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Interview with

FRED GRAHAM

March 16, 1984

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello
Randy Cummings

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Approved: *Fred Graham*
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Fred Graham

Interviewers: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello Date of Interview: March 16, 1984
Mr. Randy Cummings

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello and Randy Cummings interviewing Fred Graham for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 16, 1984, in Denton, Texas. We are interviewing Mr. Graham in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions during the integration of athletics at North Texas State University.

Fred, to begin this interview, just very briefly give us a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell us when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Graham: Okay, I was born on November 21, 1934, in Paris, in Lamar County, Texas. I attended public schools there. I attended North Texas State University--then North Texas State College. I worked in the print shop in the old journalism building to work my way through school.

Then in my senior year, I was invited by Dr. James

L. Rogers to become an assistant in the News Service. In those days it was a two-person operation. Jim was the writer, and Dude McCloud was the photographer, and he relied on students to handle the sports end of it. Curiously enough, just for your record, Bill Moyers was one of many who had handled the sports beat for Dr. Rogers from time to time. I took a pay cut to move out of the print shop and into the News and Information Office as a senior. Not that it necessarily matters here, but I had won a Texarkana Gazette scholarship in journalism that required that I learn some graphic art, and that's how I'd ended up learning the print shop business, which, as it turned out, was very valuable to me.

I graduated from North Texas State University in 1957 and had been accepted for Naval OCS. The reserve complement changed such that I did not have to report, and I chased a college coed all the way to San Angelo and went to work for the San Angelo Standard Times.

From there I went to the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, and on my first day on the job at the Star-Telegram, Jim Rogers called me and asked me to come back to North Texas full-time as the first sports information director, and that would have been on September 1, 1959.

Marcello: You mentioned, from what I gather, that you only worked for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram for one day then?

Graham: Jim Trinkle always said I was the smartest man that ever worked for the Star-Telegram because I lasted only two weeks. I really couldn't even give them a two-week notice. What had happened was that "Flem" Hall--bless his heart--and Lorin McMullen and Bill Van Fleet had been after me for a long, long time to move from San Angelo to Fort Worth. The girl I chased to San Angelo...we had ended up getting married and having our first son. Back in those days, you did not make a lot of money in the newspaper business, and the Fort Worth Star-Telegram or the Dallas Morning News or whomever felt like you ought to work for them from a prestige standpoint. But when you had one in diapers, you didn't always agree with it.

Anyway, Jim Trinkle and I were working the Odessa Pro-Am together, and I was still at San Angelo. He in essence told me that they were getting tired of coming after me, and I better not turn them down this time. So they did make what I thought was a suitable offer, and I went to work...my first son was born in May of 1959, and I went to work for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram on August 17, 1959. My first day on this job, I was to go down and meet Mr. McMullen and Mr. Van Fleet and Mr. Hall. They were having a staff meeting, and the phone rang. Fortunately, I was sitting there reading that day's paper, and the switchboard operator came on. I picked the phone up. I didn't want to interrupt

their meeting. She said, "We have a long distance phone call here for a Fred Graham, and I've never heard of him." I said, "Well, this is he. This is my first day on the job." She said, "I'm sorry. I look forward to meeting you. I'll put your call through." I said, "Fine." And I said, "Hello." He said, "Freddy?" I said, "Yes." He said, "This is Jim Rogers." He said, "The special session of the legislature just ended, we got the appropriations, and Dr. Matthews has given us the green light to hire a full-time sports information director. I told you when you left that I'd give you a chance. I asked you if you would be interested, and you said, 'Yes,' so here's your chance." I said, "Dr. Rogers, you told me that was going to be three years, and it's only been two." He said, "Well, when can you come up and visit?" I said, "I don't know. I haven't even gone to work. I'm just waiting to meet people." That was a Monday, and Sunday started the workweek; so I already had one day off, and they said, "Your next day off is Wednesday," and I said, "Fine."

So I called Rogers collect that night at home from a pay phone. I didn't want anybody at the Star-Telegram to hear me. I told him, "I'm off Wednesday." He said, "Fine." We had a meeting with President Matthews on a Wednesday at about eleven o'clock, and he told me they had arranged to pay me \$4,400 a year for ten-and-a-half months and that for

six weeks in the summer I was not going to be on the payroll. I said, "Well, I didn't know whether I could do that or not." Dr. Matthews said, "Well, just be patient. I can't put it in writing, but we'll see that you get the contract extended." He said, "Will there be any other problems?" I said, "Well, that's not as much as I'm making at the Star-Telegram." He said, "Well, I think your future is better here. Do you have any other problems?" And I said, "Yes, I do." He said, "What's that?" I said, "Well, I just went to work over there Monday." He said, "Yes, I understand that, but we're hiring you as a public relations specialist. We're going to find out right off the bat, aren't we, just how good you are in dealing with the press." I said, "I guess you are."

So on Thursday I go back to work. "Flem" Hall had hired me, and unfortunately "Flem" had sneaked out early that day to play golf. I didn't want to tell anybody that I had verbally agreed to this job, so finally on Friday morning...I worked until about one o'clock a.m. I got up on Friday, and I wanted to make sure I got there before "Flem" left for lunch or to go play golf, so I got there before noon the next day. He was very nice about it, but I had just given an eight-day notice, I guess, as it turned out.

Marcello: Let's go back to those years in Paris. Describe as best as you can remember what the atmosphere was in Paris relative

to race relations and attitudes toward blacks and things of that nature back during that time when you were a boy growing up.

Graham: Oh, it was a very, very segregated community. There was an all-black school there called Gibbons High School, and if I recall correctly, there was also an adjacent grade school building in the next block or maybe even on the same grounds. It was a very, very segregated community. There was never any covert racism and any covert physical hatred or whatever like that. It was just such a totally separate society that there was just really no dialogue between them.

Marcello: So among most people, then, there was no race hatred, but there was a strong belief that each race had its place?

Graham: Well, I think there was...no, now don't get me wrong, I don't think it ever fermented into any...

Marcello: ...physical violence.

Graham: ...violence or any demonstrations or KKK. It was a harshly segregated existence. It was so segregated that it was really not a topic of daily conversation. I mean, it just never occurred to you. I can recall that at the age of thirteen or fourteen...and I can almost tell you exactly when. It was the Brooklyn Dodgers' World Series in 1947. I can remember going to my uncle's farm to pull bolls in October. It was after the cotton had already...the cotton stalks had already died, so you just jerked off the cotton

and the bolls as well, and we were pulling bolls. The times that I would go out and do farm work at my uncle's farm was one of the few times I would really ever come in direct contact with blacks. The only other time would be when my dad worked at the Post Office, and there was a handyman there. I suppose he was a janitor. I never thought of him as a janitor. I always thought of him as an affable friend of my father's. But where even in a town that size, looking back over it now, you wonder where in the world they were buying their groceries or where in the world they were getting medical attention or how in the world were they affording transportation. It was just such a segregated society that you didn't even think about it.

Marcello: Describe your contact with the black or blacks there on your uncle's farm. What do you remember about that?

Graham: The main thing I remember about that was...and I had been around farm life all my life, although, fortunately for me, it was never a day in and day out grind, but I'd been involved in working in the fields for whatever reason.

And the Dodgers were in their first World Series, and the games were going to be coming on the air at--I don't know --one or two o'clock in the afternoon. There was not television, of course. My uncle's farm was, oh, seven or eight miles out of town. In those days--and don't hold me to this--it seems to me like if you could pick 150 pounds

of cotton, you ought to be able to pull 250 or 300 pounds of bolls. I could never...I was probably 4'10" and weighed eighty-five pounds and hated it, anyway, and I was always flabbergasted at how quick the black farmhands could pick... all of them felt like they needed to pull 300 pounds or 400 pounds or 500 pounds per day, which were astronomical figures to me, but they would shorten their goals on that Saturday because the Dodgers were in the Series, and they were going to hurry home, and they were going to listen to Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella and Don Newcombe. They had made it a point that day, rather than be there from sunup to sundown, they were going to leave in time to get home and sit by the radio and listen to the Dodgers in the World Series. So I was awed with their cotton picking prowess and also their commitment to their beloved Brooklyn Dodgers, without knowing why, really.

Marcello: Do you recall what the attitudes of your parents were relative to race and blacks?

Graham: Oh, my mother is from Mississippi. Her grandfather was a large plantation owner in Mississippi, in the delta country, as a matter of fact. Apparently, it was a combination of alcohol and mismanagement and locusts and weather or whatever it was that they ended up--her forbearers--had ended up not being as well off as they once were. But I gathered from her mother--my grandmother--that they were, in fact, an

enterprising plantation that did employ slaves at one time. My mother had a very typical racist attitude for a girl who had grown up in the Mississippi delta and who was born in the year 1912.

My father was from Tennessee. He was born in Tennessee. I guess there was shown some bias there, but it never seemed as racial to me as my mother's attitude was. I never knew whether it was the border state; I never knew if it was because my father was in World War II. He didn't go overseas, but although the military was still somewhat segregated, he certainly had more opportunities to come in contact with them than she would have had growing up or as a mother raising children.

Obviously enough, I came up in a segregated, racially biased atmosphere both at home and in the community.

Marcello: What was the general term used when referring to blacks around Paris? Today, of course, we use the term "black."

Graham: "Nigger." I guess, had I been black at that time, something that would have been almost more insulting to me than that slang term would be the common mispronunciation of the word "Negro." Everybody called them "Nigra," as if it were spelled N-I-G-R-A.

If I can just jump ahead for a minute, it was, I suppose, somewhere along in the 1970's--in fact, it may have even been in the late 1970's, if I recall--that Temple Pouncy of the

Dallas Morning News called me and wanted to interview me on the same sort of topic that you guys are talking about, and, obviously enough, in that intervening twenty years, I felt more comfortable with myself and with what I perceived my attitudes could be about people and the various races. Although Pouncy's story was to be "a policy story" in terms of NTSU and the black athletes in terms of my experiences at NTSU during those formative years, you almost...I don't know whether anybody else does or not, but I feel guilty. It's rather a shallow brag to say that I've come a long way in twenty years because ostensibly the obvious question to ask you is, "Where in the hell were you twenty years ago?" That's one of the things that troubles me about...I used to get defensive as hell about Jerry Levias at SMU or James Cash at TCU or whoever the first one was at Houston... Westbrook, I suppose, was the first one. I used to get defensive as hell. Then the further along the transition of integration went, particularly in athletics at the college level, the further along we got into it the more it occurred to me that it would be presumptuous of me to say to the Dallas Morning News, "This is the way it was in 1956, or this was the way it was in 1959." I get real uncomfortable. You know, although I can say that my own perspective of myself is that I made a lot of headway during that period of time, I'm really to the point anymore of where I don't like to

brag and say, "Well, NTSU was the first," or "I was there when NTSU was the first," because it has a shallow ring to it.

From a historical perspective, I'm sure that if you stopped to look at the whole picture, then you know why and all that kind of stuff, and yet if you were involved in it, you really don't always find it pleasant to discuss. I guess it's just kind of like my...I had an uncle who fought in World War II in the Pacific, and I could never understand why he would never want to talk about it. I used to say to him, "You need to tell me because you saw history in the making." I guess from his own microscopic view of what he was seeing, you don't know whether...well, have you done all you can do or does what you did really play a significant role? You just kind of get...I don't know...I just get reluctant to talk about it.

Marcello: I assume from what you've said, then, that you never really had any black friends as playmates or things like that when you were growing up?

Graham: No, No, I didn't. I was never around enough hatred in my family. In the family environment or the household environment I grew up in, I was never in an environment to where there was a hatred to a point to where I would ridicule them on the streets or throw rocks at them. I'm sure that went on. In fact, I know there was an incidence of that. I was never involved in anything like that.

The closest I could have come to that would have been about in the early 1950's--1951, 1952, 1953 and along in there. I had started working for the newspaper in the summertime after my freshman year in high school, believe it or not. That led from one thing to another to where I ended up being the public address announcer at Noyes Stadium in Paris. The stadium at that time--and I guess it still is--was located on the junior college campus. The local high school had its own workout facilities, and the black school had its own workout facilities, but everybody played at the junior college campus. I ended up with a job where I was the public address announcer for all high school football games at the stadium, for the grand sum of ...if I recall, I think I made \$5 a game. I would go out and make sure I had the correct names and numbers and pronunciation and with my squeaky adolescent voice get on that public address system.

I had become a first name acquaintance of...well, I had become an acquaintance by name with the high school football coach and with the owner of the black funeral home there. Coco-Cola was the major public address sponsor, but at the black high school games when the Gibbons Gophers were playing, one of the public address sponsors was Carl Ferguson's Funeral Home. He was almost a walking cliché. He was pot-bellied, gray-haired with a moustache, always

wore a coat and a tie, double-breasted coat, and had that certain swagger about him, and he had a lot of the native black ~~north-east~~ Texas slang about him. We would visit at length before every game because he would want to make sure that we had our signals right, so that when I started reading the commercial message on the public address during the Gibbons High games, he would circle the field. One of his ambulances or his only ambulance or hearse or whatever the hell it was would circle the cinder track with a light on. Invariably, Mr. Ferguson and I would screw up our signals because one night he had one of his young employees circling the track and kicking up cinder dust and even had the siren going, and there was this long touchdown play taking place. I don't know whether to try to tell who's scoring the damn touchdown or to read about Ferguson's Funeral Home (laughter). Through Gibbons High School and Carl Ferguson's Funeral Home and the Boy's Club...a guy by the name of Felix Gibson was the founder, actually, of the Boy's Club--founder of the Parks Department and later on founder of the Boy's Club there.

He was a guy who cared for what was happening at the park in the black part of town. He would pick me up in his old Jeepster. I don't know what they call them now, but it was the old...I haven't seen one for so long. It was a Willy's Jeep, I suppose, but it wasn't a jeep. It had

the panel truck kind of deal. I thought we called them Jeepsters. It was kind of like a panel truck. We could throw baseball equipment in it and the bags and the bats and the balls and the face mask and all that. His nickname, like anybody named Gibson in those days because of the "shoot 'em up" westerns, was "Hoot." "Hoot" probably had more impact on me than anybody in my lifetime, and I spent hours on hours on hours with him. Looking back over it, I can recall how he would always take time out in a really hectic, busy schedule to make sure he would go by and talk to the principal at the black high school, talk to the coach at the black high school, and make sure they had plenty of equipment at the park there that they ran in the summertime. He'd make sure the water fountains were working.

Although it was segregated, I always sensed that "Hoot" had a...if not a love for them, at least he had a care for them. I think he had some impact on me. As a matter of fact, he was the reason why I ended up in the newspaper business and why I ended up in the public address business and the parks business, because I was always doing things for him and most of it for money, thank goodness.

Marcello: So the blacks and the whites did use the same facilities there.

Graham: No not the same facilities, except for the games. Yes, they

would use the same stadium for the games, yes. That was a big event, and it was a popular event. It was a popular event even among...and I wish I knew for the sake of a comparison how Denton with Fred Moore High School was at the time, with Coach Collins. But I know in Paris in the early 1950's, the black high school would play on Thursday night. The high school would play on Friday night, and the junior college would play on Saturday night if they were all at home that same week. Gibbons High games were a big attraction.

Cummings: A predominantly black crowd?

Graham: Predominantly black crowds, but there were a lot of avid sports fans at those games. It was not a "Let's-go-laugh-at-the-baboons" crowd. It was a high school football game: "Let's go watch them play."

Cummings: Talk about the differences in the styles of football being played at that time period between the whites and the blacks, if there was any noticeable difference.

Graham: Oh, yes. When I was doing the public address thing for high school games in 1950...I don't remember the exact years, but it seems like I did them for two straight years ...maybe I only did them one year. I would assume it would have been the football season of 1951, 1952, along in there sometime. Not all of their helmets matched, and a lot of it, I'm sure, was money. Some of them would have white hats

on, and some of them would have purple hats on, and some of them would have gold hats on. They didn't wear lowtops. Of course, lowtops were not as prominent then as they are now. They all wore the hightops. There were face masks, if any. They ran more of a wide-open, helter-skelter offense that was probably ahead of its time. They were running exotic plays before anybody had the audacity to call them exotic. It was a fun deal, you know.

Their rules were a lot more lax. That was what they called the Prairie View Interscholastic League or the Prairie View UIL. A lot of people don't know this, but Joe Greene--Mean Joe Greene--as a junior and a senior at Dunbar High School in Temple, Texas, won the Prairie UIL shotput championships. So, I mean, as far as segregated high school athletics, you're not really...I am getting old, but we're not really talking about the Dark Ages here.

If you look at Coach Collins in Denton, for example, you can't say that that guy wasn't as capable a coach as the other people. He won consistently. You can say, "Well, with the caliber of play they have?" I really don't know. I assume it was his...well, I'll put it this way. Given their limitations of coaching staff, given their limitation of practice facilities, given their limitation of equipment, given the fact that most of the kids would not even go to

school and work out until after the cotton crops were in... which is true. I mean, they wouldn't even go to school. They'd never show up for school until October because that was their only way of making any income. They'd show up on Thursday night for a football game, and they'd be back out in the cotton field on Friday morning. Who's going to kick them out of the school?

Cummings: Did you catch any flak from your childhood peers for being a part of that black Thursday night football game production?

Graham: No, none at all. No, there was never any question on the part of my parents; there was never anything about, "Are you sure it's safe to go out there?" I just never thought anything of it. You know, I'd go in the Gibbons High dressing room before the games and talk to the coach, God rest his soul. I wish I could remember his name, or I wish I had looked back and found it and the principal's name. The principal's name was Givens. No, there was never... you know, I do know a couple of guys who were, oh, I'd say, anywhere from five to eight or ten years older than I was who would reveal to me later on that they saw me at the game, and to them it was kind of an excuse to go beer drinking and to get some laughs. There was never any "you shouldn't be doing that."

You know, the sin of acute segregation was there, and yet there was not the daily reminder that it was being done

with malice. That's the only way I know to say it. If the Chamber of Commerce of the mayor or the aldermen or whatever were in cahoots on taking political or social or economic steps that were oppressive to the blacks, in my background of growing up so I just never observed anything. There was just a highly structured segregated community, but there was never the outburst of malice. It just never happened.

Cummings: During that same period, when you were in high school and junior high, did you ever question either to yourself or to your childhood peers or to your parents why this segregation was there?

Graham: Oh, yes, Yes, you...

Cummings: Or did you just accept it as mere fact and went about your life?

Graham: Oh, well, there are a hell of a lot of things that interest you in your life from the time you're born until the time you're sixteen without worrying about what's going on in the political, social, and economic world around you. There was a period of time there when I was more interested in whether or not I could get on the golf course, either to caddy or to play, or whether or not we could get a pick-up tin can football game going with the other kids. You know, we didn't have any television; we didn't have any air conditioning. In the process of growing up, we were a hell of a lot more concerned about where we were going to be

Saturday afternoon when Kern Tipps started doing the Humble football game of the week--where were we going to be and where were we going to get the money to buy some soda pops or whose mother could we get to talk into making a gallon of lemonade to take over to ol' Joe Bob's house and listen to Kern Tipps do the Texas-Texas A&M football. I mean, hell, we didn't have any interest in girls; we were too busy for girls...or most of us were.

I think when it started getting to me a little was when I started doing the games at the stadium. It suddenly occurred to me. I got involved in the Parks and Recreation Department, not on a pay position so much as there were a lot of things I was doing for Mr. Gibson. I started seeing... I started going to "Nigger Town" once a day or twice a day to take equipment or to make a goodwill call to make sure they were happy; and I'm sure that someone would interject now and say, "Well, yes, but that was your way and Gibson's way and society's way of keeping them dumb and happy." That may or may not have been. When you're seventeen and eighteen years old, you don't know what's going on in the political world, anyway, and I don't know what the motivation was. It seemed honorable and decent to me that "Hoot" really cared about that part of the town.

Marcello: What was your impressions when you went over into the black section of town for the first time? Evidently, this was basically among the first times that you had gone over there,

that is, when you went with Gibson.

Graham: Yes. The thing that always puzzled me about it was how young the kids were in the park and the fact that there were not any kids out there my age. Of course, why, they were working. They were chopping cotton or gathering corn or hauling hay or pumping gas or mopping floors at stores or whatever they were doing to try to make a living.

I can recall vividly how surprised I was at three-thirty or four o'clock on a summer afternoon to find nothing but just very, very young kids at the black park. I guess at the time he was looking after three white city parks, and if you'd go there on an afternoon, there might be fifteen high school kids playing touch football or playing a scrub baseball game or pitching horseshoes or washers or playing badminton or whatever activities we had going on, and there'd be high school aged kids out there. You didn't see many black kids, and I think that was one of the things that...jumping ahead a little bit, I think air conditioning and television made the greatest impact on athletics, and I think that it changed a lot of attitudes about organized sports. I think it changed a lot of attitudes that later on impacted organized athletics.

Marcello: Can you explain that further?

Graham: Sure. As late as 1957, in Paris, Texas...and I'd already been gone away for college, but I had come back. I was

waiting on Navy OCS, as a matter of fact, and I'd come back and taken a newspaper job there filling in on some vacation in the summer of 1957, waiting to go to Naval OCS at Bainbridge, Maryland. You could begin to see it a little bit then. You could drive around school grounds, at the elementary or junior high or whatever...most of them were elementary schools. You could go by elementary school grounds, and you could drive by city parks, and you'd see activities going on. Ten years later, almost in a matter of ten years and maybe less, you could drive by those same parks, and there was nobody there. They're not shooting baskets and playing baseball. They don't have tow sacks full of sand for bases.

We used to have a game we called "Pepper." If there was just three of you or two of you, you played "Pepper." We had this old makeshift screen. Instead of there being a home plate and facing out, you'd turn around and get the guys up against the screen. We had mesh wire, and the top level of mesh wire was a home run. If you caught it coming off the wire, it's an out. If it hits the top strand of wire that ran across the old telephone post for the back-stop, it's a home run. The strand next to the top is a triple, and the next is a double. The bottom strand of wire was about three feet high, and that's a single. We'd play this hours on end--I mean, hours. We were doing that when

I was in college. I'd go home on the weekends, and there'd be "Pepper" games. The one thing that would have changed is that we might have been playing for a dime a game, and we might have had some beer in the car. Hell, we were still doing the same thing, and we'd have tournaments.

You'd go to the park ten years later, and nobody was there. They're not shooting baskets; they're not playing pick-up games. All of their activity now, rather than being creative and being put together by the kids themselves, is all organized with uniforms and schedules, and worst of all, particularly at twelve and under, you've got adults involved. That's impacted it. All the sudden now, everything is just "bottom line," see. You're supposed to win; you're supposed to get your name in the paper; you're supposed to get your picture in the paper; and you're supposed to get a trophy. It was no longer a case of being where you wanted to be and doing what you wanted to do because it was fun. That's really impacted athletics, and I think it's because of television and because of air conditioning.

Marcello: Of course, that sort of thing would have hit the white community much, much quicker than it would have hit the black community.

Graham: Sure, it did. It did. Oh, yes. See, as a matter of fact, that was one of the premier Boy's Club of America operations in the United States. I left there in 1953, 1954, 1955...

well, counting summers back and everything, I guess I finally left there in 1955. In 1957, I was there just a matter of weeks. I finally left there in 1955. The Boy's Club had already begun to integrate. The white kids weren't using it. They were already beginning to get the television set at home, to get air conditioning at home.

I can remember when my dad came home from World War II, and Paris had a minor league baseball team. Well, they had a minor league baseball team for several years running. You know, they had Class B all the way down to Class D. But I can remember my dad...we didn't have a car. This would have been about 1946 or 1947, which means I would have been twelve or thirteen years old. I can remember my dad walking home from work in the dead of summer and saying, "Would you boys like to go to a baseball game tonight and cool off?" We'd say, "Yeah." We'd walk thirteen or fourteen blocks, and Dad would pay fifty cents to get in, and we'd pay twenty-five cents to get in. We always sat in either the third base bleachers or the first base bleachers, depending on the wind direction. You never sat in the grandstand because you didn't get the wind blowing under your seat. The first places to fill up would be the bleachers because those were the coolest seats. That was your way of cooling off. Yes, if you tell somebody now, "Let's go to the ball park and cool off," they'll laugh at you. They'll either laugh at you or lock you up (laughter).

- Cummings: So when you got to North Texas, Denton and North Texas State was similar to Paris in that it was segregated and had predominantly a white environment.
- Graham: Yes.
- Marcello: Would it be safe to say that the percentage of blacks in Paris was a lot higher than in Denton, though?
- Graham: Boy, that's a good question.
- Marcello: That's something you'd have to estimate, of course.
- Graham: I'd have to go back and look in an old Texas Almanac. In the late 1950's, yes, I've got an idea that the percentage of black population was higher in Lamar County than in Denton County. I think that's a safe assumption. I wouldn't know how to estimate it, but I'm sure that's a safe assumption.
- Marcello: How did you decide to come to North Texas?
- Graham: Well, I ended up here like a lot of the great athletes did-- by accident (chuckle). I had been over here...I played competitive golf in high school, and our golf team had played in the regionals at the NTSU golf course my junior year, I guess it was, because in my senior year we played the regionals at Cedar Crest in Dallas. But, anyway, I played competitive golf, and I'd been to NTSU, and I knew at some point that I was going to be able to utilize a scholarship. I knew I could be able to at some point use a journalism scholarship. In the meantime, I had gotten a scholarship to go to Paris Junior College if I would play

competitive golf, so I went out there.

A friend of mine who, by my standards, had a lot of money was coming over here to see his girlfriend, and since I'd been to Denton and I knew the way, he asked me to ride over with him. He had made arrangements or his girlfriend had made arrangements at such-and-such a place, and I said, "Sure." His girlfriend lived in Kendall Hall, which was a girl's dorm at the time, and the Union is where it is now, but, of course, it was the old one with the asbestos shingles.

We'd gotten ourselves located, and he and I were walking his girlfriend back from Kendall Hall to the Union Building, and his girlfriend—I don't even remember her name—told me, "Are you still interested in journalism?" I said, "Yes." She said, "That's the journalism building." I said, "Oh, really?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Well, I'll catch up with you in a minute." I walked in and saw the pictures on the wall where they'd won all these awards, and I kind of walked around and stopped, and I got a drink of water.

Delbert McGuire walked up to me and said, "May I help you?" I told him I was visiting, and he said, "Well, would you like me to show you around?" I said, "Well, why not?" He showed me around. We walked through the print shop, and he introduced me to J.D. Hall, and J.D. said—typical old printer—he said, "Well, now, son, if you're going to learn

how to put out a newspaper, you need to know something about the printing end of it. So I thought I'd really impress him, and I said, "Well, Mr. Hall, I've won a Texarkana Gazette scholarship." I said, "One of the requirements is that I take a graphics course...graphic arts." He said, "Well we don't have any graphic arts." He said, "They've got some over in Industrial Arts, but they ain't worth a damn." He said, "If you want to learn something about graphic arts, you need to be in here." I said that I didn't know whether my scholarship would permit that or not. But, anyway, about a year or so later, I ended up at NTSU and had a super job in the print shop. Don Coppedge, who later on became John Connally's press secretary in his first gubernatorial race...he and I were in San Angelo together, and he went to Brownwood, and he was the publisher at the Waxahachie paper. They normally nicknamed me "Trash Can" because it was a typical old lever press print shop, you know, with the linotype machines, and, hell, we didn't know what computer typesetting was. You always had an old pair of bluejeans and an old T-shirt hanging in a locker in the print shop. It didn't matter whether you were going to work for one hour or ten. You weren't going to get anything but that ink all over you.

Marcello: During that time, of course, the school was segregated. When I say the school was segregated, there were no blacks at

North Texas when you came here.

Graham: Oh, had they already let some in at the graduate school level in the summer?

Marcello: They may have. Now if you graduated in 1957, you would have come here in 1953, I guess. Is that correct?

Graham: No, 1954, 1955...hell, I don't remember.

Cummings: I believe they started letting older graduate students in...

Graham: Yes, as I recall...and somebody would certainly remember better than I would. It may be in Jim Roger's book. If I recall correctly, even prior to the federal court hearing in Sherman, they were in fact going to summer school. Graduate black students were going to summer school. The first semester they took them as undergraduates, I assume, was Abner's first class. I assume he was in the first class. In fact, I know he was. I think they had been in school that summer before Abner enrolled in September, and I think maybe they'd even been in the summer before that. Abner enrolled in 1956. I know that graduate students, ostensibly black schoolteachers from Dallas-Fort Worth, had gone to school that summer for graduate courses. They may in fact have gone a summer earlier than that. I don't recall.

Cummings: Still, you didn't have any association with them in class or anything like that?

Graham: As a matter of fact, I honestly don't recall whether...I may have gotten out without having one in a class. The reason

why is that I was taking junior and senior level classes. I was a senior when Abner was a freshman, so there wouldn't have been the opportunity for...you just raised a question I have never posed myself. I honestly don't recall whether or not I had a class with them. I don't know.

Cummings: Since you mentioned this, tell us what you recall about the court order out of Sherman that opened the doors to undergraduate black students.

Graham: If I recall, that rendering was made...

Cummings: To help you, I believe it was made in the winter of 1955, 1956.

Graham: It had no impact on me whatsoever. I don't remember whether it came when we were on break or Christmas or whether I was in school, but I can recall it was never...

Cummings: It never bothered you--the fact that your school was suddenly going to have black students coming in.

Graham: No.

Marcello: Did you hear any talk around campus or in the print shop or over in the Journalism School relative to what implications this decision might possibly have in the future?

Graham: No, I really didn't. Don't ask me why. In terms of my getting up in the morning and getting a donut and a cup of coffee and going to my first class or going to work...I was no longer working in the print shop, but I was down there a lot. Anyway, in reporting to the News Service, which is what they called Public Information or News and Information

in those days, it was never of any consequence. You'd go home, and somebody would say, "Well, I see where they let niggers in over there," or something like that, but it was almost an expression of lazy speech as opposed to "well, you better get out of there." It just wasn't of any consequence.

Cummings: It wasn't looked at as a major news event that was going to change social...

Graham: But, see, you've got to remember now, when you're twenty-one or twenty-two years old, you're not interested in that pick-up basketball game on the school ground. You're interested in those good-looking girls in the Chat office. You've got to remember, also, we were sort of the "Flippant Fifties," you know. It was the greatest time of my life, and I don't recall us being concerned about it.

Marcello: Well, I think that's kind of significant in itself, Fred, don't you think? In other words, if people didn't think it was a very significant event, then perhaps that says something about the summer in which the whole integration process took place at North Texas. It was no big deal.

Graham: Oh, yes. In my little daily sphere, Ron, I think it said something about my professors, Cecil Shuford and Jim Rogers. I think it said something about my classmates' concern with it, and I guess that's a little unfair, too, because most of the crowd I ran with were juniors and

seniors. Some sophomore reporters were involved. But I guess it was easy for us to say that because we weren't in the classroom with them. That goes back to the point I was making earlier. You know, you hate to say, "Well, it was smooth and easy and all that," because you'd really have to ask them. In my only daily struggle to make it academically and financially, it was never a conscious event for me. We were a hell of a lot more concerned about who was going to go to Dallas and bring back the beer for Friday night and who among us had enough money to get it back and whether or not you could get a date. You really weren't worrying about how many blacks were in freshman English. It just wasn't any consequence in my life at the time. I've got an idea--and Ron may already know because Ron's an historian--but I've got an idea that one reason that it went as smoothly as it did was largely the responsibility of one man, and the man was James Carl Matthews.

Marcello: Expand on that.

Graham: He wasn't a very demonstrative person, and he wasn't a very communicative person, really; but I always sensed that he'd rather hell freeze over than the instructional process at North Texas be hampered in any way. I've always thought that was true about that guy. I think it was true about him in his dealings with regents; I think it was true in his

dealings with Austin. Whatever the guy's faults, for whatever the guy's faults, for whatever the inherent criticism you can make of a "teacher's college man," I think the one and lasting influence he would have made was that I don't think he ever lost sight of the fact that his primary reason for being here and the school's primary reason for being here was to teach. And the less that was said or done to interrupt that, the better he wanted. I think he would have sacrificed anything to maintain that mission.

Marcello: This, of course, is one of the conclusions that we seem to be reaching as the interviews proceed, and that is that J.C. Matthews does play a very important role in this whole process.

Graham: Sure, sure. You know, you can turn all that around, and you can say, "Yes, but he was forced to do it." But consider what happened here in 1956 with James Carl Matthews from Thayer, Texas, or wherever the hell that is...consider what happened here against what happened a lot of places.

Cummings: Talk about his personality or the type of man he was and why that personality helped make this transition smooth.

Graham: Well, as I said earlier, the thing that made the transition smooth was because Matthews was a teacher first, last, and always. He believed that there was a divine entity in the classroom. I don't think he would have done anything--I'm serious--I don't think he would...he had his detractors, and

I was one of them. I used to wonder how in the hell he could keep up with how many pencils I was using in Sports and Information and properly run the university. Whatever the guy's faults were, I think, in his own peculiar way, he had the students' best interest at heart first, and a lots of people didn't realize it.

Marcello: What was it like to be in Matthews's presence?

Graham: Disconcerting. He wore bifocals. He was a very, very frail, frail man. You'd swear to God he wasn't going to make it through the day. I used to wonder if, in fact, he didn't wear his three-piece suit on Saturday and Sunday and maybe even sleep in it. You'd swear to God that wind and sun and rain had never touched his skin in his life. He would sit, and he would sometimes look straight at you, and other times he wouldn't. He would always have a pencil in his hand. He oftentimes would push the pencil against his chin. You would go in there sometimes, and you would make a verbal presentation of something that you had submitted to him in writing, and you would talk for five minutes, and he would say, "The answer is no. Thanks for coming by." Other times, he might ask you two questions. Sometimes, if you did not do a good job of making a proposal in writing, you never saw him, anyway. I had a guy tell me years later that the only way you can successfully run a university is with a benevolent dictator, and I suppose Matthews was as

close to a benevolent dictator as this school ever had.

Marcello: He did not run this university by committee.

Graham: No, no. The greatest thing about him--right or wrong--was that you could get answers, and you knew where you stood. Nothing ever got bogged down in committee. Better than that, you always knew the origin of decision. In other words, you didn't have some damn academic bureaucrat hiding behind a committee somewhere. I mean, in fact, in 1964, I might get a note from him about long distance phone calls for Sports Information. The guy was incredible. You never knew how he could do that sort of thing.

Cummings: He knew everything about every little corner of this university.

Graham: But he did it in such a way that it was not suffocating to you. Now on the students' side, with Bill Woods and Imogene Dickey, I'm sure it did at times. Well, I know it did from having been in school under Imogene. As a staff or faculty member, it was not a looking-over-your-shoulder-at-you unless it was James Brown in English and you'd get crossways with him and that sort of thing. I'm sure there were ideological controversies, but when you look back at the guy in toto, I mean, you've got to give him credit. He may, in fact, have outlived his usefulness because of Frank Erwin or whomever. Our education has in fact become a political institution, and maybe he couldn't have lasted

much longer there. You could get so damn mad at him that you couldn't stand it, and yet as time went on and you got into that unending, unending, over and over and over examples of indecisiveness and inability to make decisions and even a clear understanding of the chain of command or the channels of communication, it was a hell of a lot better than it's turned out to be--from a selfish viewpoint of working in it. The working environment is totally different.

Cummings: Going back to your junior and senior years when the court suit came about and the doors opened to blacks, in the fall of 1956 is when the first undergraduate blacks did arrive. You were a senior.

Graham: Yes.

Cummings: Did you have any connection with the Campus Chat at that time or the Yucca or any organizations or...

Graham: No. I was a member of Sigma Delta Chi or the Press Club or whatever. In terms of being directly involved in the publications, no. Indirectly, yes.

Cummings: At that time you were working for Dr. Rogers?

Graham: I went to work for Rogers on August 15, 1956. I had to be here a day or two before the football team got here.

Marcello: How does Jim Rogers fit into this, Fred? I ask that because it has always been said that eventually, over the years, he had become Dr. Matthews's right-hand man. Does he play any role at all in the integration process?

Graham: Well, he certainly did on my end of it because I was under his employ, although at the time, see, Jim had only been here a year or two. I think maybe he'd been here two years before I got here. When I first went to work for Jim as a student, his influence in administrative circles really wasn't there yet. I think it is fair to say that he was a disciple--turned out to be a disciple--of James Carl's. I think his kind of laid back, let's-get-on-with-the-task-at-hand attitude had a big influence on me because, after all, I was going to be the one doing all the sports stuff. I mean, he never called me in.

Football practice started on September 1, and registration usually didn't start until about the 15th in those days--September 15th. Classes didn't start until the 18th or whatever. I had to be here a day or two ahead of the football team, and I would check into old Quad Three or Quad Four or whatever the hell they called it, and I'd live in a room in the football dorm until school started. I'd live there free and eat free, but when school started, I was just like any other student. I can recall when I came over here, you know, he never called me in and said, "Hey, this is going to be a major news story. You're going to get some difficult questions asked. Be careful what you say."

Cummings: Do you think he knew that fall that Abner and Leon were going to show up?

Graham: Oh, yes.

Cummings: Prior to their arrival on September 1?

Graham: Well, no, I don't know that he did know that. They arrived the same weekend I did. I think I got here on a Friday, and they got here on a Sunday; or I got here on a Wednesday, and they got here on a Friday. I don't know that Jim knew. He may have. We'd have to ask him. I don't recall. But I do know that I was never given any alarmed speech or any alarmed presentation on how we were going to deal with this or that problem now that we've got Abner Haynes.

Marcello: So they're playing it low key, too?

Graham: Yes. Right, right. Yes, Jim was at that point.

Marcello: If I had a suspicion, I would bet that somehow the word had come down from Matthews that this was the way it was supposed to be handled. This is strictly conjecture on my part, and I have no corroboration for that.

Graham: I would guess, if we could get anybody to admit it, it would not surprise me a damn bit if Matthews had, in fact, in a meeting...and it wouldn't have surprised me if it had been a faculty meeting. It would not surprise me that if he did not do it in a general meeting, he would have in writing or by appointment made damn sure that people in the Athletic Department and people in the public relations end of it and people in the students affairs end of it knew what the "low key approaches" were going to be. I agree with you.

It would not surprise me one bit at all because I think that was typical of him to be that way.

Cummings: So what was your first introduction to Leon and Abner? How did it come about?

Graham: I was wrong. They didn't report on September 1 because freshman couldn't report. The upperclassmen had already been in school, and I'd already made up my mind after a week or two in the "Animal House" that I didn't need a college scholarship if I was going to have to live with that.

You need to understand that what would happen in those days is that everything that I did in terms of writing or pictures or whatever like that, Jim Rogers was my editor. He was a one-man operation. "Dude" McCloud shot the photographs, and I did the writing, and Jim would edit my stuff. He might have a Bill Moyers covering the School of Music, or he might have whomever. He had his student reporters, but he wouldn't let anything hit his secretary's desk for final typing until he had seen it.

So I would spend a lot of my time...I would go down there on instructions from Rogers. He'd say, "Today let's put out a story on such-and-such. Go talk to so-and-so." Before Abner and Leon got there, I spent a lot of time there because I was eating three meals a day and sleeping down there. By the time Abner and Leon got there, I'd already

moved into an apartment with my brother, and I didn't spend that much time in the dressing room or that much time in the coaches' office as a student, because I was sent down there by Rogers, and I didn't know all these people, and they didn't know me. You know, they were cordial and courteous, but I wasn't an insider like an assistant coach or like a full time S.I.D. So I didn't have that much direct contact with them.

Cummings: So there wasn't a scene where you went down there one day, and all the sudden you saw these two black players there, and you went back to Rogers and said, "Hey, there's a couple of blacks out there on the field."

Graham: There again, I don't want to sound like that I was mature beyond my years and that it didn't impact me. I honest to God don't remember. The first vivid recollection I have of them was the first scrimmage we had under the lights inside Fouts Field after the freshmen had reported. I'm sure that somebody's told you that story. That's my first vivid recollection of what happened, and I recall the the varsity going against the varsity and the freshmen going against the freshmen, and they would change units around from time to time. They finally get down to late in the scrimmage, and I was standing over on the press box... I was actually sitting in the grass on the press box side of Fouts Field.

They kicked the ball to Abner, and Abner started running around to his right and then toward me. The defensive end...you could see Abner's legs up inside the defensive man's arms, and before he could clasp his arms together, Abner had done this little backwards dance and just shot out of there like a minnow in a bucket. All of a sudden, there was this momentary silence about what was that or what is this. You kind of looked around, and everybody was doing the same thing because he did such phenomenal things.

Mitchell and I...and he's a dear friend of mine and a fishing buddy, but we were not close then because I'd only been on the job a week or two, and that was still as a student. He came walking by and told somebody he "thought" Abner "had" a scholarship. Of course, he was the only one without one, but I've never known the inside on that either. Somebody told Mitchell one time, "Don't worry about it. When he crosses the goal line, he'll be white."

Cummings: Do you recall early in the fall workout, the word spreading around campus and around town that "Hey, there's some blacks over there, and they're really good players."

Graham: No, not only in the case of Abner. You've got to remember now, Randy, that Abner and Vernon and George Herring and Bob Way and all those guys were freshmen, and they were going to play five games, and that was it. Yes, there was excitement,

but it was nothing like it would be now because his impact was still a year away.

Marcello: What reactions do you recall coming from the older players, that is, those who were already on the team--the upper classmen?

Graham: That kept them pretty much...I remember that one scrimmage, and after they got into their season, Odus wouldn't scrimmage a lot. They kept the freshmen and varsity pretty much separated because the freshmen were trying to play a five-game schedule and play people like TCU and...I don't know whether they played TCU. I do remember them playing Navarro Junior College at Corsicana, and then they played Murray in Tishomingo. Due to the fact that they had to play five games, they kind of left them along. The real, true-blue fan who would turn out on a Saturday night and watch them scrimmage in early September knew that they had something valuable. There was the famous story at that time about in one of the freshman games. I was up in the press box, and we had the vents open because it was so damn hot. I'm pretty sure it was a freshman game, but it may have been a scrimmage. Anyway, Abner threw the halfback pass to Leon. Some guy good-naturedly from the stands hollered, "Way to go, Eagles! That's our nighttime special!" (chuckle)

There wasn't a lot of hoopla going on because the varsity at the time was very ordinary. People didn't get

interested in the freshman program, anyway, because we were only giving twenty-five scholarships, and SMU and TCU were giving seventy and eighty. Those were back in days with unlimited recruiting, and everybody did extensive recruiting. We'd carry twenty-five bodies to TCU to play. The fact that the varsity in 1954, 1955, and 1956 was down had tempered fan interest. It's kind of like it is now. If you have a down year, at this level or in this particular situation, it really kind of sets you back. So there wasn't as much excitement as there should have been.

Marcello: What kind of a crowd was there at that first scrimmage?

Graham: Oh, twenty-five or thirty people...forty...I don't know. Not a lot.

Marcello: So again, it was really no big deal so far as the townsfolk or the students were concerned.

Graham: No. Well, I don't even know that the students...

Cummings: The students probably weren't even around then.

Graham: Well, yes, the students would have been here by the time Abner was here. It's one of those deals now...and I don't know whether you're plagued by this as a historian or not. It's one of those deals where you would like to go back and experience the event over again in the perspective you had then, and then you'd want an instant replay and experience the event in the perspective you have now.

Marcello: I guess the immediate thought that comes to my mind, Fred, is

that students then were as apathetic as they are now.

Graham: That's a lot of it. Absolutely. That was very, very, very much a lot of it.

Cummings: Is that ditto for the townspeople?

Graham: Sure. Part of the trouble with the townspeople, other than your typical town-gown relationship in a community that size...and then Denton was not very big. Part of the problem, of course, is that Matthews not only welcomed that city apathy toward his university, but he fertilized it and irrigated it, you know. He loved that. That was right down his alley. So the community at-large was apathetic, you know. We were a famous party school and all that kind of stuff. We didn't have any money to party, but apparently we were partying.

Cummings: So at no time during that first fall, did you get any kind of instructions on how to treat the presence of two blacks on the football team in your releases, in your dealings with the media?

Graham: No, no. As a matter of fact, Rogers may have instructed me one time, "If you get any phone calls about your integrated football program, let me handle them." I said, "Okay," and I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because nothing has changed. We're still operating the way we were." And then he may have in fact, told me one time that we would never identify any athlete by race, color, religion, or creed.

Cummings: I do know that in a lot of the old Record-Chronicle clips that freshman year, they always did refer to Abner as "a Negro halfback."

Graham: That was your racist newspaper; that wasn't my racist university (chuckle).

Cummings: Just checking (chuckle).

Graham: No, we would never have done that.

Marcello: What role does Odus Mitchell play in this whole affair?

Cummings: I want to add to that question. Were the assistants playing a more prominent role in this whole transition?

Graham: Odus was all right. Odus was a lot with the football team like Matthews was with the university in general. He's not a very demonstrative person. He was far more talented at analyzing people as human beings and athletes as athletes than people give him credit for. He was not, as some would lead you to believe, a good ol' guy with the captain's hat on letting the first lieutenants run the ship. That ain't absolutely so. It was his nature not to. He wasn't going to be the James Cagney type on the open bridge, but he was damn sure going to have his say in which the way the ship was going to go. You don't win 72 percent of your games over forty-three years by being a lackey to an assistant coach. That was his brilliance in his own way of being a football coach.

The thing you have to remember about North Texas State

University is that it was, and for the most part remains... that's the reason I was teasing you earlier in the interview about coming to North Texas. I said it was like one of those freak deals of getting a great athlete. When you're not going to get your share of the blueist of the blue chips, and you're not in a position where because of the lack of a wealthy and influential alumni organization and ...I hasten to say one reason there is that NTSU for almost a hundred years has not put out very many doctors, engineers, dentists, or lawyers. The first fifty years it was putting out schoolteachers, and schoolteachers as a general rule don't have a lot of money, and few of them run for political office. So I'm saying there are a lot of reasons why this school was never in a position--enrollment, facilities, size of it's alumni, the lack of resources, generally speaking ...and from the end of 1946 on...and I wasn't there at the time, but I learned a lot about it because I knew the people involved and I had to research it from a statistical standpoint. Everytime North Texas State Universtiy has had an exceptional football team over a period of three years or four years, given maybe one, there has been extenuating circumstances. Abner Haynes was an unusual situation. Vernon Cole was the quarterback--thick-ankled, no muscle, big-boned, a German kid from Pilot Point who did not play his senior year because of a broken leg. He was a hell of a football player.

Marcello: Describe what Vernon Cole was like as a person.

Graham: Super guy. Super guy. When we walked into Robertson Field House in Cincinnati, Ohio, and the players were going to dress in there right off the basketball floor before a Friday afternoon workout...we came walking in...and Vernon was a blonde, crew cut...he wore glasses off the field. As a matter of fact, he kind of squinted on the field. We came walking in...and for me to look at him, he was never what I would consider the prototype quarterback because he was thick-boned...he didn't have clear muscular definition to him. He was kind of a square-built guy, chunky kind of, but he had a sort of presence about him. And we were walking in, and all the players were standing around, and they've got their handbags. Just what we would have called then "Yankee" club house attendants there at the University of Cincinnati...one of our players--I don't know which one it was--popped off, and the guy turned around, and he said, "Jesus Christ, you must be the goddamned quarterback!" And he is looking right at Cole. He had a certain swagger, a certain presence about him, but this guy in Cincinnati just instantly recognized that even in his street clothes he was the quarterback. Yet to me he was the last guy in the crowd. He looked more like a damn linebacker or offensive guard than a quarterback.

But there were some other extenuating circumstances on

that same team. There was a kid from Snyder, Texas, by the name of George Herring that weighed about 170 pounds who played at NTSU, and I guess the highest weight he ever played was maybe 210 pounds. He was a super, super offensive tackle. Of course, he was a highly decorated Marine in Vietnam. They had a tight end by the name of Frank Klein from Seguin. Bill Carrico, whose father taught chemistry at NTSU, had gone to Texas and after one year didn't like it and had decided he wanted to come back home. He was a home boy. He wanted to be in Denton. In other words, if you go back and look at them, you can carry that forward to Joe Greene; you can carry that forward to Steve Ramsey, Ronnie Shanklin. The one exception would have been maybe some key people on Hayden Fry's best teams.

Marcello: What role does Cole play, however, in the acceptance of these blacks on the freshman team? Does he play any role at all?

Graham: Well, yes, he had to. He had to for two reasons. Number one, he was the quarterback. If he got down near the goal line, he didn't shy away from giving the ball to Abner so that one of the white guys could score. He was not adverse to throwing the football to Leon, although Leon was not a very good receiver, to be blunt about it.

Marcello: What kind of a relationship developed between Vernon and Abner?

Graham: Very good. Very good, it seemed to me. Bobby Way would be a better person...Bobby Way or Bill Carrico. Let me see if I can think of maybe even a better one than that to talk to.

Marcello: You mean, who might know more about that relationship or who were closer to Abner?

Graham: No, who would know more about the player relationships. One of those guys would know better than I would because athletes have a tendency to say things just among themselves that they won't even say among their brothers or sisters. But there was no question that Vernon Cole and Robert Duty, who was a very, very good quarterback...there was no question that those two guys had a steady influence on that particular class. I don't think there's any doubt about that.

Marcello: Getting back to Odus Mitchell again, we talked about him in terms of his coaching ability. Do you think that he had the kind of temperament, mentality, or whatever you wish to call it to bring about the acceptance of these blacks on that football team? Did he play some sort of a role in this manner?

Graham: Well, yes, he had to. Then again, I wish I could relive some of it and get a better handle on it because, you know, quite honestly, hell, at the time I didn't think it was important. If the guy wants to go to school here, well, he can go to school. Willie Walls was a famous pro super-scout. He

became a friend of mine in later years and was an assistant coach at Colorado at the time. He couldn't believe that that "dumb nigger" would come here, and I said, "Well, why, Willie?" He said, "We offered the son-of-a-bitch everything except Pike's Peak." And he was widely recruited out of state.

I think it was a meshing of the right people under the right circumstances at the right time. Odus was a very low-key individual, was not a tough disciplinarian. He was a person of high moral standards--the way he lived his life. I think he expected that in his athletes, and I think he had probably less patience for the trouble they would get into off the field than he would have on the field.

Somebody may have told you about the time we were trying to get to Cincinnati. We were on a Braniff Convair 440, and it seats forty-four people. We spring an oil leak over Texarkana and...actually, we spring the leak before we get to Texarkana, and Texarkana is kind of a point of no return--whether they turn around and go back to Love Field or go on to Memphis. We leaked all this oil out of the right engine, and the plane was still in the contact zone. Anyway, we get over there and come to find out the pilot admits to us under F.A.A. regulations he should have set the plane down immediately. Mitchell said, "Well, why didn't you?" He said, "Well, if we'd ever have gotten it down, we never

would have gotten you guys off the ground because you've got so much equipment on there and the runways aren't long enough." He said that we just had to get to Memphis.

To back up a minute, we were eating our filet mignon steaks and our chocolate pie and having a great meal, and, of course, card games had already started in this twin-engine prop plane. There was this loud backfire. Finally, the pilot comes out, and he says, "Where is Coach Mitchell sitting?" Well, "Mitch" always sat...as you face the cockpit, he always sat on the left of the aisle in the aisle seat, never the window seat and never on the right side of the aisle--left aisle seat, front row. The pilot said, "Coach, I'm Captain so-and-so. He said, "How are you doing?" "Mitch" said, "Well, I'm doing fine." He said, "I was doing a lot better until a while ago." He said, "Why?" He said, "Well, I'm about half-scared." The pilot said, "I am, too." Well, hell, that was the wrong thing to say to Odus.

Wayne Mueller was a back-up quarterback from Gladewater. Then when we get back home, Mueller does his drawings. We're on the ground, and the players are mingling around the plane, and they've got the pod open on the engine, and that oil is just gushing out of that damn thing. They had ambulances and the firetrucks lined up at Memphis. Mitchell is sitting there, and the pilot is talking to him. Of course, he is concerned because we've got a big game at Cincinnati, and

we need to get on up there for a workout. And the strongest language he would ever use was "What the heck!" And so Wayne Mueller does his cartoon, and he has this line drawn up to a circle that's got Mitchell cussing his run of bad luck with the plane, and it says, "What the heck!"

I've never heard him curse. He coached for--what--seven years, I guess, while I was full-time. That doesn't even count when I was a student. I guess I was with him seven full seasons, and I never heard him curse. As a matter of fact, in all the years I've known him, I've never heard him use profanity. He'll use an off-color word so long as he's quoting a joke or quoting somebody. But as far as using profanity...

Cummings: Even when he hits a bad golf shot?

Graham: No. He just says, "What the heck" or "For crap's sake!" Those are the two strongest words he'd ever use: "For crap's sake" or "What the heck."

Anywhere we were going in 1966...when we were on the road in 1966, we'd always have these parties for him. We were at Louisville playing, and Frank Camp, who was the long-time coach there and was quite successful...and they had a famous basketball coach who had quit to become athletic director, Peck Hickman. So Peck and Frank had this big steak deal on Friday night for Mitchell before playing the University of Louisville, and, I mean, it was a swank event.

It shows you how much they respected him. I think Mitchell had two Louisville-brand beers that night, and McCain and Ferrill and I kind of had a conniption fit because we were afraid he was going to become an alcoholic in his old age.

"Mitch" will be eighty-five this year. Mitchell was born in 1899, so he was fifty-seven when Abner got here. Whether or not it was his nature to be that way or whether or not there was an edict passed down from on high, he was already a mature individual who wasn't going to be throwing chalk at them or throwing chairs in the dressing room at halftime. He was a very low-key individual, and that created probably a better climate for them. He would not grab the kids and shake them or hit them or anything like that, nor would he let his assistants.

Cummings: So it's pretty safe to say that this whole integration process with the athletics wouldn't have gone nearly as smooth without the presence of Odus and Matthews at North Texas State.

Graham: I don't think there's any question about that.

Marcello: How about the assistant coaches such as Ken Bahnsen, who had handled that freshman team that year?

Graham: Yes, Ken did a good job with that. He did a good job with that group. I was twenty-one or twenty-two when Abner was a freshman. You've got to understand it really wasn't any big deal, the way I perceived it at the time. I guess, in thinking back over it, all of them contributed to how smoothly

it went.

Mitchell had a lot less trouble with the integration than, I think, his counterparts Pete Shands in basketball and "Pop" Noah in track had. There again, I don't know that there was any open hatred or if there was any intentional malice on the part of those two guys. From where I sat and from my viewpoint, I think they had more trouble dealing with it than Mitchell did. That doesn't make any sense because all three of them were almost identical in age, and all three of them had almost identical high school and college backgrounds. They all came from rural areas. One of them went to Southwest Texas State, and one of them went to West Texas State, and one of them went to North Texas State. Their backgrounds were so similar, and their age was similar; but I think of the three, in terms of temperament --maybe that's the best way to put it--I think Odus was better equipped to handle integration than were Shands and Noah.

Cummings: Since you were at this time kind of the go-between between the Athletic Department and the media, what kind of reactions were you picking up from the people at the Record-Chronicle and people in the Dallas-Fort Worth media who were covering North Texas athletics?

Graham: Well, then you'll have to jump forward to 1959. See, I was gone.

- Cummings: But even as early as that freshman year, there was no interest when word got about that North Texas had two black players?
- Graham: Yes, word was out, and there were stories that our football team had been integrated, but it was short-lived. You've got to remember now, when NTSU freshmen played Murray State at Tishomingo, that ain't the damndest most important event to occur that weekend. No, it just wasn't that big a deal.
- Cummings: I just asked that because it was a unique thing in this area and that time period.
- Graham: Where the impact would have occurred would have been in 1957, and I wasn't here. That's where the real impact occurred for a couple of reasons. One, NTSU became eligible for the Missouri Valley Conference championship, plus the fact that Oklahoma State and Houston and some others went on their schedule. You were no longer playing Midwestern or Trinity and Abilene Christian. All of a sudden, you were going to be playing Oklahoma State and Houston and Tulsa and Wichita and so on and so forth. So the real impact was 1957.
- Marcello: Fred, we've already talked about Abner in the sense of his athletic abilities at this point. Blanking out the present, describe what kind of a personality Abner had back in that period around 1956. What kind of a person was Abner?

Graham: Abner had a quiet confidence about him, yet he could be as fun-loving and as much a cut-up as anyone. I assume a lot of it was just because of his coming from a preacher's family. He had a sense of assuredness about him. He didn't appear to be uncomfortable. He may have been churning inside. Outwardly, he didn't appear to be uncomfortable or a freak or being watched.

Marcello: If nothing else, he kind of knew how to "play the game" in the white man's world?

Graham: Right, right. Well, one coach told me one time in the case of another black athlete, "Well, he's nothing but a con artist." I told the coach, "Well, hey, that could be a compliment. I don't know how you mean that." He said, "Well, so-and-so in such-and-such class told me the other day that he's always on the front row and cheerful and says good morning and all this and all that, but, hell, there's no way he can pass that course." I said, "You know, is that being a con artist or is that being a good student? Would you rather him have a good classroom manner, be punctual, have perfect attendance, or do you want him hiding because he has no interest in an education? Which do you want it to be? How the hell do you mean--a con artist?" So, yes, that's part of it, too, being able to survive in a white man's society.

Marcello: How about Leon King? What kind of a personality did Leon have?

Graham: If Abner was the leader, Leon was the follower. I mean this figuratively and not literally, but he would be a half-step behind Abner and would get his clues from Abner. Academically, he was far superior. Leon was a good student.

Cummings: But he didn't have near the outgoing, bubbling personality that Abner had.

Graham: No, he didn't. I don't think Leon was intimidated. I think he was more a follower. I think he was waiting on Abner to tip him on when to be hard-nosed and mean or happy or cheerful or cut-up or whatever like that--or "yes, sir," "no, sir," or Negro slang. He got his clues, I think. He had a much better mind than Abner did, and it was clear almost from the start that he was just going to be a better student than Abner was.

He was not that great an athlete. See, there again, you don't know whether there was an edict from on high somewhere that said, "Abner, you're going, but you're going to have to get somebody like Leon to go with you," or somebody is saying, "Hey, Abner, we'll take you, but you better bring somebody like Leon with you." See, you don't know, and I don't know. Somebody may. I don't know. He was a great athlete who, like a great musician, is going to get acceptability immediately because of the things he can do with his God-given skills. But your institution of higher education also ended up with a good student.

Marcello: Let me ask you a highly speculative question.

Graham: Okay.

Marcello: Suppose, just suppose, that Leon King alone had come up here to play football.

Graham: He would have had a hard time. He would have had a hard time because he was not a good enough athlete to withstand the intimidation. Better yet, he was not a good enough athlete to ward off the intimidation. See, Abner was really never intimidated. He was such a great athlete that...you know, there's the famous story you guys have heard, I'm sure, with Mac Reynolds. He was so good that you never got a chance to intimidate him.

Marcello: What was the Mac Reynolds story? Let's hear your version of it.

Graham: Mac Reynolds was the one that said, "I'm going to kill that nigger," or something like that, and Abner ran about nine times on his side of the field and--I don't know--scored eight or nine times. I was there that night, but I heard the story later on. But he warded off the intimidation on the field before it ever got there, and Leon wasn't that good. Both of them, if they were going to get intimidated, I think, were in areas other than athletics.

Marcello: Interestingly, too, Abner had been around white folks at least up until seventh grade, which was when he moved to Dallas. Leon, on the other hand, had really never been

around white folks.

Graham: That's right. That's right. Yes, I used to hear all sorts of things. Well, I used to get all sorts of questions, you know: "Is it true the NAACP hand-picked Abner to come to NTSU?" "Is it true that they stipulated that Leon be taken, too?" "Was it NTSU that told Abner they'd take him on a trial basis for one year when, in fact, they'd already agreed to give him a scholarship, and to slow it down they were going to put him in a place in southeast Denton and the house caught on fire?" You know, that goes on and on and on.

It never bothered me for somebody to suggest to me that it may have been pressure from the black leadership in Dallas or the NAACP that insisted that Abner go to NTSU. As a matter of fact, if they did, they chose with foresight, and who would blame them? You damn sure wouldn't want to send a 5'6" 125-pound scatback up here who was not going to make a good football player. That would be self-defeating. I mean, I don't understand...the idea then was that is was unethical or it was a puzzlement to some, why the NAACP would send Abner to NTSU, if, in fact, they did. Like I say, if they did, I'd say congratulations. They made a smart move.

Marcello: What do you know about the decision to have Abner and Leon live off-campus?

Graham: I don't know about that. I honestly don't. I do know that

at a later point...I think whatever racism there was on the coaching staff really came following Abner, actually. I don't think there's any question in my mind that there was a quota. I don't know whether that quota was dictated from within the Athletic Department or from the Administration Building, but my personal observations were that the coaching staff itself was always happy with that restricted number.

Marcello: Would this have been the post Odus Mitchell years?

Graham: No, this was in force before Odus left. But I don't mean just Odus now. I mean up and down the staff. Yes, the attitude was...and this is a little unfair, but I think it's germane to what we're talking about. The attitude would have been in the mid-1950's or the early 1960's: "Let's don't waste a scholarship on a black lineman." See what I'm saying? "We want running backs and receivers. Don't waste it on a lineman." After Abner how many blacks were recruited in 1957? One or two.

Marcello: If you go back through the annuals, you find two a year up until about 1959, I think.

Graham: Yes, right. Yes, you would have had two in 1956, two in 1957, two in 1958, and two in 1959. It wouldn't have changed a lot more than that in 1960, 1961 or 1962, either, if you'll go back and look. As a matter of fact, I'm trying to remember. I guess Burkley Harkless was the first black lineman, and he was a defensive lineman.

Cummings: He was also one of the first to live on the campus, too.

Graham: Burkley's last year was the football season of 1967. The first offensive black lineman, I guess, would have been ol' Fred Washington, He was in Joe Greene's class, so that means he would have been on the varsity...what I'm driving at is, the fall of 1956 isolated, I think there was less apparent racism involved there than there was after that because of the quota system. Again, I don't know where that quota came from.

Cummings: You have no idea where it came from or how you realized it?

Graham: No.

Cummings: It was just there.

Graham: No, I knew the quota system was there. I heard enough...I was around the Athletic Department enough to know what their recruiting attitude was going to be about that quota, but I didn't know whether that was a self-imposed quota or a quota coming from the regents or from Matthews. I knew how they were going to deal with that quota. They were going to deal with the quota by not recruiting black linemen.

Cummings: What about in terms of numbers per year?

Graham: There was a quota.

Cummings: What was it, if you recall?

Graham: I don't know. I don't know. That'd be fairly easy to figure out.

Cummings: Of course, like Ron has mentioned, we could tell it was two

per year that first three or four years.

Graham: Well, yes, I can name the first, you know--Billy Joe Christle, Bobby Smith, A.D. Whitfield...

Cummings: Arthur Perkins.

Graham: ...Arthur Perkins. Yes, that would have been the first crop after Abner and Leon--right there.

Marcello: There's something else I was interested in. Was North Texas playing teams that had blacks?

Graham: No. Cincinnati played blacks, and Wichita State played blacks.

Marcello: But now were they playing those guys before Abner came?

Graham: No. See, we joined the Missouri Valley Conference. They coincided, is what happened.

Marcello: This is one of the things I was leading up to. Now you know as well as I that it takes several years before one enters a conference. Isn't that usually the way it works?

Graham: Yes.

Marcello: You just don't decide one year that you're going to enter, and you suddenly become a member of that conference. They must have known that if they were going to get into the Missouri Valley Conference, they were going to have to play teams that had blacks.

Graham: NTSU was voted into the Missouri Valley Conference in the spring of 1956 and was to begin competition with the spring sports of 1957, football in 1957. From a scheduling standpoint,

Ron, it was a little bit different then for a couple of reasons. Number one, almost the instant we got in, Oklahoma State got out. This made it easier because all of the sudden Oklahoma State had to pick up seven Big Eight teams, which were freeing seven games off their schedule and which permitted them to get in. The second thing is that the Missouri Valley Conference schools did not schedule that far in advance. I don't think anticipating an integrated schedule or anticipating trying to beat an integrated team had as much as Abner's being here.

Marcello: Did you ever accompany a freshman team to any of their games?

Graham: Yes.

Cummings: Which of the games?

Graham: Tishomingo.

Cummings: Describe that whole trip or what you recall about the game itself.

Graham: Well, I recall in coming back that Ken was driving, and Abner was in the middle, and I was in the outside front seat, and Abner went to sleep and fell all over me coming back. That was kind of a foggy night--poor lights--and Abner put on his usual great showing. There were catcalls in the audience and all that kind of stuff. But by then the team had already accepted him.

Cummings: That was what? The third game?

Graham: I don't remember. That was probably the best game Leon ever

played because every damn kick he made went out of bounds. I'm not even sure the field measured a hundred yards. He was kicking it down to the damn barbed wire fence at the end of the thing. I don't know. I'd have to go back and look, Randy. Hell, man, that's a long time ago. I don't remember that.

Marcello: When you mentioned catcalls, were they from the crowd and directed at the black athletes?

Cummings: Do you recall some of the things they were yelling?

Graham: No. I do when Abner was a senior, but I don't when he was a freshman.

Cummings: Was Judge Gray on that trip, also? Do you recall?

Graham: Gosh, I don't know. Jack could have been. I don't know. Jack was a big fan of NTSU.

Cummings: Ken told us that after the first couple of games, he requested that Judge Gray go on some of the trips just in case problems broke out and they needed some legal help.

Graham: He may have. He may have. I was a senior in college, and I don't know. I don't know.

Marcello: So you weren't at that Navarro game then?

Graham: No. As a matter of fact, if I'm not mistaken, I was assigned to a damn cross country meet. I had to do something, and I couldn't go, and Rogers had some assurances that we would get accurate statistics and facts from Corsicana. I don't think I went, Ron. But I may have, and the reason why I'm

confused is that when I came back full-time in 1959, we were still playing a separate schedule. Even after I was full-time, if our freshman team had a Thursday night game and you were going to get back at midnight or one o'clock a.m., and the varsity would be leaving the next day to go to Louisville or Memphis State or something, even though I was full-time, I might not go to that freshman game the night before. I do recall the Tishomingo game, but that's about the only one I recall Abner's freshman year.

Marcello: I'm going to turn the tape over at this stage.

Cummings: That first game that you went with the freshman team up to Tishomingo...was that really your first recollection of whites verbally showing their antagonism against blacks? You said that you never really remembered any violent scenes from when you were a child between the races.

Graham: Oh, well, yes, but you might see a kid drive by a black on a bicycle and hear epithets or something like that, but I meant on a bigger scale than that, I had ever been accustomed. That was probably the first time.

Cummings: Did you just take it in stride?

Graham: Well, yes. We were getting such a vicarious kick out of our blacks kicking their ass that it was kind of funny.

When it really got out of hand was Abner's senior year, and coincidentally enough, it did not involve Abner. No, I better check that. The worst case I've ever seen was

Memphis State when we used to play over at Crump Stadium, and that would get vicious to the point of making you ill.

Cummings: That was his senior year?

Graham: I don't think Abner...that may have been 1960. That may have been a year after Abner. That may have been when Billy Joe Christle was a junior or senior, and A.D. Whitfield was a freshman or sophomore. I don't remember. It would get so nasty over there that it was kind of blood-curdling. It ain't that ol' rural guy sitting up there in his damn coveralls and kind of poking fun. I mean, this was a mean --I mean, really a mean--attitude. It was scary. I didn't like it at all. I still don't like Memphis for that reason. I never learned to like it. You don't ever like it. I've been scared too many times at Crump Stadium. So is Bill Mercer, too, because in those days ol' Crump Stadium had the ...you had the main enclosed writers' booth on one side of the stadium, and then on the other side of the stadium you had nothing more than a damn wooden crow's nest. There is a little small box for the radio crew, and you can just reach out and touch those people on the top row. You didn't have any glass. You weren't sound proof. They'd turn around and holler obscenities at us, and then they'd turn and holler obscenities at the kids on the field. Really, I didn't like Memphis.

Looking back on it, I'm surprised it didn't happen more

than it did. I'm sure everybody's told you the same story of playing in 1959 at Rice Stadium against the University of Houston when they stayed in the pullmans.

Marcello: Do you remember that story?

Graham: Oh, sure.

Marcello: Would you describe it?

Graham: Yes. Believe it or not, we had had trouble at Louisville, and I don't know why that surprised me. I was not a history scholar, and there was no empirical evidence for it. I didn't expect it in Louisville. We had had lodging trouble--lodging trouble, meaning room and meals. We hadn't at that point. We were to have trouble at Louisville and Memphis and so on and so forth. They made a decision, partly because the team had been winning so much in 1959, that there was interest in a student trip. One thing led to another, and the first thing you know, they were able to get the pullmans or the sleeping cars off the on siding at Houston. We would walk over at the Rice Hotel, I guess it was, and eat meals, and they would pick up Abner and Leon and take them either to the Texas Southern campus or whatever. Everyone used to laugh about how many...everywhere we would go, there were always a bunch of blacks there to meet Abner. Now I know why. They ran their own underground system as a matter of necessity. They wanted that guy to know ahead of time where it was acceptable for him to go and where it was not acceptable

for him to go. In some cases, rather than them being thrust into making a choice, they would take care of them--take them into their homes or whatever. All the teammates used to tease Abner: "You've got more damn cousins than anybody I've seen. They're all female." Looking back on it, it suddenly occurred to me not long after that. Years later we'd fly somewhere to play a football game. There wouldn't be any blacks there waiting.

Cummings: Who do you think organized that underground system during those early years?

Graham: Oh, I think the blacks did it. That was their way of doing it. Reverend Haynes would pick up the phone in Dallas...

Cummings: That's what I wanted to know.

Graham: Oh, I don't know who it really was.

Cummings: Was it Abner's relatives or...

Graham: Sure, sure.

Cummings: So it wasn't really anybody connected with North Texas?

Graham: Who in the hell could have done that?

Cummings: You tell me. That's what I'm asking you.

Graham: Who would I call in Louisville to say to take care of Abner?

Marcello: In other words, what he is saying here is, only blacks would have known blacks.

Graham: Only blacks would have known. I mean, I wouldn't have known ...if I were going to go and meet the Wichita State team at Love Field, I wouldn't be able to tell Wichita State

where the blacks were to go.

Cummings: I was just curious. You know, here's the North Texas State team getting ready this week to go to Louisville. Now does Coach Mitchell go ask Abner's father to arrange something, or was the word just passed underground?

Graham: Sure, sure. As a matter of fact, Abner would have to get permission, and Fred McCain and Odus Mitchell would talk to whomever it was to make sure that...I mean, it was their deal. You know, that went on for...I don't know how long it went on. It went on with A.D. Whitfield and Bobby and that bunch in the late 1960's. Hell, we could fly into Jackson, Mississippi, now, and there wouldn't be anybody waiting on them. But you can bet there were then.

But, anyway, so the Houston deal was the train. A couple of things about that game I remember is that it was Boy Scout night, or it was the University of Houston's homecoming game, and they announced the crowd as something like 12,000 or whatever. A friend of mine at Rice told me there were over 20,000 people there, and Houston didn't want to admit that we could draw a crowd in Houston. The one trivial point that a lot of people don't realize...Mercer was giving the play-by-play for NTSU. Do you know who was doing the play-by-play for the Cougars? I'll give you a hint. Station KTRH in Houston.

Cummings: I have no idea.

Graham: The CBS anchorman, Dan Rather. Dan wouldn't know me now, but he and I were close enough for about three years of football there that I wouldn't object calling him or writing him in New York now. I'd have to jack his memory a little bit about KTRH and the Cougars and the Eagles.

Marcello: What was the deal with that train? Did the players eventually sleep on that train?

Graham: We never got off of it. We got off to eat and came back, yes. It turned out to be a heck of a deal. I don't know why we didn't think of it earlier. The underestimated crowds, Dan Rather...and that wasn't important at the time because he was in Fouts Field the next year. He and I just got along pretty good, and the first thing I knew, he was the Southwest correspondent for CBS and then had a special assignment in the White House. The other important thing about that is that you would walk into the Rice Hotel to catch the elevator up, and they had a brass sign in it. I don't remember what it said except...I don't know whether it said, "Whites Only," or "No Negroes Allowed." I don't remember exactly how it said it, but it was an old bronze sign, and it had been there forever and ever and ever. That was 1959. I come back--what--three years later to a coaching school at Houston, okay. It's going to be at the Rice Hotel. I step on the elevator, and there's an eight-by-ten picture of Willie Mays, and it's got this little sign that

says, "The Rice Hotel welcomes Willie Mays and the San Francisco Giants vs. the Houston Colt .45's." They'd gone from a segregated sign to welcoming Willie Mays in just BOOM!! like that.

Marcello: So basically, because no hotel could be found that would take the entire team, it was a team decision to sleep on the train.

Graham: Right, yes.

Marcello: And this was a team decision?

Graham: Yes. Pretty much so, yes.

Marcello: In other words, they're all going to stay together or...

Graham: Oh, yes, I guess so. Based on what had gone on prior to that, it would not have surprised me if they had given Abner and Leon permission to sleep somewhere else. Whether they did or did not that trip, I don't recall. But I do know that Abner and Leon did not get to eat at the Rice Hotel. When was the first year of that Colt .45's played? 1962?

Marcello: 1961, I believe.

Graham: Two years after we lived on the train, I go back to the same hotel, and they welcomed Willie Mays (laughter).

Marcello: It's kind of interesting that in that situation at the Rice Hotel concerning eating, the rest of the team stayed there and did eat?

Graham: Well, they'd walk from the train to the private dining room and then walk back.

Marcello: But not Abner and Leon?

Graham: You're right. I don't know whether Leon was still playing as a senior or not. I don't recall. Ron, you're going to have to confirm this with somebody else. I think Abner went somewhere else to eat. I don't think he ate at the Rice Hotel. That's the way I remember it.

Marcello: One of the things that came out in a previous interview, Fred, was that there was a rather contradictory attitude on the part of the North Texas players. In other words, they would go on the road, and they would bitch and gripe about how these blacks were treated, but when they would come back to Denton, Denton was still segregated, at least when Abner first came here--the restaurants, the hotels, the movie theaters and so on.

Graham: True, true. That's a good point. Sure, and that's the reason I told...as a matter of fact, Temple Pouncy's column in the Dallas Morning News centered on the Houston train trip as much as anything because of the coincidence of major league baseball coming there two years later. Yes, that's one reason I never felt like chortling over the fact that NTSU went out of its way to make things comfortable for Abner and Leon on the road. It's not important for me to analyze what we at NTSU did or how we did it or why we did it. That's not as important as Abner's and Leon's reaction to what we were doing. See what I'm saying? That's a very

valid point because I don't know how long it took to integrate the Campus Theater. Part of it was because of Riley Cross's daily newspaper.

Marcello: (Chuckle) The "Wretched Chronicle?"

Graham: Yes.

Cummings: He has to get those digs in, doesn't he (chuckle)? Let me jump back to that freshman year again. I know I'm skipping around here, but I guess it was the third game that Oklahoma was your first trip with them. You said that by that time, the team was a cohesive group that was close and felt close to Abner and Leon. How long in your estimation did it take for the emotions of having those two black players on that freshman bunch...

Graham: About thirty seconds into the first game they ever played. Why, yes, that's the great thing about athletics. That's the reason it was a great vehicle for integration--not just here but everywhere. The nature of competition is such that if your team's wearing green and the other team's wearing white, you're going to win. I think it was a vehicle that made it a heck of a lot easier, although I might say, also, that I think the same thing could have happened in the School of Music, or the same thing might could have happened in art. I think where your skills have a visual impact that makes it easier for people to assimilate you into their circle.

Marcello: That's a good point.

Cummings: Yes.

Graham: I mean, the smartest black kid at North Texas State University in 1962 might have been a chemist, might have been a history major. But where he's going to make his quickest impact and get his quickest acceptance is that if his skills and his abilities can be appreciated visually instantly. You know, if you're playing a football game, you're worrying about your...you know, Bobby Way is worrying about who he's blocking. He's not worrying about some yo-yo in the third row of bleachers that's hollering at the guy.

Marcello: Even somebody like Mac Reynolds comes to realize this, I think. He says, "Hey, this guy can help us win football games."

Graham: Sure, yes, yes. Mac was on the defensive side, and the other guy is on the offensive side, and that was a scrimmage.

Cummings: It's not the color of your skin.

Graham: That won't have anything to do with it, and I'll give you a prime example. I'll give you a prime example. Roger Staubach's first preference to me on making his Hall of Fame presentation was Drew Pearson—his very first. I mean, they're still like that (crosses fingers). The appreciation they get that permits them to get to know one another as human beings can carry further than just the athletic part of it. But that common ground of acceptance, it don't take long.

It didn't take long in football. That was so easy. I think there were some of those guys who coached him and who played with him who, I personally think, are still racists. That is given any other social situations, events, or other than athletics still wouldn't approve.

Cummings: It's just that environment of athletics that supercedes that racism.

Graham: I think so. Yes.

Cummings: That first scrimmage that you mentioned a little while ago, had the general acceptance of Abner and Leon occurred then?

Graham: Well, I didn't know those guys well enough to where they were going to say anything to me.

Cummings: Just from a player's viewpoint.

Graham: Well, I'm sure they were still catching some moderate to hard elbows in the chest in the pile-up, and I'm sure they were probably getting razzed in the cafeteria.

Cummings: Did you go to many workouts early?

Graham: No. Well, I'd go to all the early workouts, but I wouldn't necessarily be there early for them.

Marcello: Did Abner never stay on campus?

Graham: Yes, I believe that's right. I believe that's right. As a matter of fact, I know he didn't. But knowing Abner, that would have been by his choice. I think he liked the social possibilities off-campus a little bit better (laughter).

Cummings: The reason I asked you about attending the workouts...so you

did not really see any indications of the white players testing Abner's...

Graham: No, no. Where you're going to get most of that would be in the locker room before you ever get on the field and occasionally from the early stragglers out on the field. You might catch a little bit of that. You guys may already have first-hand evidence that it was a brutal son-of-a-bitch, but I just didn't see it.

Cummings: So you were here Abner's freshman year, and then you left for two years.

Graham: Yes.

Marcello: Could you see any changes in Abner from the time you had seen him in that freshman year and then was out of contact and then came back that senior year?

Cummings: Both in personality and in athletic ability.

Graham: Well, yes. The main thing that happened there is that... you've got to remember that they were 7-3 his junior year, I guess it was. You've got to remember that when I got back on September 1, 1959, I found a much more mature Abner, and I found a much more mature football team. They had a very workmanlike attitude about it. I mean, they knew they were going to be a good football team.

Marcello: Did he have the same outgoing personality?

Graham: Yes, yes. As the season wore on, I think the pressure began to eat at all of them a little bit--everybody. I don't

think there was anything racial to that. They got as high as--what--tied for number seventeen in the nation or nineteen in the nation. The pressure got so strong that, yes, they weren't as relaxed a group, but that was solely because of the pressure and the fact that they were on the verge of having a really unique season.

Cummings: At that time, had the media approach to Abner's presence at North Texas State changed?

Graham: Yes. The way you do that...see, we white honkys, to be redundant, have a way of getting around that sort of thing. It's like the play-by-play announcer on a basketball game. When the big kid goes to the free throw line, the tipoff is if he says he's blonde, you know--a 6'9" white kid on that team. Back in those days, you could say something like, "Abner Haynes, quick as a panther." You can't say, "The black jet, Abner." There were always subtle references to let you know that he was black, but as often times as not, it was a damn writer trying to figure out how he could tell somebody he was a "nigger" without saying so, because he knew he couldn't.

Cummings: So there was no media interest in the off-the-field happenings with blacks on the team.

Graham: Hell, no, they didn't care.

Cummings: Today, see, the media would jump on that.

Graham: Who cares?

Cummings: The public. Doesn't the public care?

Graham: Bullshit. If Abner Haynes couldn't eat in Louisville or Memphis, that was fine with Riley Cross. I mean, why in the hell would he examine it? SMU was all-white; TCU was all-white. They didn't care. I mean, it wasn't that they didn't give a damn, but they just didn't really stop to think or to care. It wasn't an issue with them, Randy. It just wasn't there. Now they were appalled later on. See, about once every three years, Randy Galloway will do a column. Hell, every so often Temple would do a story. A lot of that is personal shock on their part just like it might have with me. I mean, their personal shock would be to say, "Hey, my God, if I was writing then, why didn't I write something about that?" That's a major story now, but it wasn't then. That's like saying, "Hey, we were great and proper and good for everything we did for Abner." If I was Abner, I might say, "Hey, you mother, why didn't you do it forty years ago?" I told Temple that more than once.

Cummings: What kind of improvement and changes did you see in Abner's football talent from the early times you saw him as a freshman to that time you came back his senior year?

Graham: Number one, by his senior year he was on a very, very good varsity football team that was two deep and very structured and very organized. As I recall, his "stats" as a senior were not as good as his sophomore or freshman years. But

that's because they were hammering people. They were a good football team. I mean, they were just a very, very good football team, and you played both ways. So I don't remember how he did it, but I believe Odus used to take... well, as a matter of fact, at Hardin-Simmons I know he did. He took the first unit out after the end of the first quarter, and they didn't get back in until the start of the third. So he didn't get the opportunity because everybody played. If you went in, you had to stay. You could start the game and go back once a half. You couldn't ever go in a second time, I believe, is what his substitution rules were.

See, a lot of people don't know this, but the guy was a phenomenal defensive back--I mean, phenomenal. He was worth a scholarship just to play defense and return punts and kickoffs. Amazing ability.

But they played both ways, and so they would substitute fairly often. In his junior year, he didn't touch the ball all that much. I did the deal for the Sun Bowl, and I'm going to say that he touched the ball his senior year--on running, receiving, and kick returns--less than 150 times, which isn't very many.

Cummings: What were some of his talents that made him the great running back and the phenomenal defensive back?

Graham: Great quickness, great vision; width of vision and depth of

vision; great quickness, and instincts. He just had that instinct. You've seen quarterbacks that know to duck the rush, and there ain't no way they could see it. That's the way he was in the open field. He instinctively knew when to cut, when not to cut, when to go inside, when to go outside, when to come to a dead stop, when to turn it on straight ahead. He just had all those natural instincts. It was just as natural in him as daylight to dark. He didn't have great blinding straight away speed. He had great eye-to-hand coordination, though--good receiver. He didn't fumble.

Cummings: He was a good receiver.

Graham: Yes, an excellent receiver. He didn't fumble. He was just a great football player--great football player. Had he not gotten his mind screwed up, he probably would have played in the pros longer and more successfully than he did.

Cummings: What do you mean, by getting his mind screwed up?

Graham: The franchise moving to Kansas City and the death of Mack Lee Hill. I guess he was the first one. Which one was first? Kansas City lost two blacks...oh, Stone Johnson.

Marcello: Stone Johnson.

Graham: Oh, Stone Johnson, the sprinter from Grambling, was a wide receiver with the Chiefs; Mack Lee Hill was a fullback with the Chiefs, and he died. There was still another one, and the third one may have been after Abner left. But I think

that Stone Johnson's and Mack Lee Hill's deaths did big, big subconscious impacting on Abner as a football player. He may never admit it. I don't know. I don't think he was ever the same after that. I don't know whether he's ever been asked that. To me, he was never the same. I think the two factors that hurt him was the move of the franchise to Kansas City, and the second thing was the deaths of those two players.

Marcello: How did the move of the franchise to Kansas City hurt him, Fred?

Graham: Because he was playing professional ball in his hometown, and he'd played college ball thirty miles away. It would have more impact on him than it would Len Dawson from Purdue, for example. A lot of those guys did not want to leave. I know Abner was opposed to it. I think that and those black teammates there...one of them, if I recall, died in surgery...one either died in surgery or coming out of surgery, and one of them had a heart attack. I don't know, but they had about three or four black players at Kansas City die unexpectedly or by violent deaths. At least two of them occurred while he was with the Chiefs, and at least three of them occurred while he was still active.

Marcello: Abner had also mentioned that he experienced more racism in Kansas City than he did probably any other place.

Cummings: That's news to you, huh.

Graham: I'm going to tell Gayle Sayers he said that (laughter), since Gayle played at Lawrence. I don't know. That really surprises me. But Louisville surprised me, so I don't guess I really should be surprised. I don't know. I don't know.

Cummings: Were you still somewhat disturbed and shocked by the racial receptions that he was getting on the road by the time he was a senior and you were a full-time employee here at NTSU?

Graham: Yes.

Cummings: I mean, he had been here four years, and he was still getting the reception, and things were still happening to him and to the team when they went on the road to these various places.

Graham: And your question?

Cummings: Were you still shocked that they were happening?

Graham: Well, you feel resentment and that they're being unfair to Abner, but then how totally honest and open had you been in your relationship with blacks the last five years or for your entire lifetime? You know, I hoped they'd fully integrate Denton but not Hopkins Hills--that sort of thing.

I like to think that Abner made an impact on my life in making me more tolerant, but, see, that's a dumb-ass word there because if he makes me more tolerant, then he's a freak.

I don't know how to say it. I think that Abner made me aware of whatever my lack of insight about other people was, and I'd like to think that in our face-to-face experiences at that time, I was supportive of him. And I would hope that he sensed that support from me to where in that respect it was a helping pull-together-type of deal.

But then you get back to that point, I ain't the poor son-of-a-bitch getting in a cab and going fifteen miles to get something to eat, you know. That "Rah, rah! Hey, we're in this together; we're with you, Abner," is fine. I might sense that, but, hell, it ain't me having to go... you know, they ain't picking me up in a damn cab and taking me somewhere on Beale Street in Memphis so I can get a square meal, or somewhere in Louisville or wherever the hell you are.

That's the part of it that's really his story to tell, is what I'm saying. I don't know how else to say it. You like to feel like the interplay between you and him at that moment was satisfactory and productive for the two of you, but that's easier for me to say than it is for Abner to say. That's what I'm driving at. I don't know that I've said it right, but that's what I'm trying to say. It would be easier for me to reach that conclusion than it would for Abner.

Cummings: I think you've answered this a second ago, but one more

time, what was your reaction when SMU with Levias and Houston with Westbrook broke the color line nine or ten years after all this happened at North Texas. What was your personal reaction to the hullabaloo thing that they had?

Graham: Well, actually, I didn't resent it because I knew it would be better for blacks. Emotionally, I resented the hell out of the tooting their horn like they're some white knight to come in to be the salvation of the black athlete in Texas. That was malarkey. Yes, some of those guys--one of them who later ended up at NT--who would make those sort of proclamations if they were self-serving to him and his program--he would not worry about the degree of accuracy of them or whether or not they might be offensive to someone else. That would be their problem and not his. After a while I finally decided the thing for me to do...and I did it among media people who were friends of mine. When opportunities presented themselves, I would say, "You know, hey, when are you going to quit running that bullshit? You know and I know...blah, blah, blah." In terms of mounting a campaign or making an issue out of it, I would have been as guilty as Hayden was. So what are you going to say? In other words, why say, "Hey, by God, SMU, we're ten years smarter than you!" Then you go back to that original deal. Hey, Graham, where were you in 1913 when they started the football program here? You're bragging

for ten years out of a hundred.

Cummings: You think that irritation that North Texas had done this ten years earlier but now SMU and Houston are getting all the air play for it...do you think the irritation was present among a lot of the people up here at North Texas?

Graham: Oh, I don't know. I don't know. I really don't know. I'm sure there were some racists around who said, "I hope SMU and Baylor get all of them. Maybe they'll leave North Texas." I don't know.

Cummings: We've touched on this already, but do you feel, in looking back at all this, that some people at North Texas had the feeling that they were the white knights that broke new ground in a social atmosphere? I mean, do you think some people at North Texas take pride in being the first in athletic integration even though maybe at the time they didn't realize that it was such a historic event? Am I just placing way too much importance on it?

Graham: Well, if there are those among us who were here at the time--and I was here in 1956 and then skipped two years and came back in 1959--if there were those among us in that era who today...looking back, I will concede that I was here observing first-hand an historic event. I damn sure don't claim or want any of the credit for it. If I and others who are white like me expect or want or demand that sort of credit, I'm not sure that they would find the reaction among blacks very favorable. In other words, did

Abner Haynes blaze the trail, or did his teammates and coaches and the student S.I.D. and the trainers and managers blaze the trail?

Cummings: What do you think?

Graham: I think he did.

Cummings: And all the other people who were here were just doing their jobs?

Graham: Well, I think we've already touched on that. I think all the assistant coaches and coaches did a super job. Odus did, Matthews did; and on my end of it, Rogers did. I was on the publicity end.

Cummings: In other words, are you saying that the white people involved in this whole situation weren't the pioneers of this athletic integration?

Graham: They ran the wagon train, but I don't think they were the true pioneers, no.

Marcello: In other words, you feel they were simply reacting to something that had happened.

Graham: I think they reacted to something that had happened. I think they were reacting in a very productive, responsible way to something that had been thrust upon them. If it was by their choice, then let them take credit, see. If it's not by their choice, then what credit can they take?

Cummings: And in this case, it really wasn't by their choice.

Graham: It really wasn't by their choice. That's kind of like being

on a ship and becoming a buddy with that black gunner's mate. If you're the only two in the gun turret on that particular watch for six months...I think it's awfully, awfully risky...and I've said this over and over and over, and I don't mean to belabor the point, but it's something I guard against personally. I think it is awfully, awfully risky as a white person in a privileged society to take credit for having improved the plight of someone in a less privileged situation. I just have a hard time...I would have a hard time facing Joe Greene if I felt that way.

Cummings: Yes.

Graham: And if I do, I stop to think for a minute because it's an attitude I want to keep suppressed at all times. That's just the way I have to be with that.

Cummings: Do you maybe personally feel fortunate that you were able to be around when this happened and to experience it?

Graham: Oh, yes. The first ten or twelve years I was here, I think was a super time. I think the times were fun. I think later on times got provocative. I think they got serious. I think in some ways they got dangerous. I think they were of historical significance. Oh, you can't say that, but they were in their own way very significant.

In the mid-1960's and late 1960's, there was a hell of a lot going on off the football field, and it didn't involve just blacks. I mean, they were very volatile times, but

I think the college campus was a great place to be. A lot of people don't. I do. You knew that there was so much unrest. There was so much uncertainty, so much difference of opinion. Whatever it was, you knew that it was provocative and that something was changing. You might not know what it was, and you might agree with it or disagree with it, but you knew that changes were taking place unless you had an IQ one point higher than a plant.

They were fun times other than just the athletic part of it. They were invigorating times. It was fun. I guess you kind of feel like, you know, you're kind of a footnote to history to say you were there when Abner was there. I enjoyed it. I'm glad I was here from a personal standpoint, but I wouldn't want to paint it any bigger than that.

Cummings: Yes, that's what I was asking--just from a personal standpoint.

Graham: Yes.

Cummings: You're glad that you were here at that time.

Graham: Yes, yes, yes, yes. If I had to be a S.I.D, I'm glad to be somebody dumb enough to stay at the S.I.D. as long as I did. I guess it was all right with me. I don't know.

Marcello: Well, I think that's probably a good place to end this interview, Fred. We want to thank you very much for having taken your time to talk with us. I think you said some very important and insightful things that both of us can use.

Graham: Good. Thank you.