to people, "I'm gonna ask the board to admit Joe L. Atkins." I was saying what I had to say to the board at that stage.

Mangrum: Did Atkins ever enter North Texas?

Matthews: No.

Mangrum: In conclusion, is there any summing up or last comments you would like to make at the end of this interview?

Matthews: No, I don't think so. I believe every point that I would make has been made--maybe quickly at some stages. But I believe every item that I would think about as an element in it has been met.

Mangrum: Okay, I want to thank you so much, Dr. Matthews.