ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

SAM VAUGHN CONIFER, COLORADO APRIL 24, 2020

INTERVIEWED BY RACHAEL BLEDSAW AUDIO FILE #042420 – SAM VAUGHN

# EDITORIAL NOTE

This document is a rendering of the oral history interview as transcribed by the interviewer from the audio recording. Although significant effort was made to provide a verbatim transcription, for easier reading of the transcript, verbal pauses, repetitions of words, and encouraging words from the interviewer were omitted. In addition, Mr. Vaughn, who reviewed the original draft of this transcript, was given the opportunity to make minor modifications to the verbatim transcript of this interview. For the original interview, please refer to the audio file.

# ABSTRACT

Sam Vaughn, former interpretive planner at Harpers Ferry, describes the course of his career with the National Park Service beginning in 1973. He discusses the problems and pitfalls of creating interpretive exhibits for the Brown v. Board of Education site. Mr. Vaughn describes the creation of the General Management Plan for the park and the specific definitions that were used to guide and create the exhibits. He also discusses at length the issues relating to budget constraints and the general handling of interpretation in parks. Mr. Vaughn describes community involvement in interpretation and opines on the overall importance of the park in the narrative of American history.

# PERSONS MENTIONED

Dave Dane, Gail Hazelwood, Cheryl Brown Henderson, Linda Brown, [President] Jimmy Carter, Bill Gates, Mike Beerman, [President] Theodore Roosevelt, Denny Gelvin, Robin White, Ray Harper, John Oxner, Senator Paul Douglas.

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Interviewer: This oral history interview is for the Administrative History of the Brown v.

Board of Education National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas. The interviewer is Rachael Bledsaw, with Outside the Box, on behalf of the Midwest Regional Office of the National Park Service. Interviewed today is Sam Vaughn, former interpretive planner at Harpers Ferry. The date is April 24, 2020. This interview takes place on a virtual conference using the Zoom platform.

Mr. Vaughn, as I’m sure you know, the purpose of an Administrative History is to document the development of a unit of the National Park System, both physically and administratively. Oral histories are one way to get information that might not be otherwise available from documentary evidence. We try to get as much information as we can, from as many different perspectives as possible, in order to create a robust narrative of the developmental history of the park. This will be used by future park administrators to inform their decisions as they navigate future developments. However, I should inform you that not all the information we gather will be included in the final Administrative History. That depends on how the information advances the understanding of park development. But we do appreciate that you are giving your time to share your experiences of the development of the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site to further this project.

So, to begin:

Could you just state your full name and spell your last name, for the transcript, please?

Vaughn: My full name is Sam Walton Vaughn. Last name is V-A-U-G-H-N.

Interviewer: Perfect. Alright, let’s start with your work for the National Park Service and then move on to the specifics of your involvement with Brown v. Board. When did you start with the National Park Service?

Vaughn: Oh, 1973 – beginning of 1973. Interviewer: Okay. What was your position then?

Vaughn: Well, I – we went to the Grand Canyon for training – Buck Ranger training, for two and a half months. Then to Seattle for six months of an urban experience. And Wisconsin for a month in – training in environmental education. And then I went to Kennesaw Mountain for – National Battlefield Park, outside of Atlanta for two years, two and a half years. Two and half years, then, at Fort Vancouver in Vancouver, Washington. And then – my whole pedigree then – let’s see, I go to Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore for about eight years.

Interviewer: When did that start?

Vaughn: Oh, that was 1987. And – no, it wasn’t. It ended in 1987. It started in 1978. So, then, to the National Capital Region, where I was the interpretive specialist working with interpreters in all that Region. And, finally, I got hired by Harpers Ferry Center in 1990. I actually never worked in Harpers Ferry Center. Reason is, I – Harpers Ferry just created a unit at our other planning center in Denver, the Denver Service Center, and we actually had the idea that both service centers should – here’s a crazy idea: work together! Like, on visitor center and plans. And so, I and another ranger were the first two interpretive planners out there, joining – and my boss was Dave Dane, the former Chief of Interpretation for the National Park Service. And I worked here in Denver for about twenty years. The last ten years of it, I was Chief of Interpretive Planning for the Park Service. And the whole time, I worked for Harpers Ferry Center, so a lot of airplane flights back to Dulles Airport. I retired in 2012, I guess.

Interviewer: Okay. And what was your role in interpretive development for Brown v. Board? Vaughn: I entered the project kind of late. There was at least one major workshop, and

Dave Dane, my boss out there, who I’ve mentioned – my boss in Denver – was

our representative on that. And Gail Hazelwood, who later became the superintendent at a number of areas, was sort of the Interpretive Planner trainee. After a while, I was asked to take over the project, and I did – from the beginning of the project, including preparing interpretive themes, and visitor experience goals, and then trying to facilitate the development of interpretive media and – the media planning, and interpretive program planning.

Interviewer: Okay. You were kind of all over the place. I like that. What were your first impressions of the Brown v. Board National Historic Site when you first saw it?

Vaughn: I was really excited to see the school. And I was really excited, also, to meet the people, Cheryl Henderson Brown – Brown Henderson, Linda Brown, the community members, the teachers. I mean, this was – this was a really important part of our history, you know. I was – 1954, I was six years old, but my father talked to me about this. I think my father was the only white physician in Minnesota to belong to the NAACP, and he never told us about that until, oh, decades later. But he was – you know, he talked to us about this. And so, to see the school, the very place – because National Park Service is mostly about place. Or starts with place and that school, it – and I worked on a number of projects that involved, sort of, sacred schools, like Jimmy Carter – you know, the school where he went to, Plains, and Little Rock Central High School. So, this was – this was very exciting. And then I walked into the school, and it seemed like – I mean, naturally, we knew the school was going to be the visitor’s center, also, and the headquarters. And my first impression was, “This is perfect! It’s perfect!” It was – it was very well – I guess, for a school but certainly for a visitor’s center.

Interviewer: Excellent. How do you think the public perceived the park, at the time?

Vaughn: I think the – my impression is, the park was very favorable. As I said, I joined the project late, so I didn’t participate in the early public meetings. And so, I got second-hand treatment of what that was. As I said, I’d worked at Little Rock, and there was more active, oh, kind of, resentment, just to over generalize – well, probably not over generalize – by white people. Losing a year of school, and they moved to the suburbs, and the Little Rock Central High School became mostly white – well, I mean mostly for people of color. At Brown, I think it – my impression is, there wasn’t as much threat to the, oh, the activities of the community. So, I mean, the Monroe school was already closed and wasn’t in use. And so, my impression was people were quite proud of the role of their community, and that extended to the whole state. And I think – I can – I think very few people found that decision to be questionable. That – I mean, most of the people I’ve talked to were astonished that they actually had to make that decision. Thought we settled that at the Civil War.

Interviewer: (Chuckles) Alright, so when you first started with the park, what expectations did you have for the job?

Vaughn: Well, I think – let’s see. We – I’ve been doing research here, you know, I’m studying before the test. I was told this was going to be multiple choice, but –

Interviewer: Oh, you were lied to.

Vaughn: Ah, phooey. You know, I can do it. General Management Plan, 1976, so we probably – I probably got involved around sometime in ‘94, ‘95. And I’d been out at Denver for four or five years, and we, at the time, had a doctrinal battle going on between the old style planners, several of which had become my friends, and the landscape architects who would wave their arms and create a vision for this area, and then the new planners, who would put together the purpose statements very carefully, and they’d argue about whether to say, “if possible” or “if practicable” or “if feasible” – you know, which of those is the right phrase and purpose significance. And several of them were friends of mine. And I – so, I thought I kind of moved easily in both areas. I believed very strongly, by then, that interpretation was about more than exhibits and programs and the information desk in visitor centers. We ought to be concerned with the entire visitor experience in parks. Also, the before and after bit. So, it became really important to generate visitor experience goals and interpretive themes and work on those, and this was a – you know, this was one example where those things were really expanded in the General Management Plans as drivers of – well, for example, drivers of alternatives. And I didn’t participate in any of the alternative choice because that was before we were in the process that I was involved in. So, they’d already chosen the alternative. It was pretty obvious, anyway. It was what the skeptics call less, more, most. When you’re supposed to have three alternatives.

One is, you don’t do much of anything, and the “most” is, you do – you imagine that Bill Gates will give you an unlimited budget, and then you pick the one in between. My experience is, we almost always do that anyway, but we don’t like to admit it. So, in this case, they did more of a Phase One and Phase Two in the – in the eventual plan. And that – Phase One was the low budget option that really

nobody liked, except maybe some accountants in Washington. And Phase Two was the way we should do it to meet our goals and our themes and make it an interesting place to come. Because we want visitors to come there.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, you were – you were expecting, kind of, something difficult?

Something easy?

Vaughn: Well, the previous folks had had some difficulties, so I think, if I recall – and different planners have different skills. But we had a deadline for interpretive themes, and I remember just having gotten the project, and there was lot of discussion on interpretive themes, but nothing really coalesced. And so, I remember walking – I live in the hills southwest of Denver – and I remember walking up our hill and sitting on a rock and making just some notes, and it – and it really seemed pretty obvious to me how they – how they separated. So that came pretty easily. And, to my shock, these met mostly approval with a few word changes or additions by the park, and the team captain, and the rest of the team, and such. So that was – that was pretty good!

Interviewer: Good. Alright. Well, it sounds like you were kind of starting to get to some of your challenges, but what would you say were the biggest challenges in achieving your goals for this job?

Vaughn: We were not able to – I also basically wrote the Long-Range Interpretive Plan, or the – can’t remember what it’s called – Interpretation and Visitor Experience Plan and Accessibility Guidelines that are part of the General Management Plan. The Interpretation and Visitor Experience Plan, I think, I basically wrote because I was the only team member. Usually, you have a team of, like, [unintelligible] specialists from Harpers Ferry Center, exhibits, and publications, and audio visual. And this project, as I recall, was done with a little bit of left-over money in the GMP fund, and if we didn’t spend it, it would go back to Washington. And so, it was kind of a – it was a – you know, I got a lot of advice from my colleagues. I only had two colleagues from Harpers – in the Harpers Ferry office at that time.

Maybe we had a couple more. We had up to ten people, Harpers Ferry people, in Denver, and then, at the end of 2011, I was the last one, so, then, I retired. But, doing it – writing it myself was a challenge, but it was – it was – maybe the challenge was reduced by the fact that we weren’t going to go into, really, very much detail on what the interpretive media should do. I mean, what specific – like, media and programs are ways of achieving the goals that you’ve already set. And we all knew that we were going to have a goa.: We were going to have school kids come to Monroe School. We were going to their school, and we were going to discuss the community. We already knew that kind of stuff. We already knew that one of the things we were able to stress is with the involvement of Harpers – of Denver Service Center, which had architects. In fact, I believe our team captain, Mike Beerman (interview interrupted by Sam Vaughn’s wife, then continues with sounds of food preparation in the background). And Mike was an architect – so, the idea of how a visitor’s center should be put together, and how do you greet people when they come in, and what kinds of experiences – how do you orient them within the building? And that all comes together in visitor

experience. And so, we had a meeting of minds on how all that would lay out. But you asked me about challenges.

Interviewer: Yeah. Your biggest challenge.

Vaughn: I think my biggest challenge was – among some of the – our colleagues, there was what I might recall – regard – as a little bit of hesitation to embrace controversy. And I think, at that time, Park Service was kind of graduating into more populist and social history and of underrepresented groups. And so – but, when we would – I would – I mean, I wanted to interpret racism. I wanted to interpret with kids and maybe with people of all ages. I remember the – I wanted to interpret racism and get them in touch with their own racism. And I was inspired in that by the Chief of Interpretation at Brown v. Board, who is somebody that I had hired years before at Indiana Dunes. And she is – she is now the superintendent of Little Rock Central High School and one of my heroes. And she said, one night – she’s African American. She grew up in Gary, Indiana. And she said this isn’t only about white racism; everybody has racist – everyone has some tendency of prejudging people unfairly by appearance, or where they live, or language, or some kinds of behavior just different than we’re used to. And I was real impressed with that, and I wanted – engage in that, and they let me slide an interpretive theme in on that topic. But they were – they were a little uncomfortable with it, I remember, also – some people were. I remember, also, that, you know, I was preferring sort of short sentences, active sentences, simple language. That doesn’t go well – too well in a planning document. And I remember that I was – I prepared a draft, and I said our approach to history will be to tell the truth. And then, I followed that with a sentence: “Where there are several truths that come,” –you know, we’d already said “that they come from scholars or actual participants,” “we’ll present the significant several truths.” Several perspectives. Well, somebody accused me of pandering. I don’t know pandering to whom, but I later saw, when I was looking at this, they kind of cleaned up the language on that a little bit so it was more – and, actually, the language was better, because [unintelligible – audio fades]. But that was probably too much of a – of a slap in the face of people who thought they were telling the truth and who hadn’t read the second sentence and thought I was proclaiming there as being one, objective, truth. So that’s an example of some sort of language challenges and – but I felt that we – and I – actually, I haven’t been to Brown since. I haven’t seen [unintelligible – sound faded out] but, I think – my impression is Park Service and other organizations do a really good job of telling the truths, plural.

Interviewer: All right. It sounded - with the language, it sounded like you had one delicate situation there. Were there any other difficult or delicate situations related to park development administration, or was that the biggest one?

Vaughn: A little bit like – I’m trying to remember where this was. Where I got a question from the public about, “How come all these white people come in here and tell our story?” This was from an African American community member. And, as I recall, our team captain jumped in, and our team captain was no – he was Mike

Beerman. He was not afraid, at all, of taking on the power structure and standing up for what he felt should be done. And so, I think, he jumped in and said, “This is not an African American story; this is a human story.” And it – and it – I thought that really summarized it very well. But, in my, you know, ignorance of – I think this was maybe my first – well, let’s see, I think – I’d worked on Jimmy Carter, which had a lot of racial aspects. The story did. But the first area that was set aside specifically for relating to Civil Rights. And I remember getting lectured by – I think Cheryl Brown-Henderson lectured me several times on – I was asking what’s the difference between prejudice and racism. And I felt kind of stupid having to ask that question, but they were distinguishing it in their comments, and I think – I think she put it pretty well. I think she said racism is prejudice with a power factor. If there’s a power differential, it could be racism. Otherwise, it could be just, you know, garden variety prejudice. So, some of those – I remember also being so surprised – but they liked to shock me. They said, “You know, you might not believe this, but teaching for our black kids was better before integration.” “What? What?!” “Segregated education for our kids here in Topeka was better. Their education was better, their books were better, their teachers were better. They were – they maintained more discipline.” And every black person and every white resident of Topeka were nodding their heads. And they knew that. There was – and I just – I was surprised by that. And, in retrospect, thinking about it, I – you know, it makes sense. But – and they were so proud of their school, their Sumner School. They were just – that was – and their experience there. But they said that doesn’t mean we want to go back to that.

Interviewer: Okay. That’s fascinating! So, there were some pretty major projects at the site during your tenure. What was your involvement? I’ve got a few here, if you need – if you need some guidance or reminders. But the first one that’s listed, you’ve mentioned quite a few times, the General Management Plan?

Vaughn: Yes.

Interviewer: Your involvement in that was?

Vaughn: I was the interpretive planner or visitor experience planner on that team. And, as I said, I joined maybe a year or two into the project. But – and so, my job was to draft – you know, attend the meetings and see the site, and work as a liaison with our media specialists in Harpers Ferry Center, meaning we give a call to our audio/visual specialist and ask him, “What do we need for theater? What are the requirements for a theater?” Because I – as a visitor experience, I was really – that theater! There’s another challenge. That’s in almost all of our visitor’s centers as a challenge. Most people in the world have made the decision – most people with enough money to actually go to a – go to a movie – which may become obsolete, I don’t know – but they are used to sitting in a comfortable chair with a sloping floor, and the chair is fixed, and there are good acoustics in the room and good electronics. And they’re used to that! And they might go and watch a dumb movie once a week. But in our – so many of our National Park Service visitor centers, we’re really cheap. And I’ve seen so many where we just have a room that’s adjacent to an exhibit area with a lot of activity and some folding chairs set up

before a video screen. And that’s really crummy. And then we have some areas like – have you been to the Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C.?

Interviewer: Way, way back when I was in eighth grade, I think.

Vaughn: Okay. Did you grow up around there? Did you grow up there? Interviewer: No, I actually grew up in Chicago.

Vaughn: Oh, okay. So, you know about Indiana Dunes, then. Interviewer: I know of them. I was never allowed to go. (Laughs)

Vaughn: Anyhoo, the Roosevelt Memorial, you know – we all know what a great communicator Theodore Roosevelt was, and a kid – ask any eighth-grade kid: “What was the Depression?” “What caused World War Two?” “How – why did we go in?” Most of them have no idea about that. The story there is really important. And what we did was we hired a – I forget his name, but one of these world-famous architects, and they spent – they spent way too much money because they had to get this special granite stone, I think, from China. And they had – you know, they had a granite quarry over in Maryland, but that wasn’t the right stuff, so we spent it all on this ego trip for this architect and – or landscape architect, and in – nowhere do we tell the story of Roosevelt, of the Depression, of World War Two, of the great programs, the great social programs, that, I mean, directly relating to the Park Service, CCC, and the WPA. And we were supposed to have a theater there. What a – you could put together a twenty-minute film that would just be so powerful and would tell the story in a way that was meaningful to an eight-year-old and a seventy-eight-year-old. And we – instead, we spent all the money on granite trash cans and that kind of crap. So, Park Service – we have a tradition of that, and I fought for a fixed seat theater, and that was in our requirements in here, and they ignored it and made sort of an activity room with a video screen. So, that was – and it was a fight that I fought and lost.

Interviewer: Alright, and that was the General Management Plan or the Interpretive Plan? Vaughn: It – that was in the Interpretive Plan.

Interviewer: Okay. So, the results for that one: not what you wanted?

Vaughn: Well, we – actually, it was in both, because we got into that Phase One and Phase Two. And Phase One is sort of like a neighborhood nature center: homemade exhibits, which are often very good, but it’s not the kind of quality and effectiveness that we should expect. And we were, at that time, pressured to get by on the cheap. Congress was telling us that we spent too much money on our visitor’s centers. I think our visitor centers ran, maybe, two to three million dollars, most of them – except for ones where you get a great bunch of donors like Grand Teton and they spend – [unintelligible – audio fades] they spend that much on almost [unintelligible]. So, that’s in Chinese granite, chiseled right outside the Visitor – I don’t know if it is [unintelligible – audio fades]. So, Congress told us – and, in fact, I think it was after Brown, but they were – they were needling us about this, and our accounting people were nervous about this and would ask,

“Well, why do you need $400 a square foot for exhibits?” Now, that was the – that was the – what we would estimate was required to adequately tell the story. And to minimally tell the story was maybe $250, and they want us to spend $200. That’s – you know, that’s like for some flip charts and magic markers! And, so, the (long pause) – interpreters in the Park Service, we have a kind of a – well, a coarse barnyard expression would be, we always feel like we get the hind teat.

And – you know, “Whatever’s left over, well, we’ll give a little bit to interpretation. But, you know, law enforcement and resource management, and maintenance, and administration, you know, those really carry the load.” And we feel like we don’t get enough. And so, you can play your violin to that sad tune. But – and in many cases, it’s true. In this one [unintelligible – audio fades] Brown

v. Board Phase One was really inadequate, and we had people that said, “Don’t phase it, because, if you have Phase One and Phase Two, you’ll only get Phase One. They’ll cross you off the list, “Well you have enough.” And you’ll be battling [unintelligible – audio muffled] to have money to build more fountains at the Roosevelt Memorial. And so (exasperated sigh) – those fights – and, I think, eventually, Harpers Ferry got involved, I believe, in helping them, kind of, get to – I don’t know. it As I said, I haven’t been there, but it looked on their website like it was, sort of, Phase One and a Half. But I think they were also fortunate, because they had a really good staff – really good staff and a really good Chief of Interpretation, I’ve heard, (and so they, you know, in the personal programs, in personal contacts, they do a great job, and you don’t need a lot of fancy exhibits for that.

Interviewer: Okay. What about the Value Analysis study in 1998? Were you involved in that? Vaughn: Yeah, I think I was. Hmm! Well, I just talked to the Chief of VA a few days ago.

But I don’t – I don’t think I was involved in that. Usually I was – I was sort of the

Harpers Ferry VA contact person. I was involved with almost all of the Value Analyses for visitor’s centers. And I would facilitate the workshops and write up the final reports, but I didn’t – I didn’t do that on Brown. That would have been one of the fairly early Value Analyses. And I’m a real strong proponent of that program and [unintelligible].

Interviewer: Okay. In any of those studies that you helped out with, were there things that should have been included and weren’t? And if they weren’t included, why?

Vaughn: (Long pause) I can’t think of anything. You – I think the General Management Plan set a pretty good context and set of goals. And there were some personnel issues, and we had a team captain who was, sort of, half taken off the project, and the General Management Plan is signed by a different Denver Service Center employee than the team captain, and I thought that was mistake. We all – in fact, our whole team marched in and said, “We like our team captain,” you know. “Don’t touch him!” Anyhoo, that’s the administrative history, unvarnished. You have it right there.

Interviewer: Alright! (laughter) Were there any things that, in either of these studies – or any of these studies, that you thought should not have been included and did end up being included?

Vaughn: I can’t think of anything there, either. We didn’t get – we didn’t get – we didn’t get much money, and I didn’t see that as a – necessarily, a hinderance except for, as I’ve said, the failure to go fully into Phase Two and fund this as a – you know, a site that gets – that gets press in travel magazines and in travel [audio garbles – unintelligible]. And the internet was becoming popular at that time. But that took planning, and people would know the story, but, “Geeze, you mean we – there’s -- the school’s there? You can go into it? Really?” “Yeah, just drive right off the interstate, and it’s right there.” “Wow. Maybe I’ll do that.” Of course, they didn’t, but, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, how has the park’s interpretive programing changed? Or how did it change as you worked with them, since you were involved in some of these interpretive plans?

Vaughn: I don’t know the answer to that, really, because I never went back after – I think – I think I went to Topeka twice. And – once with the General Management Plan and then once with the Interpretive Plan. And I think, you know – interpretation – of course, they were – you know, they were good professionals, and they followed the development of the profession. I think my interpretive themes – I think they were really good themes. I think they were rewritten about, maybe, four or five years later. Normally, an Interpretive Plan is said to have a life of five to ten years. And I never knew something – I never knew a plan to be rewritten in five years. We always would say “Oh, five to ten years.” It’s always ten to fifteen or twenty. All depends on whether there’s money and whether there’s a Chief of Interpretation. Some Chiefs of Interpretation – park Chiefs of Interpretation honestly think that they know what to do, and they “don’t need no stinkin’ plan” to tell them what to do. And – plus, having to sit in all these workshops, and look at someone writing on a flip chart, and divide into small groups, and, you know, develop ideas and present it to the group. And they find that really annoying. And so, they don’t have an interpretive plan. I work in Columbia in volunteer projects – up until the virus hit us, and they require their parks to have an interpretive plan. And, if they don’t have an approved interpretive plan, they’re not getting any money for exhibits or for another interpretive staff member! Which we’ve advocated for the U.S. but no! Park Services is kind of a fiefdom of – oh, now, four hundred and some sort of separate areas – and especially areas that are older and bigger and are run by people who, you know, are the Old Guard and came from Yosemite or Yellowstone or something. They don’t like to be told what to do by some national office. And the Office of Interpretation – or Interpretive Planning – we didn’t have any line authority over parks. We would advocate value of interpretive plans, and we would sometimes help with funding, but that funding kind of went away when – actually, when Denny Gelvin retired and we lost a funding source, so the park or the regional office would have to find the money for those.

Interviewer: Okay. So, with the work you’ve done for Brown v. Board, what are you most proud of?

Vaughn: I’m proud of the direction that we were able to set. And when I say that I was a one-person interpretive team that was just wrong. So, don’t quote me on that – on that earlier! Because our team included Robin White, our Chief of Interpretation, their – Ray Harper, their Superintendent, and Cheryl Brown-Henderson, and several members of the community. So, we had – what I should have said was, I didn’t have any other Park Service people full time on the team, as we would on other projects. So, I’m proud of – also we worked a lot to get visitor experience established as a, you know, legitimate aspect of interpretation. The strict limits of interpretation are personal contacts programs, or informal contacts, and interpretive media. Well, most visitors come to parks to have experiences. They don’t – most visitors don’t come to parks to go on a program. Most visitors don’t come to parks to look at exhibits. They come to parks because they are unique places, you know, and we’ve done the research to demonstrate that. Most people go to Yellowstone to see wildlife; they don’t go there to see the primary value that was the reason why the park was set aside, which are the, you know, geysers and the geothermal features – which are just astonishing! But it’s mostly looking at the – you know, wanting to see bears, and sitting in a bison jam, and that kind of thing. But it’s a variety of new experiences. Only five percent – I kept track every year and, every year, only about five percent – one year, four percent – of our visitors actually went on interpretive programs. Which, when I say that, interpreters get mad because they think I’m demeaning the value of interpretation, which I’m absolutely not. but, in almost every park I know, interpretation should be a really major activity offered. But for – like, when my wife and I go to a park, she’ll sit outside while I go into the visitor’s center. She doesn’t like visitor’s centers. (laughter) She wants to get out in the park and experience the park. So – but I think – I think we are –so, the combination of interpretation and, at Denver, the architects and landscape architects, really could put together this concept of visitor experience and visitor experience planning. And we generated that in the ‘90s. And it was met with a fair amount of resistance. And, in fact, there was a workshop on visitor experience planning at Harpers Ferry Center, done by our Mather Training Center, which is also at Harpers Ferry, and, at that time, I was the one in the Parks Service who had the most experience and was talking most about experience – visitor experience planning and visitor experience, and also several other people in Harpers Ferry, and nobody from Harpers Ferry was invited to this workshop. And their definition became – of visitor experience – became the experience while you’re going on a program, or the experience while you’re doing some kind of digital connection with bird calls or something, which is part of it, but not nearly enough. And so, I think the – my impression is that we’ve gotten visitor experience installed in some cases, but it’s – you know, every – in any profession, people often can advance their careers by publishing an article or small book or something that is well received, and, within a year, they get a nice promotion. And it follows in kind of a cyclical fashion. If we have one approach to interpretive themes, for example, like the one I used in Brown v. Board, which was just asking – essentially, asking, “What are the stories we need to tell?” And we’ve gotten just way, way, way, more complex with that – with post-modern education, with meanings, and tangibles, and intangibles, and kind of a formula

approach that (chuckles)I found that if you don’t – if you don’t follow the formula, which I didn’t follow in Brown v. Board – the formula was only being developed –that your reviewer would just red line the whole thing and ask for meanings, and tangibles, and intangibles, and universal concepts, and such. But I think that happens in every profession. And, at least in – it’s slowed down, though, in the Parks Service because, I think, the personnel are just scrambling to survive, nowadays. And so, I haven’t heard – of course digital interpretation became big. That’s the technological – technologically driven change. Which makes me glad I – that I retired when I did, because I can barely use my cellphone. (laughter) I would have had a little trouble.

Interviewer: All right. Is there anything that I’ve not asked that you want – that you’d like to talk about?

Vaughn: Well, I think (long pause) – I think – a couple things. Brown is the perfect park. Brown is the perfect park because the story matters, and it’s the right place to tell that story and to let people experience that story. And I think it – you know, it works really well. I think this is also an example of good planning. Because the – as far as I know, we didn’t get carried away with having millions of meetings and millions of drafts. I think it was pretty practical. We had a really good team, as I recall. And, so, we’re – there’s also – there’s also an argument in the Parks Service between whether plans should set general goals and general desired futures and – but, since what’s going to happen two years from now is unknown, they would just set that framework – plan would set that framework. And then the regional office and the park would decide how to – (phone rings in background) how to achieve that. And some people in the - sorry for the phone. Some of the people (laughs) – actually, that call is from John Oxner, who was one of my – well, my best friend, but he was the team captain on the Yosemite project, and he’s been retired since, I think, ’91. But he’s my hiking and lunch partner, and we haven’t been able to meet for a month or so, so. He’s – we’re now going – we’re trying to figure out how to maintain social distance, you know, on the trail. And then, I don’t know, everyone brings their bottle of wine, and you don’t share when you sit down for lunch, that kind of thing. You can’t – restaurants and – of course, I’m telling you, in Seattle, and so you are – you were one of the epicenters, but you should be showing us how to do it.

Interviewer: We’re trying.

Vaughn: Yes. So, a general visionary plan versus a practical “okay, next year, this is what you do, this is what we’re going to do. We’re going to do these,” you know, “twenty-five things, and we’ll need this much money for it.” And then the next year – or you can put those together in a five-year plan or a three-year plan. I thought those two extremes, the visionary and the practical, are determined mostly by the personalities of the people making the decisions, the superintendent or the Regional Chief of Planning, or some such. But we – and we don’t do General Management Plans anymore. And I think that’s really a shame, because I heard the definition of planning once from Denny Galvin, who was universally regarded as the smartest guy in the National Park Service, ever, and I certainly

don’t know anyone who would threaten that. But planning is about thinking. And thinking about what we should be doing. And planning is also about thinking about what not to do. And I was impressed with that. But now I think we – I don’t know – I don’t know if – you may know of some General Management Plans being done, but – because they’re done to – actually, we were told to do it in one of the NEPA legislations that has not been rescinded. But, somehow, we were able to weasel out of it and take the money from planning and put it into the White House visitor’s center. No, see, that’s why – geez. I see [unintelligible – muttering].

Interviewer: It’s all right. (laughter)

Vaughn: Well, I’m retired, so, you know, what are they going to do? But I really – I really – I really enjoyed this, and I really enjoyed – you know, as I said, this was a number of Civil Rights – or one of a number of Civil Rights oriented projects, whether it was a General Management Plan and a Interpretive Plan done together, which we also did at Jimmy Carter or – oh! Also did at Little Rock Central High School, how about that? And then I was able to put together a workshop on Civil Rights, and we did this on – at the Carter Center in Atlanta. And bringing in Park staff from all around the country to try and articulate some kind of vision for interpreting Civil Rights.

Interviewer: All right. Well, that sounds absolutely amazing! Was there anything else that you wanted to talk about?

Vaughn: Yes, but I shouldn’t put it on tape. Interviewer: (Laughs)

Vaughn: No, I feel – I feel so fortunate. This is not relevant to just Brown, but I feel so fortunate to have been able to work on this. You know, I spent twenty years as a Park Ranger and then twenty years as a – as a Park Planner. And I – we always felt that you couldn’t be a good interpretive planner unless you’d worked at a visitor’s center, behind the desk, and led programs. There is some pretty bad local exhibits for your visitor’s center because it didn’t have money, which I did. And then oversaw a project with money to actually do things the way we should do.

And, in fact, we did an environmental education center at Indiana Dunes, and your senator, Senator Paul Douglas, was the patron saint of Indiana Dunes. And he was the one who got it – got it from – set aside. And we – was able to, when I was at the Park, work on the building – the – and finding placement for and building the environmental education center. And that’s also when I started working with architects and landscape architects. And most interpreters, we don’t quite do that. So, the cross fertilization of relevant disciplines is just – is just exceedingly important, and I’m hoping it’s still happening. I’m not too confident, but I’m hoping it is. And Brown was a – to have interpreters on their General Management team, I think, was really – helped the final product. And, as many people said, this place is not a story of architecture. It’s not a story of battles or – there are no famous men or women who actually lived there, but there were

heroic men and women that worked and – throughout the country – on this, and so I was really proud to be part of this.

Interviewer: It sounds like you should have been. All right. Well, if there’s nothing else, (pause) I’m going to go ahead and stop the recording. All right?

END OF INTERVIEW