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Interview with

J. C. MATTHEWS

April 4, 1984

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas  
Ronald E. Marcello  
Interviewer: Floyd Jenkins  
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Oral History Collection

J. C. Matthews

Interviewers: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello      Date of Interview: April 4, 1984  
Dr. Floyd Jenkins

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello with Floyd Jenkins interviewing President J. C. Matthews for the North Texas State Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 4, 1984, in Denton, Texas. We are interviewing President Matthews in order to get his reminiscences and experiences concerning the integration of athletics at North Texas State University in 1956.

President Matthews, even though you have been interviewed before for the Oral History Collection, some people perhaps will not read that first interview, so why don't you start by giving us a very brief biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell us when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature.

Dr. Matthews: I was born on October 16, 1901, in northwest Grayson County.

Dr. Marcello: Tell us a little bit about your education.

Dr. Matthews: I went to the Rock Creek School in northwest Grayson County, which was my first school to attend, and I went there one or

two years before going to Foard County. We moved to Foard County, and I went to Plainview School. Lazy Neck, it was called.

Jenkins: I don't remember your mentioning that.

Matthews: I may not have mentioned it. All of the little schools had nicknames in those days, and that was a very good one for that place. It was slow to start things, slow to have basketball. I remember how hard we worked to get basketball injected into the program even for playground activities. We didn't have enough space, and we didn't have enough coordination between the people who were playing basketball and other people--and all kinds of things to handicap the early basketball experience. And that soon changed. We had a young man come in, and he was a basketball fan, and that ended the little problem of who could do what around there and so on. Basketball was on the make from that time on.

Marcello: Where did you then continue your education after Lazy Neck?

Matthews: I went to Thalia. It had a four-teacher school. I lived with my grandmother and went in the ninth grade. The ninth grade was not taught at Lazy Neck, and I guess it never was. As far as I know, it never was. But the family then moved to the West \_\_\_\_\_ community, which was a three-teacher school. The Thalia school was a four-teacher school, and this was a three-teacher school. I went there from that time until it was time for going to college. But the credentials

for going to college had almost nothing to do with the school. It had to do with a teaching certificate that I went down to the courthouse and earned and used as proof that I could do this, this, and this, and I was admitted as a full-fledged freshman to the North Texas State University.

Marcello: At that time was it called North Texas State Normal School?

Matthews: That's right, North Texas State Normal. Then I was the first student to be admitted to the freshman class without being a high school affiliated graduate. I did that by taking teacher examinations before I went down, and I got twelve units of credit for that, and then I did three more on topics not included in those twelve to make fifteen units of credit to get into North Texas.

Marcello: During this particular period of your educational experience, what kind of an interest did you have in athletics?

Matthews: Well, I played basketball at the West \_\_\_\_\_ School. I played some basketball, but I never was on the team. I didn't want to be on the team at Thalia because I was concentrating on getting my units of credit together. I didn't want to be on the basketball team. But that's about the extent of it. At Thalia I was playing on the scrub team, giving the regular players all the practice we could.

Marcello: Where did you continue your education after North Texas State?

Matthews: After North Texas, I went to Peabody College and got the

master's degree, and I came back and worked a year or two and went back to get the doctor's degree. I got those two degrees at Peabody between 1928 and 1935...1932 maybe.

Marcello: Now during any of your educational experience up to this time, had you ever attended school with any blacks?

Matthews: Well, the first blacks were at North Texas.

Marcello: But that was not during that period when you were a student at North Texas, was it?

Matthews: No, I was a member of the faculty at that time.

Marcello: How about at Peabody when you were a graduate student? Were there any blacks at Peabody?

Matthews: No, no blacks there. I don't know when they were admitted to Peabody. There was little enough about it that it didn't phase the whole program.

Marcello: Let's go back to your days when you were in primary school and grade school and perhaps even higher. What contact did you and your family have with blacks during that period? In other words, did you ever play with any black kids, or were you ever associated with them in a work situation or anything of that nature?

Matthews: No. There might have been a time when they were picking cotton, but I don't remember one. It didn't matter if they were black. That was okay. But I don't remember a thing about a case where there were blacks before it got to be a matter of an open thing that you didn't discuss anymore.

We never did have any problems.

Marcello: I think you had mentioned in a previous conference that we had off the tape that you did come in contact with them when your folks would come to town to sell apples and fruit and things of that nature?

Matthews: Oh, yes. I helped Grandfather Matthews sell apples in Sherman. That was about the early 1920's, I guess, and we went door to door--blacks, whites. It didn't matter where we were. We didn't say, "Let's not go here because this is the black community." We didn't say, "Let's go here because it's the black community," or anything about it at all. We just went where we thought we could sell our apples.

Marcello: In general, as you look back, what kind of attitude did your folks have toward blacks?

Matthews: I think it was such a little problem to us that we didn't do much discussing of it. I don't remember very much discussion of the whole matter. We had cotton pickers way back. That was my introduction and relationship and so on, and that probably had something to do with our being better acquainted with it than we would have been without that kind of firsthand contact. But there wasn't any problem about employing blacks to pick cotton. If they wanted to pick and we had some to be picked, that was it, and that was all there was to it. I don't remember anytime when we had some blacks and some whites. I remember a time when they were

all black; I remember a time when they were all white. I do not remember a time when there were mixed pickers in our field. There may have been, but it wasn't significant enough to look out for.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if there was any reason for that, that is, having all blacks one time and all whites another time in the fields.

Matthews: No. No, I don't think we even discussed it. Here's some pickers, and there was some cotton to pick, and that was it. We went right on and picked with them just as we would with somebody else when we were using them. We got the ones that we could get, and sometimes they were scarce.

Marcello: Were there very many blacks that lived in that area?

Matthews: No. The first blacks were ones who came for cotton picking, and they went back to East Texas after cotton picking time. Maybe they'd come for some other kind of time, but chiefly it was for cotton picking.

Marcello: So they were mainly what we would call migrants today.

Matthews: Yes. They were migrants for a period of several years from, say, 1910 to 1915, or somewhere in there. I don't think we thought anything about it after 1915, and we didn't think anything about it any other time except that here are some people we can get and we need some people. I don't remember any discussion about it.

Jenkins: Neighbors or classmates--you don't recall people ever discussing it?



Matthews: Well, at school they had discussion occasionally, I think, but not any ill will or anything like that was involved. I guess we had assumed that it was going to happen. I think West Texas was 200 miles west of where the thing first boiled up and so on. We knew it was going to happen, so we accepted it, is the way I see it in recalling back. Very rarely did anyone ever balk just as an individual. I remember a few who did it like that. The typical attitude in the community was, "That's like ol' Joe," and, of course you'd expect him to object to things. But that was it.

Jenkins: As you went to town selling apples and so on, you said there were blacks in town.

Matthews: Yes.

Jenkins: Were you there enough to hear conversations or remarks among customers?

Matthews: I don't remember a single one. This was in Sherman, remember. I was with my grandfather, and he had a long experience with blacks, and it didn't bother him, so it didn't bother me.

Jenkins: Did he ever speak of this subject?

Matthews: Oh, yes. He had no more doubt about going to the black neighborhood than he did about going to the white neighborhood. He knew the people down there and so on because he'd been selling apples for twenty-five years down there. There hadn't been a problem back the line when integration wasn't involved, and in his mind there wasn't any problem now, see.

It was a matter of these people wanting the apples, and we had them, and so we were going to sell them.

Marcello: So the relationship that you and your folks had with blacks was a purely business relationship.

Matthews: Early. This was the relationship before school integration was the problem or even an issue. I don't think anybody thought anything about it up until that time.

Marcello: I'm sure that integration and that sort of thing was far removed from the people of that time since we're talking about the 1920's, and you really don't have the Supreme Court decision until the 1950's.

Matthews: That's right. In the 1920's, you had only rare cases and especially in West Texas. You had a few of the families that came and picked cotton, and they stayed on after they picked cotton, so they sent their youngsters to school. There was just two of them and so on and so on, you see. This happened in such a normal sort of way that I don't remember anything even being discussed. There were no heated, as you know, problems.

Jenkins: Were you personally conscious of where the black kids were going to school?

Matthews: There wasn't any school for them to go to but the regular white school. No black schools developed for a long time in West Texas. In fact, rarely did you have a black school even in a town.

Marcello: So did you have blacks going to school with whites at that early date, or did they not go to school at all?

Matthews: Well, sometimes they didn't go to school. When they went to school, they went with us. That's the only school there was, was the white school. I don't remember us worrying about it.

Marcello: Did you ever attend school with blacks at that early stage of your life?

Matthews: I can't say. I just don't remember. I remember being surprised when people got so worked up later on, and I had watched the whole thing for years and years and years.

Jenkins: I'm focusing on this. This is a new one on me. I wasn't aware that blacks had attended white schools at that time. You say you don't personally recall them being in the classroom with blacks, but you knew that there was some out there.

Matthews: Yes. Yes, I don't remember having any feeling about it. You see, I had contact probably more than the people in West Texas because it was in Grayson County that I'd had the contact when I was helping Grandfather sell apples in the summer after our crop was laid by. And that was my first contact to any amount at all.

Marcello: When you returned to North Texas and continued as an administrator at North Texas, either in the Lab School or the School of Education or even after you became president,

did you perchance have an opportunity to work in any capacity with any of the black colleges or universities in Texas?

Matthews: Oh, yes. You see, I was in the State Department of Education. I don't know whether you knew that or not.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about that.

Matthews: I was in the State Department of Education during the curriculum development program time.

Marcello: And what would be the dates here, Dr. Matthews?

Matthews: In the early 1920's, I would say, or in the 1920's. See, the thing got fuller and fuller as you went on down into 1932 and so on, and it was still going strong. But my first contact was to leave North Texas at noon on Friday and get back to North Texas early on Monday morning. And there's no telling where I'd be in the period of time. I'd be at school meetings in towns 200 miles away on down to twenty miles away and spend the weekend, so to speak, in this community working with whoever it was that was doing the kind of thing that had brought me there--the curriculum development, etc. The blacks were as interested in the curriculum development as anyone else, or even more so because they saw this as a means of getting some things done they hadn't been able to do otherwise. This is something new so you get two or three new things altogether. That's the way that turned out, as a matter of fact. You had more white teachers going to black teachers' meetings than they'd

ever experienced before--either one of them--you see. I had my first meeting with a whole staff of black people after this curriculum business started. We had a need, and we dug in on it.

**Marcello:** What kind of work were you doing with blacks with regard to curriculum?

**Matthews:** Well, we had to start with getting materials; we had to start with getting a new kind of grouping in the schools. They had not had much effort made to get the fellows who can teach fourth grade material in this school and eighth grade material in this school and so on. That was a new kind of thing to them. It gave us a chance to work with them and help them, and it gave them a chance to get the help, and so this was just made to order. They were ready. They were already wondering what to do, often asking, but sometimes we didn't realize quite what question they were asking, the way they got around to it.

So the curriculum days opened up the relationship so that the whites understood the needs and blacks understood the sources of aid, and that worked out very, very well. There was a two-year period when it was in real high gear. That two-year period was worth twenty years of background for the blacks. They got more done in that two-year period than they'd been able to do in the twenty years before that time.

Marcello: And these were black public school teachers and officials that you were dealing with?

Matthews: That's right.

Marcello: Would it also be safe to say it was perhaps educational for you in that this was your first experience in working with blacks?

Matthews: I don't say perhaps--it was. Yes, sir. Of course, I had had contact in the summertime, as I said, on occasion in going back to Grayson County and helping Grandfather sell apples. I had had contact that I would not have had if that hadn't been something that I was doing because there was no contact available in Foard County, even in cotton picking in the fall. That was a rare occasion. The committee would sometimes wait on the fellow who was about to invite a group of blacks to come and pick his cotton. That was done carefully and so on. Once or twice there was a matter of hard feelings that got down to a point where it had to be attended to in a formal way--give them a backing up and so on--but that was very rare in Foard County. Foard County and Grayson County were different. Grayson County had known blacks all the time, and in Foard County they got acquainted with them only in a little dab at cotton picking time. Foard County was not backing up on the problem the way Grayson County did. They just went right on in, and it was all right--just go ahead. There were not as many, and therefore they were not as

concerned about being overtaken and all that kind of thing.

Marcello: That's an interesting point that you just mentioned there because, in doing background research for this project, I looked at the census reports, and Denton and Denton County really didn't have a large percentage of blacks in the population during the 1950's when the school integrated.

Matthews: It was a very small school across the tracks, and they had a fellow who had a knack for working with people in charge of the school system then, and that was a very fortunate thing. I think there were enough people who took an objective view of the thing to make it sort of look unusual for a fellow to balk about it. I don't know of a smoother place for integration than Denton, and that's the way history tells the story.

I worked, of course, with schools all over in curriculum development, and this nearly always came up one way or another. We just sat down and talked it out and decided what's the best way to go about this thing: "It's going to happen sometime, so let's do what we think is the best thing and the best way and so on."

Marcello: When had you come to North Texas as a member of the faculty and staff of the university?

Matthews: 1925.

Marcello: So you were in the community for more than twenty-five years --almost thirty years--before the whole process of integration

took place.

Matthews: No, we moved to Foard County around 1909. I was about nine when we got to Foard County. So the early breakdown that I saw was in Grayson County, and that was from the apple wagon and different places like that. I helped my grandfather sell apples in Sherman on two different occasions. One was when I was just a mere lad, and one was after I was up to nearly high school age.

Marcello: During that period when you were living in Denton and prior to the integration of North Texas, what kind of race relations existed in this town?

Matthews: Well, I think you'd have a hard time finding a town where the flow of information back and forth and so on was any franker or smoother than it was here. It was a rare thing in our area for a conflict or to come to blows, so to speak. I think you'd have a hard time finding a place that would be a better pattern to look at because the principal of the black school was--I started to say--admired. I guess you could say that his way of doing it was admired by the whites in Denton, and his way of doing it was to lead the people--not shove and push--over in his community to cooperate with the whites, to encourage them to cooperate with them and so on, to explain to them when things came up occasionally and all that kind of thing. He was deeply respected by both the whites and the blacks, and he was there for, I guess, twenty



years or some such time as that.

Marcello: And what was his name?

Matthews: Fred Moore.

Marcello: Again, in going back to the background research that I've done for these interviews, I can't find any evidence of any violence or anything of that nature taking place. Denton simply didn't have a history of racial violence going way back in its early history.

Matthews: It had an experience of working with them in all kinds of ways. You would see a group working on the street--a black and a white--digging post holes and so on way back in that time before you'd expect that to happen. I think Denton was very unusual in that kind of thing because the people simply didn't worry much about it. I think one of the reasons was that the black community was not overpowering in size, and there wasn't any "fire-fighter" taking over for them, you know, and so on, and that, I believe, had more to do with it than nearly anything else--the two factors of the leader in their group being able to work with the white group and there not being such a big group of them that they could overpower the situation. There was no big push to not let them be chief carpenters or whatever, you know. Nothing of that kind was going on.

Marcello: I also gather that the blacks and whites probably intermingled rather freely in the downtown business area because the business

area would have been now at the square during that period of time and the black community was very close to the square.

Matthews: It was closer than the other part of town. They had less distance to walk than the students at North Texas, for instance, had to walk--about half the distance.

Marcello: You were mentioning Fred Moore as being one of the leaders in the black community during that early period. What do you remember about Reverend Fred Haynes, who would be Abner Haynes's father?

Matthews: I didn't know him for a long time. I knew him better after I knew Abner than I ever did before that time. I don't think he was as much a public figure as the other fellow, but he was a very quiet, very solid sort of fellow, and he was as respected--maybe more respected--than any black man in Denton because he had the mental discipline that the blacks hadn't always gotten. If they went to a black college, they got one that hadn't been as well-prepared as this might be a lot of the time...most of the time, as a matter of fact. So this person had had a solid background of study. He was a solid fellow, too, and he had a very good way of getting things done without making any sales pitches or that kind of thing. You didn't see him out trying to sell himself or trying to put on a show or nothing. He just took a problem and went after it.

Marcello: I understand that he had a lot of friends and contacts in the

white community.

Matthews: That's right. That's what I said. Yes, sir.

Jenkins: What was his educational background?

Matthews: I don't know (chuckle). I didn't know him until well along in the process.

Marcello: I think it was generally true even at that time, was it not, Dr. Matthews, that the black preacher would normally be a pretty important person in the black community?

Matthews: Well, yes, he had been the leader in nearly every community wherever he would go. The leader was the chief minister, whoever he happened to be. Then if it was any size community at all, they always had more than one church and more than one of these fellows, and they were respected by the whole black community.

Marcello: Now during this period of time, was North Texas the chief employer of blacks?

Matthews: Custodians were a high percent. I don't know what percent, but custodians were a high percent of the people. There were no conflicts between the white and black custodians in the work at North Texas.

Marcello: I guess they also worked as cooks in some of the dormitories, did they not?

Matthews: More of the women than men in that case, but, yes, they did. There were a lot of women in the dormitory kitchens, and occasionally there would be a man.

Marcello: Abner always remarked that the black women who worked in the kitchens at North Texas State University always seemed to be healthier, as he put it, than other women in the black community (laughter).

Matthews: (Chuckle) They had a better chance to have the right food, you know.

Jenkins: I worked in the kitchen during that time. Do you know what religious denomination Fred Haynes was?

Matthews: Abner, you mean?

Marcello: Well, Fred Haynes was the father, and, of course, Abner was his son.

Matthews: I'm talking about the son, and you're talking about the father. Is that right?

Jenkins: Yes.

Matthews: Well, you see, I had a lot more contact with the son because he and I sat in conference about this problem day after day after day for a long time, and the father did this over a long period of time in getting him all ready and so on, you see. That part of it was out before I was really working on it.

Marcello: Abner always referred to this church as the Holiness Church. I think it's the Church of God in Christ.

Matthews: Well, Abner had the colloquial name for it, though. That's what all people called the group at that time, but they've got themselves other names. That was the typical name. Abner was sort of razzing them, too, when he called them the

Holiness, you know.

I don't know whether you know how much of a gigger he was, but he really had a way of bringing his people around by the darts he let them have from time to time. He was concerned about their...I guess he was exhibiting what his father had been trying to accomplish, but exhibiting it in a non-teaching form, you know. He was doing it in jokes and doing it in ways of that kind. There's no doubt in my mind that that's why he opened up relationships more than they would have been. He was the most talkative guy you ever saw. He just talked all the time. But he sent messages, too, along with his gabbing.

And both sides liked him. I don't know a person who would say, "Well, Abner needs to be thrown out." He was doing enough activity that it would have been likely for someone to have said that at some time because he was into everything. Nothing was out of his territory (chuckle).

Marcello: Now prior to Abner and Leon King coming in 1956, blacks had already been previously admitted to North Texas. I think as early as 1954, there were black students--Tennyson Miller and, I believe, a Mrs. Sephas and maybe one or two others.

Matthews: Right. That's right.

Marcello: And then I guess it's in 1955 that North Texas admitted the first black undergraduates, and then, of course, Abner and Leon came in 1956. Now this was mentioned in that first

interview, but I'd still like to get your thoughts on this, Dr. Matthews. When the federal district court in Sherman ruled that North Texas had to accept blacks, this was in the Atkins case...

Matthews: Yes.

Marcello: ...then what exactly was your attitude? What did you do at that point?

Matthews: Well, my board said, "Let's let them sue." The board had already made up its mind before it came to the meeting to get at it. They just said, "Just let them sue." They didn't have any militant attitude about it, but if they wanted to sue, let them sue. The board didn't debate that at all. They just had a year or so to get ready for that decision, and they had in the meantime come to that conclusion: "Let's just get it on the books and get it over with." Nobody made any fuss about it when they got sued and lost because they expected it, and so it may be that that's the best way to handle it. I don't know a school that got along with it any nicer down the line than North Texas did, and so I think it partly was a matter of the people assuming that it was going to happen: "Okay, it's going to happen, so let's let it happen in the best way we can, and let's not be a troublemaker ourselves."

Marcello: Would it also be safe to say that perhaps the attitude of the board and perhaps even of yourself was, "Okay, the courts have so ruled. That's the law. Now we're going to obey the law."

Matthews: That's right. That was strictly it all the way up and down the line.

Marcello: Which, I think, says something about the leadership at North Texas at that time because you could have very easily dragged your feet for years and year and years like some schools did despite whatever the courts had ruled.

Matthews: Yes. Well, I had a good board, and we had a very interested board in the school. Ben Wooten had been a student at North Texas--I don't know whether you knew that or not--and several others had been early students at North Texas. Ben Wooten was the leader. There wasn't any doubt about that. You'd go to a strange group, and the first thing you'd know, he'd come out as the leader. I saw that happen with board members from all over in the state, you know, not just North Texas but North Texas, East Texas, whatnot. Who would turn out to be the leader? Ben Wooten. It didn't fail. It didn't happen just occasionally. It was always Ben Wooten. He worked on it. He thought about it and so on, and he had a way of putting it up to a fellow that it was hard to question. He was one of the big reasons why North Texas made such a leap forward in about a ten- or twelve-year period there.

Marcello: Let me ask this. After blacks were admitted, or even around the time that blacks were admitted in 1954 and 1955, what efforts or lack of efforts went forward to publicize the

fact that North Texas had integrated?

Matthews: I don't think we were trying to publicize that it had been nor to keep from publicizing what had been. There wasn't any secrets as far as we were concerned, so we treated it just like we treated problems in general. We didn't get a fanfare kind of deal out of it, you know, to try to make it get before the people. We just took things as they came along and worked with them and tried to solve them.

Marcello: What sort of feedback were you receiving from the community after the North Texas had integrated?

Matthews: A very quiet nod--very quiet. No big deal about it. But the people were glad it happened that way and that there was no disturbance. The business people were glad there was no disturbance in the town. They told me time and time again, "We don't know how you did it, but that was the way to do it." (chuckle) I had one or two individuals come and want to have a big word battle about the matter, and I said, "I'm not in the mood," and that ended that (chuckle).

Marcello: These were people from town?

Matthews: Yes, two or three trying to map out a thing.

Marcello: Now were those first black students who were admitted...were they commuters, or did they live on campus? Do you recall?

Matthews: The three early ones lived on the campus. They lived on the campus and were going through the procedures and so on. The blacks in town were not involved in it directly at first, I



would say, but an individual would be involved. The blacks didn't seem to feel like it was their problem alone. It was everybody's problem. They had no meetings to try and keep something from happening; they had no meetings to try to get it to happen. They just didn't have group meetings to chew the thing over.

Marcello: So blacks were not only admitted during that period, then, but they were also allowed to live in the dormitories as well?

Matthews: Yes.

Jenkins: Were they living in the dormitories?

Matthews: I don't know how early, but as soon as they were ready, there wasn't any big discussion about it.

Jenkins: Do you know where the first three actually stayed?

Matthews: It seems to me it was Bruce Hall, but I'm not positive. I think it was Bruce Hall.

Jenkins: Did you get any kind of reports out to those dormitories about any kind of disturbances?

Matthews: I didn't have a single group coming in to grate on me about it one way or another.

Marcello: Were they eating in the dormitories as well?

Matthews: That's right.

Marcello: Now that's kind of interesting because is it not true that the town itself still had segregated facilities at that time?

Matthews: Oh, yes, I'm sure they did. I don't remember a place where

a black could go in to eat at that time. You see, there were only three or four people...there were a very small number of people involved and that we're talking about now. They had been admitted to the institution. They had been admitted to Bruce Hall. The people at Bruce Hall didn't even raise the question with me: "Shall we take them, or shan't we?" I didn't know they were applying until they had already arranged to let them move in. I said, "Sure, you've already done it." (chuckle) But nothing happened. It was just an ordinary kind of thing.

Jenkins: What about their roommates?

Matthews: They were in no case mixed and matched for some little time, quite some little time.

Jenkins: So the blacks would have had black roommates?

Marcello: That's right.

Marcello: How closely did you work with Mr. Wooten during this entire period?

Matthews: Well, during the whole Matthews-Wooten time, we worked together all the while. I don't think we had many more meetings during the time of this business than we did typically. We did make telephone calls about any kind of thing that was bothering either one of us. He was a very frank fellow, and I was, too, (chuckle) so we just said what we thought as gently as we could, but it was what we thought. I couldn't possibly have had a better person as chairman of the board at a time like that.

I don't think it would be possible at all. I wouldn't even try.

**Marcello:** What were his general attitudes and reactions toward the integration of the school?

**Matthews:** Well, I think they were almost identical with mine. I don't think he and I ever had a conflict about it. We had talked about it. Everything that happened, we talked about in advance. See, we'd anticipate what this one is going to be, what this issue is going to be, and we had decided what our business was going to be in connection with it and so on. I told him, "Someday someone is going to want in the dormitory." He said, "Well, what do you think should be done?" I said, "I think we should let him in or her in." I said to him, "I would hope it would be a woman." He said, "You would?" I said, "Yes." I said, "It's too easy for boys to get in scuffles, don't you know?" He said, "Oh, I see what you mean. Yes. Okay." And so two women were the first ones to enter. I think it was fortunate because it would be all over with then.

**Marcello:** Now this all occurred in 1954 and 1955, and then Abner and Leon come in 1956 to enter school and also to play football. I'm not sure which came first (chuckle).

**Matthews:** Well, they had their first contact with the coaches. They had no contact with anybody else until the coaches had decided they wanted to go ahead and do the thing because

Mitchell was talking with me all the time about it and so on.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. As we have learned, actually, Abner was brought up to the campus by his brother, and they went directly to Coach Mitchell, as you mentioned. Evidently, Coach Mitchell handled the situation quite well, at least as far as Abner was concerned. Did Coach Mitchell ever get in contact with you afterwards and say, "What should I do?"

Matthews: Yes, sir. He did.

Marcello: Describe what took place during that conversation.

Matthews: Well, it was just the way we're talking now, just some details: "Do this and let's see if we cannot do this, and if something comes up, let's not make issues by taking a step ourselves that would result in an issue becoming a public issue and so on."

Marcello: For instance, did he perhaps say, "Should I or should I not allow them to come out for football?"

Matthews: Oh, well, yes, sure. That was the first question, of course.

Marcello: And your answer was?

Matthews: Yes, sure, if that's what he wants to do.

Jenkins: Coach Mitchell initiated the idea of recruiting blacks.

Matthews: No, no. No, no. Abner Haynes recruited himself to be a student at North Texas.

Marcello: They walked on.

Matthews: Abner came, but he came first to see about being a student at North Texas and then second about being a member of the

football team. He was smart at that because Mitchell could have been a lot slower to have done it the other way around, you see.

Jenkins: That's what I was wondering.

Matthews: Yes. See, the whole responsibility was mine when you got right down to it, but it was all the time, anyway. So you just go ahead and make it that and let it go.

Jenkins: Had the issue of whether to recruit black students come up before Abner walked on?

Matthews: We didn't recruit Abner, see. He recruited himself.

Jenkins: I know, but had the question arisen?

Matthews: No, I don't think that we had gotten into the athletic matter beforehand because no one was talking about it and so on.

Marcello: When Coach Mitchell posed that question to you, that is, whether or not to allow them to come out for football, is it safe to say that your response was, "Yes. In effect, you have to let them come out for football because of the law once again."

Matthews: Yes. Yes, that was not debatable. He was admitted to the school, and he was admitted to the football team if he can make it.

Marcello: Now at the same time, let me ask you this. Did you place any responsibilities upon Coach Mitchell for making sure that there were no problems on the football team, or was

it assumed that that was his responsibility.

Matthews: Just go ahead as we were doing.

Marcello: What kind of an individual was Coach Mitchell?

Matthews: Cool, calm, collected, organized, planned in advance, anticipated, and so on. He was as fine a fellow to be an athletic director as you could pick--working with the boys, working with the staff, so on and so on, right down the line.

Marcello: Do you think that he perhaps was an individual with the right temperament to handle the integration of athletics?

Matthews: You bet. That was a fortunate thing.

Jenkins: It appears that either by accident, fortune, or deliberation, there were a lot of people at North Texas who seemed to be in the right place at the right time to make this thing go smoothly. How do you account for that?

Matthews: Well, I think that the blacks were either given some advice or were doing some pretty solid thinking on their own about where to go and so on in those early stages, and I don't think that anybody else thought about going until Abner went. I think that other people would think about it and were hesitant and delayed and whatnot. By this time, the matter of handling integration had already been thrashed out and anticipated in a good many places. The fact that it was going to be a problem down the line was known by a lot of coaches and a lot of presidents before it happened to anybody. Before North Texas had a walk-on, for instance,

other people were already aware of the fact that it was going to happen someday. I think that it was not surprising that it happened to North Texas first. I think we did business in a little more open way than a lot of other people, and people knew how we stood about it and so on down the line.

Jenkins: Was this a topic of conversation at coaches' meetings, at presidents' meetings?

Matthews: No, I think the only discussion that went on between the administration and coaching staff was between Mitchell and me.

Jenkins: Well, I was thinking that you were saying coaches across Texas knew this was coming.

Matthews: Yes, I think before North Texas actually integrated coaches in Texas were aware that this was going to happen. Well, you see, here they are, in a little town, and they're watching a black school and a black player and so on, and they said, "Boy, there isn't anybody in town that can play like he can." This is happening, you see, before integration time even, before anybody had been integrated.

Marcello: As you look back on that period, do you see sports as playing a very, very prominent role in the whole integration process?

Matthews: No. I see nearly every spot having some champion of the cause. I don't know of a department where somebody didn't come forward and help solve the thing, take on a lot of the possible

problems in connection with it, and you'd be surprised sometimes who that would be. It wouldn't be necessarily the fellow that the director depended on most. It would be somebody who had thought it all out and went to the director and said, "Why don't we do so-and-so," and he says, "Do it." And that was the way it was a lot of times.

Marcello: Describe your first meeting with Abner Haynes.

Matthews: I don't remember. I don't remember it being any different from a lot of others with him enough to stand out. See, he had several conferences before he finally got everything lashed out. He had several conferences with me, I mean, before it was finally clear as to just what we're going to do and how we're going to do it and so on and so on and so on all the way around.

Marcello: What went on in those conferences? Do you remember?

Matthews: All kinds of questions about what work you have done, what you plan to do next, why this can't be done somewhere else. We were building the case from the real facts of the matter, not from somebody's statement, you know, that's pulled out of the thin air and saying, "This can't be done anywhere else." Abner was a smart boy. You had to know that about him. If you didn't, you soon learned. He had thought about a lot of things before he came, and he would raise the question that he'd thought about.

Jenkins: Was a lot of the conversation between you and Abner of a



racial nature, or was it pretty routine as you would talk to any other student?

**Matthews:** No, no. It was both. It was a mixture. One minute it would be some technical point in connection with racial matters, and sometimes it would be just the average kind of thing. It came out as the situation made it come out. See, Abner had done a lot of thinking himself before this started, and you didn't find him unaware of the situation. There was one weakness in his admission papers that was a problem, and he and I were discussing that, and he pointed out, "A lot of people have that, don't they?" And I said, "Yes, we call it to their attention, don't we?" And he said, "Yes, you do." (Chuckle) We laughed and said, "Well, we'll see what we can do with it. That will have to be made up sometime somehow."

**Marcello:** You mentioned that Abner would come to see you periodically concerning various matters. Can you recall in general what some of the concerns were that he had relative to racial problems and so on?

**Matthews:** Well, you see, you had three people on the team--black people on the team. We didn't have fifteen or so. You had three people, and they were the ones that Abner knew and so on, and they were ones that Abner could talk with and get out of a notion of doing this or that or the other kind of thing. Then they started having people that Abner never had

seen before, and that got to be a problem, too, for him and for everybody else for that matter because the Abner way of doing things didn't agree with this guy, see, sometimes. So that all had to be taken into consideration. That did not make for a two-second thing. It had to be a thing you think through--about how you're going to go about it--and we decided that Abner wouldn't take it any further than to report that here's a problem. I didn't know that was a problem. I didn't know this guy was trying to enroll even. He brought the problem, so I took the problem at that point, and Abner was out of it from then on. We made sure that every fellow understood it pretty soon, that if you're going to raise a problem or a problem that the administration is going to have to face, you go to the president first. The way to get things going got pretty cleared up in fairly short order--a couple of years. There wasn't any questions about why didn't this one come to somebody's attention earlier or something like that because it did come to somebody earlier, see. Abner saw to that and saw that everybody else understood it and whatnot (chuckle).

**Marcello:** What kind of housing arrangements were worked out for these two black football players once they came to North Texas?

**Matthews:** They were in the dormitory just like anybody else if they wanted to be. I think they didn't come the first year, as I recall, because they didn't want to tackle the problem

themselves. But they worked with the boys a year on the team and so on and were a part of the athletic unit, and they changed their minds. I don't think they were in the dorms the first time. I could be wrong about that.

Marcello: How about in terms of dining facilities? Were they taking their meals with the rest of the team over in the quads?

Matthews: Yes.

Jenkins: Were they rooming together?

Matthews: I don't know that.

Marcello: They did that first year when they lived off-campus. They were living with Abner's sister over in Southeast Denton, and they came back and forth to school. Do you recall the story when Abner's sister's house burned down and there was an outpouring of aid to help from the local townspeople in terms of donating clothing and all that sort of thing to Abner and Leon? Do you remember that?

Matthews: Oh, yes. You see, Abner was a very popular fellow. He was known by the businessmen in town and by all kinds of people. He was well-known and well-liked.

Marcello: You kind of get a gleam in your eye when you mention Abner. I gather you must have liked him, too.

Matthews: (Chuckle) Well, Abner had a way of doing things just right, you know. And that sort of accounts for it. He simply knew how far not to go on a problem and where just to leave it alone completely and back up and so on. See, his father

or his grandfather...was it his father that was a minister?

Marcello: Yes.

Matthews: I think his father had worked on him for years and years beforehand, taking into account many slants of the thing but always as a matter of being fair with his boy. Now Abner tried to see to it that whatever he was pushing for, he was at the same time being fair with the other fellow. I would be aware of the fact that he was taking my part of a problem into account as well as his own because I'd often say, "Abner, you see, I have this matter to work on." And he'd say, "Oh, yes," and he'd add two more things to it, you see. He wasn't caught unaware. He knew what my problem was before I even mentioned it, and he was wide awake in looking for things all the time. You could wonder, "Am I getting this point over to him? Yes, yes, he's got it."

Marcello: It would be safe to say, I think, that he was the kind of person you couldn't help but like.

Matthews: Oh, that's right. I think you'd have a hard time making yourself not like him.

Marcello: Did you know Leon King very well?

Matthews: Yes, indeed. He was a quiet fellow, but he was a strength. He was a strength for Abner. Abner depended on him a lot.

Marcello: In what way? Can you elaborate?

Matthews: Well, in being able as a couple of buddies to thrash the problem out in a different way to what you and the boss or

you and anybody that didn't know what it was all about and so on. An informed buddy, is what he was.

Marcello: But personality-wise he was a lot different from Abner, was he not?

Matthews: Yes, but they tied their two strengths together when they got into a problem a lot of times, and one took the end that he could do best, and the other one took the end he could do best, and that was the way they did their work. They worked as a team as almost no team ever did.

Jenkins: Did they come together to see you some?

Matthews: Rarely did they come together.

Jenkins: Did Leon come to you very much?

Matthews: Yes, yes. He came quite a little bit. Nothing compared with Abner, of course.

Marcello: Abner was a regular visitor?

Matthews: Yes, yes. He wasn't the fellow that was tapping on your doorstep all the time, and he wasn't the fellow that overdid his time staying. He was considerate of other people's problems. He knew, as he put it, that the blacks are causing the whites to have problems.

Jenkins: Were Leon's visits much different from Abner's?

Matthews: Much shorter, number one--just to the point, and that was all.

Marcello: Leon was not the talker that Abner was.

Matthews: No. Abner would come talking, you know, and leave talking.

Jenkins: Were Leon's issues much different than those that Abner would

come with?

Matthews: No, not a whole lot.

Marcello: I do know that after Abner and Leon came to North Texas and the football team had become integrated, they were no longer able to play games with schools such as Ole Miss or Mississippi State or the University of Southern Mississippi. Did you in any way participate in scheduling or nonscheduling of those games?

Matthews: Not in the conversations about what to do about it, not without people or not with them, no.

Marcello: That was all handled by the coaches.

Matthews: That's right.

Marcello: Evidently, it was decided that if the blacks couldn't come to Mississippi, then they would no longer play Mississippi.

Matthews: They wouldn't go. That's right. But that's the coaches' decision. The coach talked with everybody on the squad quite often about some of the things that were getting down to a problem. He'd like to know. He wouldn't want them to say the next week, "Well, we wouldn't have done that or something," so he let them in on things like that.

Marcello: After the two blacks did come and were on the football team, were there ever any sort of limits imposed as to how many blacks could be recruited each year for the team?

Jenkins: Was it discussed?

Matthews: The fact that we wouldn't limit it, you mean?

Jenkins: Yes.

Matthews: No, I think we just faced it as it came along and didn't make any rules we didn't have to. You wouldn't have to make a rule about that because there weren't a lot of people available to do the thing.

Jenkins: Of the blacks who were recruited, was there much of a problem of academic acceptance of these blacks persons?

Matthews: No. If they didn't meet the thing in a pretty square way, they probably got left out just like anybody else would. If you couldn't come up with his clear case, we'd leave him out the way you'd do anybody else that wasn't up to it.

Jenkins: Were you aware of any attempts to change standards at all?

Matthews: No, they didn't bring any requests of that kind to me (chuckle). They knew that they weren't going to be changed. The coaches knew. Mitchell knew.

Marcello: Do you think the fact that Abner was also a superb football player had a lot to do with the ease with which the integration process took place?

Matthews: Abner was a superb football player, he was a superb public relations person, and he was a pretty good student. He wasn't the best in the world, but he hadn't had the best chance in the world, see. So that was taken into account. People put it this way. They said, "Abner's smart." See what I mean? That was the way they answered that question. The coach would say that. Other people would say it: "Abner's smart. You

don't have to teach him a lot of things. He learns on his own a lot of times just by getting the feel of it."

Jenkins: This is kind of a strange question, but the thoughts come into your mind (chuckle). Has anyone ever suspected or accused you of recruiting Abner because he was such a perfect case?

Matthews: We didn't recruit Abner.

Jenkins: I know you probably didn't, but...

Matthews: Abner was on the ground flying before anybody had given it any thought, and Mitchell, before he even had a conference with Abner, had a conference with me. Abner was on the campus, and it was known what he was on campus for, but Mitchell didn't have any meeting with him until he came over and had a little chat with me and went from there. He went back and had his conference with Abner and got him straight on a lot of things about how he thought it was. And that was okay with Abner. That was just fine. That was the way it was done.

Jenkins: Well, just as I was mentioning earlier, with such a tremendous pattern of people in the right spot at the right time, I wonder how different it had been if there hadn't been an Abner Haynes.

Matthews: Well, I don't know. A lot of people thought of Abner as being a smart aleck, and in a sense he was. But Abner was smart enough to know when he had reached his limits or was about to, see. So he got a lot of things done that he wanted to see done



by working all the way around them and all that kind of business.

**Marcello:** Abner said something interesting to us when we interviewed him. He mentioned that when he left Denton in seventh grade and moved to South Dallas to an all-black situation, he had a much harder time adjusting to that than he did coming to North Texas State University and adjusting to a white situation. His observation was that he had been around whites all of his life up until seventh grade here in Denton and ...

**Matthews:** ...and he hadn't been around those city boys (chuckle).

**Marcello:** That's right. He had not been around those city boys, and then he moved into an all-black situation. That was much harder for him than North Texas. The way he looked at it, by coming up to North Texas to school, he was coming home.

**Matthews:** Yes, he had a lot of friends, you see, when he came. They'd seen him play in high school. He knew a lot of the people. Yes, he was right about adjusting a lot better than somebody from Wichita Falls that had moved in all of a sudden.

**Marcello:** He was not really an outsider, so to speak.

**Matthews:** No, no. He knew a lot of people, and a lot of people knew him. And it was easy for him to get acquainted. He knew how to open up the gate, so to speak.

**Marcello:** Dr. Matthews, this is perhaps really taxing your memory, but do you recall a white football player on that same freshman team by the name of Vernon Cole?

Matthews: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Describe what kind of a person Vernon Cole was.

Matthews: Well, I don't know his characteristics as well as I knew Abner because they were not as obvious, I guess was one thing about it. But he was a pretty solid fellow, the way I read him, and not overly talkative but talked enough to do what he needed to do. I think he was reasonably cautious about when to move in and when not to move in and when to leave things alone. But he was more than ordinarily quiet. Not a withdrawn sort of fellow but more than ordinarily quiet. Before he moved in on a thing, I guess he made a point of being sure he was thinking straight on it. You wouldn't find him being the first one or two making the move. You'd find him coming in at three or four and making a point that was a real important point to be made, see.

Marcello: The reason I mention him is because he was the quarterback on that freshman team and was one of the first persons to go out of his way to make friends with Abner, and they became lifetime buddies.

Matthews: Yes.

Marcello: But more importantly, Vernon Cole was the real leader on that freshman team, and if Vernon Cole said Abner Haynes and Leon King were okay, then they were okay. Again, I think that is going back to something that you mentioned awhile ago, that is, having the right people in the right place

at the right time.

Matthews: Well, it would have been awful easy to have had somebody here who was bragging about it all the time. That's one thing you didn't do, you know. You got it accomplished, let the people see it accomplished, and do it without making announcements and pronouncements and so on.

Jenkins: Were there people wanting you to do that?

Matthews: Oh, God, yes (chuckle). Yes, a lot of people were just saying, "You have such a good chance to get in the press now." The hell with the press. You're trying to get a good job done, see.

Marcello: How about national news coverage? Did this whole integration process at North Texas command the attention of the national media?

Matthews: Well, they took a longer period of time to recognize it, but, yes, they came in, and North Texas was recognized as being one of the ones that led out and made it stick after it led out and nothing happened counterclockwise down the line and so on. This was watched all over the country. They'd say, "Look out! They'll have some trouble! Look out!" See, for the first couple of years, we hear that. At the meetings you'd go to, they'd say, "How is it going now?" That emphasis was on "now." "Is it still going all right?" You didn't just do an introduction and then let it go to pot, you see.

Marcello: Who was dealing with the media? Would this have been Jim Rogers's responsibility?

Matthews: Well, Jim Rogers and I were the two that did the most deciding about it, yes. Jim Rogers didn't do a new angle on athletics without our talking about it. I didn't do one as a new angle without talking to Jim about it because he understood an angle about it that I might not understand. We talked about it. We just sat down and thrashed it out.

Jenkins: Do you remember any particular incidents where television coverage was attempted, where they would come to campus, and did it create any kind of incidents on the campus?

Matthews: You mean somebody with a television camera would come somewhere else and...yes. They were some cases where they came, and people wished they hadn't. But we didn't bring any confrontations with them about it if they were already there and doing it before we knew anything about it. We didn't have a scene about it, you know, or that kind of thing.

Jenkins: I'm recalling a story that Jack Curry tells. He was in the College of Business at the time when television cameras came. Do you remember this?

Matthews: No, I'm not with you yet.

Jenkins: Have you talked with Jack?

Marcello: No, I sure haven't.

Jenkins: Well, I'm simply relating my recollection of what he says,

and this did involve a football player. He says that the cameras came in, and it was when they had, I guess, the first black woman graduate student. This is my recollection. The television people said they were going to enter the classroom, and Jack said...do you remember that?

Matthews: Yes, and he said, "No."

Jenkins: Yes. And they kind of pressed him, and he said, "No, this is a classroom. Whatever you want to do outside the classroom we will talk about later." Apparently they did come on in, and apparently there were a couple of very large football players in there. Jack says he indicated to these football players, "Would you as gently as possible remove the cameras and the people from the room?" He said they did, and there was no problem after that. Did Jack talk to you about this?

Matthews: Yes. Of course, he did just the right thing. You'd have had to let them come and run over you or call their hand on it, and he called their hand on it. The faculty was troubled occasionally by situations like this before they happened. I had a lot of "what if" faculty members coming to visit me about it, you know, and we just sat down and talked about possible ways of doing the thing. They had very few incidents of this kind in the whole process--very few.

Jenkins: Have you talked to some of those earlier students? I'm recalling a fellow named Jim Jolly, who was the first black

graduate student in the College of Business. Are you familiar with Jim?

Matthews: No, I don't know Jim.

Marcello: Generally speaking, as you look back on this, do you recall any faculty opposition to integration?

Matthews: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, sir. I had a couple of faculty members saying, "If you don't do so-and-so, we're going to quit." And I said, "That's all right. Go ahead and quit." They didn't say anymore. That was the end of the conversation (chuckle).

Jenkins: They didn't quit?

Matthews: They didn't quit, no. They didn't ask any other questions later down the line either. I think they saw what the situation was.

Jenkins: I think we probably may have mentioned this before. I'm not sure I've talked about it with you, but I have with others. The roles and the attitudes of the top administrator can go a long way in determining how in this case a faculty responds.

Matthews: I think that, number one, you have to say if there's going to be a role played there, it ought not to be done by saying to the faculty member, "This is the way I'm going to do that, and you get behind this and push it some." There was not any contact with the faculty about how we were going to precede. We just preceded in this manner and let them observe

it and let them find a way to respond in like manner and so on when they could. That took the place of anything coming from me about instructions about what to do or what not to do or something. You don't remember anything that I ordered the group to do or not to do, do you?

Jenkins: No, but the attitude that you presented was that it will be done, and we will not oppose it in any way.

Matthews: I never did say that, I don't believe.

Jenkins: No, but the attitude was there.

Matthews: Yes, that's right (chuckle).

Jenkins: And there will be no debate.

Matthews: I think they saw that that was the solution I was going to use, and I think a lot of people decided then that that's going to be for me, too. That's the way I'm going to be. One or two got too excited about it, you know, and enthusiastic, and it wasn't quite the way it was really done--what they were doing--but they thought they were. I think that the faculty realized that this kind of thing was going to happen sometime or another and appreciated the fact that it was being done this way, and they stayed with it about as well as you could expect a whole faculty. You can't expect to have 100 percent in a whole deal like that, but I guess we had as near it in practice and in feeling about it, too, as you would expect.

Jenkins: Were there any changes in tutoring policies and approach toward athletes after the blacks were integrated?

Matthews: Not that I know about.

Jenkins: Were there any greater problems or incidences or need for tutoring as far as you know?

Matthews: No, no.

Marcello: Well, President Matthews, I think that exhausts our list of questions, and we want to thank you very much for contributing one more time.

Matthews: Well, (chuckle) I'm glad to do it with you. I hope that's the kind of thing that you had expected.

Marcello: It certainly is, and we thank you very much.