Listening to Indians

HERBERT JOHNSON, Seminole

September 23, 1975
Tulsa, Oklahoma

This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63135.

The purpose of these interviews is to bring the Indian peoples' own comments to students in classrooms, and to foster greater understanding among the peoples of the United States by providing Indians the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and ease of reading, but every effort has been made to preserve the original feeling. Conversations and opinions were encouraged on any subject of interest to interviewees; questions and responses do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the interviewer, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or St. Louis Community College.

This transcript series was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and by support from St. Louis Community College.

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Sam Myers:

    Today, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, I'm talking with Herbert Johnson. That sounds like a Scandinavian name.

Herbert Johnson:

    That may be, but I'm a full-blood Seminole.

SM: From Florida?

HJ: No, Oklahoma.

SM: Here in Oklahoma you refer to the Creek-Seminoles as a hyphenated, dual tribe?

HJ: No, we speak the same language that the Creeks do.

SM: You do speak it? Did you always speak it at home?

HJ: Sometimes in the house, to my mother-in-law. The kids pick up words here and there.

SM: Did you speak both languages when you started school?

HJ: No, I spoke Indian.

SM: You spoke Seminole when you went to school. Did you go to a school where the language was spoken?

HJ: I went to Bowlegs.

SM: Is that a school here in Oklahoma?

HJ: Yeah. I went to elementary, first and second grade there.
SM: Did they teach the schoolwork in Seminole?

HJ: No, no. They taught it in English. First you had to learn to speak English.

SM: So you went to school speaking Seminole, and had to learn to speak English?

HJ: Right.

SM: That's kind of difficult, isn't it?

HJ: Not really.

SM: I guess young kids pick it up quicker than older people.

HJ: Right.

SM: On a reservation where they're teaching in the classroom the children's native Indian language, they said the kids pick it up quite rapidly, the five, six, seven-year olds.

HJ: Right, they do.

SM: I guess they have a more flexible tongue and everything else. So that's how it started—you started with Seminole and went to school and learned English.

HJ: I was raised at Sequoyah in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

SM: That's farther east in Oklahoma?

HJ: Right. Cherokee country. I was raised there. I finished eighth
grade, then went to Lawrence, Kansas.

SM: At Haskell?

HJ: Yes, it was Haskell Institute. I was up there for four years. After I finished, I left, took off...

SM: Did you go to school any more after that?

HJ: I went to the Service, and after the Service I went to a branch of Oklahoma State in Okmulgee, Okmulgee Tech. It has Oklahoma State University's School of Technical Training, Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

SM: Did you take up any particular...

HJ: Accounting.

SM: And that's what you do here. You're the assistant to the director and the bookkeeper.

HJ: I'm the bookie.

SM: Taking a few bets? Well, anyway, is that what we heard buzzing a while ago?

HJ: I was marking the property around here. I was engraving. Just in case I should ever lose my job, I could always get a job in a jewelry store, engraving.

SM: Is it hard to do?

HJ: No, it's real easy.
SM: It's electric. By vibration.

HJ: Right. Like little bitty dots. It looks like a straight line to the naked eye, but it's little dots, and it moves about 127 whatcha-callits per second.

SM: Is that the kind of engraving thing police departments offer people to come borrow and mark their things with?

HJ: I don't know.

SM: They do that in St. Louis.

HJ: I know they marked my sister-in-law's house in Dallas like that. Something like this, but it didn't make so much noise.

SM: Well, how did a full-blooded Seminole get a name like Herbert Johnson which sounds like Ole Olafson up in Minnesota?

HJ: Right. In the Dawes Act of 1896 when they enrolled the Indians and put them on a roll number, I guess when my father came there was too many Harjos.

SM: Was Harjo your original name?

HJ: That was my father's name. I imagine at that time Indians didn't have two names. They had one name. I was looking at some of the rolls and I saw my mother's name, she didn't have a last name. It just said Iley, which I also named my daughter, one of my twins.

SM: You have twin girls?

HJ: A girl and a boy. They're two of six.
SM: Two of six kids . . . or six twins?

HJ: Oh no! Not twins, Gee! (laughter)

SM: So that's how you got Herbert Johnson, simply because they put a label on you?

HJ: Yeah. Everything is categorized, I guess.

SM: Because they needed some identification, they usually used the names that were familiar to the people doing it. Like Sylvester Roubideaux, he got his name because the nuns were French, and so they used a French name for him.

HJ: From the Sioux country?

SM: Yes, up on the Rosebud Reservation.

HJ: There's a lot of Roubideaux.

SM: Well, after your school was finished, you got a degree in accounting?

HJ: Right.

SM: Have you been working at the profession ever since?

HJ: Yes, I have. I went to Cleveland, Ohio, under the auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. They took me up there, they relocated me.

SM: That program, that relocation program of a few years ago. Is it still going on?

HJ: I guess they do, but it's not really what they call relocation. As
far as I know, up in Cleveland they just had students come in and go to school in Cleveland, and after they finished they could either stay or go home.

SM: So you went with that program?

HJ: I went direct employment. I didn't go to school.

SM: You worked in Cleveland?

HJ: Yes, I worked in Cleveland.

SM: As a bookkeeper?

HJ: No. They hired me in shipping and receiving, because I could work with pencil. All I was doing was loading the docks, which I quit after a while, 'cause that's not what I went to school for. But you see, so many Indian people that have training such as accounting, typing, stenography or anything like that, the training is about two years. Then when they get out they don't make use of it.

SM: They go into a job doing whatever comes up?

HJ: Yeah, but I made sure I went into accounting.

SM: That's what your director here was saying, that a lot of the people have skills, but they're hesitant to assert themselves, or put themselves forward, or maybe don't know the technique that would get them a job in a better paying vocation. And this is one of the things you do here in this center, isn't it?

HJ: Right. 'Cause we noticed that up in Cleveland with the influx of Indians, that we just had to get a place for the Indian people to meet, and one of the people that helped start the Cleveland American
Indian Center was none other than Russell Means. It was Russell Means, Henry Old Horn from Montana, Crow Indian, and myself.

SM: You know Russell Means then. You worked with him up there?

HJ: Right. I've known him since 1968.

SM: He's from Minnesota, isn't he?

HJ: No, no. He's from Pine Ridge. Dennis Banks is from Minnesota.

SM: Russell Means is a Sioux from Pine Ridge. Is he up there now in jail?

HJ: No, he's not in jail. He could be in and out of jail quite often.

SM: One of the church groups had gone on record as going bail for about $42,000, and then they got worried because he went to Canada, so he came back, and they didn't have to pay, but then he was arrested for something, or submitted to arrest . . . it all gets vague. Nobody seems to know.

HJ: Yeah, he was shot. They said he shot a guy in a bar, but the guy was already shot when Russ walked into the bathroom in the bar.

SM: Somebody else had done it and left him there?

HJ: Right. You know they had to pin it on someone, and he was available, so he was arrested on that, and he was also shot.

SM: In the same evening?

HJ: No. Later on he was shot.
SM: Was that up in Pine Ridge country?

HJ: Yeah, it was up in the Sioux country.

SM: His home is there, or was there?


SM: I'd like to ask you then, since you know him and worked with him in Cleveland when you got that center going. Is his reputation around the country as an all-out militant leader who is involved in violent things—is that fair, or is that over-drawn in the press?

HJ: I don't know. I haven't really been that close to him the last three years, I guess.

SM: Well, in three years would he change that much?

HJ: He could have. There's a lot of people that have changed, say since 1970, when it became Indian awareness—everybody became part-Indian.

SM: Yes, a lot of people remember now that their great grandmother was part Indian.

HJ: But it's always a woman, you know. It's always a woman. It's always a Cherokee princess. And with George Washington and her—the father of our country and the Cherokee princess. When I knew Russ he was an accountant for a part of OEO, a camp office for OEO in Cleveland.

SM: He understands bookwork too then?

HJ: Yeah, he has some accounting knowledge.
SM: I don't think anybody would ever get that impression from the newspaper or television.

HJ: See, they don't really know Russell. He puts on this act, I think. You know, I, myself, I have nothing to hide, so why should I even put on an act, you know? Just myself, I come here to work every day, be myself, go home.

SM: You're kind of enjoying it too, aren't you?

HJ: Yeah, I'm happy with life.

SM: Well, that was the philosophy of this man in Ponca City. He didn't look a day over 50, and he was 61. He said, "I keep happy, I keep busy, and I don't sit around and feel sorry for myself. I just keep happy, and maybe it works."

HJ: I went through that bag at one time, feeling sorry for myself, saying, "you're right, we are oppressed. The white man did this to us." You know, no one can do anything to you—not unless you let them.

SM: Well, yes, with a few exceptions.

HJ: Yeah, but I figure I could overcome that, with the help of my family, of course.

SM: You have a wife and six children?

HJ: My wife is a nurse.

SM: A visiting nurse?

HJ: No, she's an LPN.
SM: They do most of the nursing in the hospital nowadays, don't they?

HJ: Right. She went to St. John's Nursing School here in Tulsa. She didn't finish because at the time we got married they didn't allow married students at school, back in 1960. But now you can be married, have kids. You don't have to be married and have a kid and still go to school. Everything's a little lenient now, but back then. . . .

SM: Well, Russell Means must be quite an organizer.

HJ: Yes, he's really . . . he's suave, he's good with words, and he listens.

SM: And he knows how to look angry when he should?

HJ: Yes, and he can pick up ideas from you without you even realizing it. He's really a smart man.

SM: Was he ever in jail in Minnesota?

HJ: He may have been, I don't know.

SM: But anyway, you did know him, and you knew him as a suave, capable, hard-working bookkeeper?

HJ: Regular person. He lived in a better part of Cleveland, Fairview Park. He had a wife and two kids.

SM: How long ago was this?

HJ: About '70, '71. I haven't kept up with him since.

SM: You see, he's very much on people's minds because of the publicity. And, of course, most people think he's somebody to be afraid of.
HJ: But he's not, we know that. He's not, he's just a regular person.

SM: But do you suppose he puts on his act just for that purpose?

HJ: Either that or he has an inferiority complex and he feels that he has to put on an act to be equal with someone else. I know there's a lot of people do that--I don't know about him.

SM: He ran for tribal chairman out there, didn't he?

HJ: Right.

SM: And lost by just a few votes?

HJ: So they say. Some others say he lost by a lot.

SM: Both sides claim it was close.

HJ: Right.

SM: And then this fellow, Dick Wilson, won.

HJ: I met Dick Wilson.

SM: Is he as bad as they say he is?

HJ: Um . . . I don't know. He wasn't too receptive to what I was telling him. When I told him I was from Cleveland, all of a sudden he stiffened up, thinking I was AIM. I said, "Wait a minute, I just come up here to visit." And I didn't want to speak Indian politics or nothing.

SM: I was at Pine Ridge last summer and didn't see Dick Wilson or Russell Means. Do you suppose if I went up there now that they would talk
to me . . . would they be glad for an audience, because I have people who will listen, or would they resent my presence?

HJ: I don't know. Maybe Russell would speak to you. I don't know.

SM: He gets plenty of publicity without me.

HJ: Right, but maybe he could use your help too. In Cleveland I had this woman from Pennsylvania come down and make a bust of Russell.

SM: Sculptress?

HJ: Yeah. But he would never sit still long enough for her to capture his nose. So she got his little brother, Ted Means, and told him, "Would you face the other way, please?" Then she looked at him, she said, "Thank you." So I don't know if that's Russell's nose or Ted's nose that's on that bust.

SM: There are lots of pictures of him.

HJ: Yeah, but I think . . . she won a prize anyway.

SM: Was she a student?

HJ: No.

SM: It was a contest for artists?

HJ: Yeah, it was a real good bust of him.

SM: On the Pine Ridge Reservation, I guess it's pretty touchy up there, a kind of tense atmosphere?

HJ: Right.
SM: It's too bad, too. They really shouldn't be wasting their energies that way. They should be working with each other, if it's possible.

HJ: But you know, you've heard of Billy Mills?

SM: Yes.

HJ: Well, he's from Pine Ridge. He's a Sioux.

SM: I knew he was part Sioux, but I didn't know he was from that country.

HJ: Well, I don't know why . . . .

SM: He went to Haskell also.

HJ: I was in his classroom. We graduated together in 1957. May 25.

SM: So you went to Haskell too.

HJ: Right. I graduated from Haskell.

SM: There was a lady up at Haskell told me about Billy Mills and gave me his address. She said he lives in California, near Sacramento, and she said he'd be glad to talk to me.

HJ: Sure, I think he would be. We graduated together, we stayed in the same dorm.

SM: Did you go out for track with him?

HJ: Yeah, we ran track together.

SM: Did you run against him?
HJ: We ran the half-mile freshman year, and I stayed with the half mile and he ran the mile in sophomore, junior and senior year--he was undefeated all through high school.

SM: Well, yes, he's the world's best in the 10,000 meter.

HJ: That was a good thing, because an American had never won it, and the first American to win was an Indian. And I don't think he should have gone up there and said, "I'm part Sioux." He should have said, "I'm a Sioux Indian."

SM: Well, I thought he was part Sioux and part some other kind of Indian.

HJ: No, he's Sioux. He's Indian.

SM: So I have his phone number and his address which the lady at Haskell gave me. Do you know Mrs. Coffin?

HJ: Yeah, Tony's wife.

SM: Tony's wife. He's dead now.

HJ: Right. He was a real good coach. We often talk of him.

SM: He died in '66, didn't he?

HJ: We were up there when he had his first heart attack, and we didn't know what to do with him. We'd never seen a heart attack before. And all these Indian kids running up and down the hall.

SM: All excited?

HJ: Yeah, under the gym.
SM: Did he collapse?

HJ: Right. But they took him to the hospital, and he came out. But he had a lot of undefeated seasons. Our freshman team was undefeated, '53, which we both played on.

SM: You and Billy Mills?

HJ: Yeah, gobs of other guys too that played. And since you was talking about Billy, well he played football too. And he ran track, he played basketball.

SM: Did Billy Mills play football too?

HJ: Yes, just freshman year.

SM: Mrs. Coffin said her husband tried to talk him out of playing football, he was so light when he came there.

HJ: Right. In his sophomore year he didn't go out for football, but freshman year he did play football.

SM: He was a small kid then.

HJ: Yes, he was.

SM: He's a pretty tall man now, isn't he?

HJ: Yeah, he's big. I think most of us freshmen that year weighed every bit of 90 pounds, soaking wet. You know, tough guys. And they said that was the smallest freshman class they had ever seen, I mean in height.

SM: But undefeated.
HJ: Yeah, undefeated.

SM: And you were on the team too. You ran the half mile?

HJ: That was the longest distance they'd let freshmen run that year. I don't know if they run farther than that now. It may still be the longest distance they run.

SM: Your school comes over to my school for track meets. I don't know if you remember that.

HJ: And it was a high school then?

SM: Florissant Valley Community College, St. Louis.

HJ: Well, Haskell's a junior college now, so I guess they would.

SM: And Haskell comes over, I've seen your guys over there.

HJ: We were undefeated in track. Every year we were state champs while I was there.

SM: That's a pretty good record.

HJ: Right, and we won our league every year that I was there. In basketball in 1956 we went to the state, came in second.

SM: State tournament?

HJ: Yeah. In basketball we got beat by LaSalle, Kansas City. I'll never forget that, it was humiliating.

SM: What did you play there?
HJ: I didn't play basketball. I ran cross-country, with Billy again.

SM: You almost have to be tall to play basketball these days, don't you?

HJ: Yeah. We had little short guys back then, but they were fast. They ran.

SM: Fast and play-makers?

HJ: They ran the ball and the other team had to run to keep up with us.

SM: Yes, Haskell has been well known for its athletics.

HJ: I could say I ran cross-country with Billy, but I'd say I ran behind him somewhere. (laughter) We were back there. We made it. Like Tony said, "I don't care how tired you are, or how far behind you are. I don't care if you're the last person, you cross that finish line even if you have to crawl. You finish!" And that was one thing I always remembered and I tell my kids, "Whatever you start, you finish." See, we learned a lot from Tony.

SM: Was Tony an Indian?

HJ: I always thought he was Indian, but one day I. . . .

SM: His wife is part Indian.

HJ: I always thought they were Potawatomis or Kickapoos.

SM: That's the local people.

HJ: And he's from around there. I always thought he was Indian. I never thought of him any. . . .
SM: Well, she said she was part Indian, but I never thought to ask her about him. I would have liked to talk to her, but I missed the opportunity, and didn't get to take pictures of the beautiful things they have in that school office. The rugs they have, and some of the pottery, they have beautiful things. I wanted to get back and talk to Lolly Coffin to ask her more about Billy Mills, and here I find a guy who was with him. That's pretty good.

HJ: And he joined the Letterman's Club before I did as a sophomore, and I joined when I was a junior. And you know, in that Letterman's Club, the Letterman is always the master, and the guy that's just coming in is whatever they call him that year. So he was my master, Billy was my master, and if he tells me to clean his room, I had to go and clean his room, wash his socks, shine his shoes, or whatever. I belonged to him that week.

SM: Can I tell him I met you?

HJ: Yeah, would you?

SM: Sure will.

HJ: I heard he come through Cleveland and I didn't get to see him.

HJ: I know he was working for the BIA, with the commissioner.

SM: It is some kind of public relations job, isn't it?

HJ: I guess that's what he is doing now, but at the time I went up there he was with the commission, and I left a note on his desk telling him I was by, but it was the wrong time to put a note on his desk, because it was at the time of the BIA take-over.
SM: Oh, and he was in that building in Washington, D.C.

HJ: Right. The first time they attempted to take over, the first time they attempted, the riot squad threw us out.

SM: Were you there?

HJ: Yes. Threw us all in jail.

SM: Did you go to jail with them?

HJ: For about a second. Then they left me out so I could go and make arrangements for them to get out. See, I was with Russell. Russell asked them to let me out so I could go and make arrangements. I went back to the BIA and spoke to the people, and begged them, and Leon Cook was very instrumental in getting us out.

SM: Was he there too?

HJ: Oh, right. That Mohawk guy was the commissioner, Bruce, so he had already signed the thing for the Indians to be released that morning, but no one told us until late that evening, which really teed me off.

SM: Because they sat there all day not knowing that they were free to go?

HJ: Yeah, so when I confronted him he says, "Well." And I said, "These guys are hungry." So he gave us, what, Kentucky fried chicken and that stuff, you know, fed all of us.

SM: Bruce did?

HJ: Yeah. We had a short meeting and we came to an agreement that things would be better. But it didn't get better.
SM: So that was the first of a series of confrontations.

HJ: Right, leaving people bitter, disappointed on both sides, I suppose. And some factions --Indian groups--felt like turning against everything, even trying to tell their kids not to get educated. Maybe I'm not saying just "don't get educated." That's not the Indian way.

SM: They were saying don't accept the non-Indian education?

HJ: But they need it. They need to have some working knowledge of the greater society to make it.

SM: Russell Means has it himself.

HJ: Right.

SM: He couldn't be leading this group if he didn't have some.

HJ: And he's a very eloquent speaker. He can talk circles around anyone else that I know, which used to anger the hell out of me, because when he was talking to me, we'd be arguing about something, he doesn't argue. He talks so fast I wouldn't know what he was talking about, and he'd win his point and I'd be angry.

SM: Because you couldn't verbally win?

HJ: But that's the way he got to be our spokesman when we first started the Indian center.

SM: At Cleveland?

HJ: Yeah, and I guess they're telling a lot of young people the Indian
way is . . . I really don't know what the Indian way is anymore. I used to think I did. But the way that I'm living now, and my family's living, is our Indian way. We don't necessarily have to wear a whole bunch of turquoise or wear beadwork or long hair—that doesn't make an Indian.

SM: Well, you can't cut a culture off at any given point in time, like you couldn't say, "I'm going to be Indian as of 1890 or 1979 or 1710. You can't go back. You can recapture good thoughts and good habits and practices, develop them, and a lot of people are trying to do this.

HJ: One thing we compared . . . we were on a panel in Cleveland one time, and they were asking me, "Did you bring something to demonstrate when you talk?" And it was at Thanksgiving, and we were getting baskets for the Indian people. So I went and I had someone build me a little table and make out of paper, like a turkey and all that stuff, and I said, "O.K. First we have a table, we have the cloth, and we put all the food on it, the benches. O.K. What did the Indian bring? What did the Indian have?" They said, "The turkey." I took it away. I said, "the corn?" They said, "the corn." I took that away. I said, "the squash?" I took that away. I had taken everything away. I took the table away and all they had was the cloth. I said, "See what you brought? You brought the cloth, and your hungry family. We furnished everything again."

SM: Well, even some economists have said over 4/7 of all the food that makes up our gross national product we borrowed from the Indian.

HJ: But, getting into that, too, up at Plymouth Rock, when Russell and them painted that rock red, and then they marched all this way to this place and turned over their Thanksgiving table. That was back in '69 or '70. I said, "What did they do that for? There's a lot of hungry Indians out here, and especially me." I said, "If I had
walked those five or ten miles to the Thanksgiving site, and you'd turned that table over on me, (laughter) I'd a jumped all over him. And that one guy said he was just standing there hungry as he could be and here they turned that table over. (laughter)

SM: I didn't ever hear about the table turning-over.

HJ: Yeah, they had pictures of him and everything. But the Indians, I think, the way I lived . . . we don't set aside one day to be thankful, or we don't set aside one day to remember people. We think that Thanksgiving is every day. We give thanks in the morning and the evening for each day, and we give until it hurts. So we have Thanksgiving and Christmas every day, we don't set aside one day for it.

SM: That's a beautiful way to live. I've found things like this in some of the published works, and use these in classes, how the Plains Indian people and, of course, other people used to give thanks for each day for the chance to live it. Very religious people, weren't they?

HJ: Right. And very clean people too. Because this one man was telling us that when they were building these Indian homes out west the Indians said, "We don't want a bathtub." And they said, "Why? 'Cause you Indians are always dirty." They said, "We don't want a bathtub, we want a shower." And they said, "Why do you want a shower? Take a bathtub." They said, "No, I think that's very unhealthy." The old lady said, "When we bathed, years ago," or even then, I guess, "we went upstream. The water then hit us only once. We washed in it and it went by, it went down river, it went past us, and it never hit us but once. And in a shower it doesn't hit us but once. But in a bathtub, when you get in, what part of you goes down first, and then you grab that water and put it on your face?" Now you tell me what's unsanitary. And she had a good point
there, you know. The old people are smart.

SM: Your people didn't use the sweat lodge, did they?

HJ: No.

SM: With the Plains Indian people and the Nez Perce and out in the West they were more popular.

HJ: Right.

SM: And that's a very cleansing process too.

HJ: I've been in one up in New York with the Six Nations. Chief Beman Logan.

SM: Are you familiar with the White Roots of Peace?

HJ: Yes I am. With Mad Bear Anderson?

SM: It's some kind of an educational process, is it?

HJ: Yes it is. The tree is the holy tree, and they got the bird up there, the eagle. The roots goes out and gets to all the people.

SM: This is the symbolism of the White Roots of Peace?

HJ: Right. I don't know who started it, Chief Beman Logan of the Senecas, or Mad Bear Anderson of the Tuscaraoras. But Mad Bear is still active. He's not AIM, but he's active in his own way. I don't know if you read several years ago they had approximately 1,100 white people on their reservation, on the Tuscaraora Reservation. They had moved there under the guise of getting Indians to be employed in Niagara Falls in some of the factories they were building there, or some of
the construction that was going on, but none of the Indians ever really got hired. The white families came in, either intermarried with the Indians or just stayed there. And they kept having meetings, the Indians, saying, "We have to get them off our land. They're taking over our land, we've got to get them off." And Mad Bear came to the meeting one time and they were talking, and he said, "Why are we sitting here talking about it? Let's go out and do something." They went out and had those people off the reservation in 11 days. And I asked them how they did it and they said, "We broke their windows, we shot their cattle, we burned their houses, whatever."

SM: I saw a movie about this.

HJ: They had to leave. They won their war in 11 days, so Israel has nothing over us. They took 12, we took 11--11 days to get rid of 1,100 settlers that were on there. And whatever they had put on the Indian land had to stay. If they had a house trailer there, it stayed, they couldn't take it, the Indians wouldn't let them take it.

SM: Now this White Roots of Peace. Is this part of that?

HJ: No, it's like a religious educational thing.

SM: One of the side-lights that sort of strengthened the movement?

HJ: Right. They have a lot of young people on it. They came through Cleveland in the summer, but at that time it was changed to Unity Caravan.

SM: That's what they called it?

HJ: Yeah. And the Unity Caravan picked up people as they went across--Indian people as they went across the states. They went through
Iowa and picked up some Tama, Sac and Fox, whatever. Came through Kansas and picked up some there. Came to Oklahoma, went across Oklahoma, picking up people all along, or dropping them off. They had religious meetings at every place they stopped at, and when they stopped in Cleveland, they had this Indian burial mound outside of Diamond, Ohio, I guess it's closer to Akron, around Talmadge, Ohio. These people had a farm, Mr. and Mrs. Kruse, and they had this Indian burial mound on their land, which they turned their land over to the Indians for their use, although they ran their cattle and everything on it, but we could use it when we wanted to. We built the sacred fire and all that.

SM: The White Roots of Peace was at Webster College in Webster Groves, one of the suburbs of St. Louis, and the Mohawk people that were involved in this came, and they set up a tepee and had a fire, and then they would visit the classes and talk to the students.

HJ: That's the same one.

SM: What is it? Do they attempt to explain their point of view, or to teach their philosophy?

HJ: To re-educate the white man. When I say, "re-educate" I mean, like so many books have been written about us... .

SM: Full of errors?

HJ: Right. Oh, by the way, I was telling you about this one place where they stopped in Cleveland, and the people turned over the land to them. Well, they named it "Unity Lake." The lake that was on it, they called Unity Lake. It made all the papers in Ohio, Akron Beacon and all that. But it's really a good thing, because it gives people, Indian people, a place to go. Like in the summer if they
want to have an outing with their family.

SM: They can go to this farm of farmer Kruse?

HJ: Yeah, or they could come in and camp out there and rest for a week if they're travelling through. And they've been real good to us.

SM: That's nice. So that kind of explains a little bit what this White Roots of Peace Movement is.

HJ: Right. To re-educate the greater society.

SM: About their attitudes and feelings?

HJ: Right. A lot of history books have the Indians that were here, and the Negroes, happy, which, all in all, it's a damn lie. They may look happy, but they gotta laugh out here, so maybe they're not happy here.

SM: Heartbroken?

HJ: Yeah. Right.

SM: That program at Webster College, I heard of it too late to see it.

HJ: We're taping one of them when it was taken up here at Gore. At that time it was called the Unity Caravan. It was the second caravan to go across.

SM: This was still the Mohawks?

HJ: Yeah, it was still the Six Nation people.
SM: The Iroquois.

HJ: But I have one of the tapings, and this guy, this young man, his name is Van Avery, and he prays, and it's a long prayer. He asks the Mother Earth to bless everything, everything from a fly to the woman, to the menstruation of the woman; to bless her and everything; to bless everything that flies, crawls, swims, runs, walks. It's a long prayer, and it's in English.

SM: It's almost essential to use English to reach the audience, isn't it?

HJ: Right. It would have been said in Indian, if he could speak Indian, and I guess he finally has learned it.

SM: I hope sometime I have a chance to see one. I've learned more from you about it than I've been able to find out before. Herb, did they give you an Indian name besides Herbert Johnson?

HJ: That is my Indian name. (laughter) I'm an Indian, and that's my name. That's an Indian name.

SM: A good old Swedish Indian name.

HJ: You'll remember him, won't you?

SM: I sure will.

HJ: Everybody's got these little kickers behind them, like, maybe somebody has Harvey Little Elk, whatever.

SM: And you've got Herbert Johnson.

HJ: Herbert L. even.
SM: Well, some days you have more fun than other days.

HJ: Yeah, but I'm happy, although I am aware of what's out there.

SM: Oh yes, and it's not all nice.

HJ: Yeah, I'm aware of it, 'cause I've lived in it. If I didn't believe it was out there, I wouldn't help even start the Indian center, which has grown into over a $100,000 organization up in Cleveland, Ohio.

SM: These are growing in several cities now. Wichita has one that's in the planning stage. Minneapolis has a beautiful building built, and you've got this one in Cleveland that is growing.

HJ: Yeah. It's not very big now, but it's a pleasant place, and they're having an election tomorrow to have new board members put on. They asked me if I would ever become a director again, and I told them "no." My reasons were that when we first started the center we had hoped to just get it started and then let the people have it. So the people have it, let them keep it. They have a Manpower program, they have the Indians in it, and in the Manpower they send people to school, whereas they wouldn't have the opportunity to before. If some of them didn't come under the Bureau of Indian Affairs, they wouldn't never have gotten to school. Some of them come up on their own. At the time I left, we had about ten young men enrolled in school, in welding school, where they learn three or four phases of welding, and when they finish, they can work anywhere, which was good. Like I said a while ago, if you're going to replace something with something else, it's got to be just as good or better. If they get rid of this Bureau of Indian Affairs, what are they going to replace it with? Because there's a lot of old people that depend on the Bureau of Indian Affairs. That's what AIM wants to do, they want to throw it out. Sure, there's a lot of phases of it that we
believe doesn't work, that's not really helping the people. There's other phases that are doing a lot. They have to look at the whole thing. Or maybe there's somebody in the Bureau that they don't like, and that's just personality. And what the hell is that, as long as they're helping somebody?

SM: But that's the purpose of the BIA. Congress set it up for that reason. It doesn't always work, like you say, but that is its purpose, to help Indian people.

HJ: Yeah, at one time wasn't it under the War Department? And then now it's in the Interior, which includes wildlife, trees and grass, oil, recreation.

SM: Reclamation.

HJ: They stuck us with wildlife, trees. (laughter)

SM: That's the best place to be. Seriously, though, as you said, maybe what would replace it might be worse and maybe better, but at least until we get something better, we'd better keep this.

HJ: Right. Well, I don't know, there's a lot of white tape up there.

SM: Yes, that's a good way to put it. I don't know where that "red tape" thing came from, do you know?

HJ: From a white man. Blaming it on us again. (laughter)

SM: I don't think it had anything to do with Indians, did it?

HJ: No, but we're changing that.
SM: But that's an interesting point. Where does that term come from?

HJ: Yeah. But, like this one man explained--he was a white man--he was talking, when Carl Stokes was the mayor of Cleveland. He said, "I'm gettin' damned tired of this black flag." And I said, "Well, what about the white tape" I said, because his assistant is a white man. But I don't know where they got "red tape." They always say, "red tape." I said, "Why red tape? The Indians didn't have nothing to do with that. It was you guys."

SM: I don't think it comes from anything connected with Indians.

HJ: No, but you know, with everything being so color conscious now, that's what I mean.

SM: Well, it's a good way to lighten the strain of being so terribly serious all the time.

HJ: To leave a good note on Russell--he's a very good human being, he's a good person, a real good person, because I see him different. I've known him differently than what other people see him now.

SM: Most people only know what they've seen in the news.

HJ: There's a lot of people that hate him, that want to shoot him, kill him. There's others that's completely the opposite.

SM: You know him as a friend that you used to have?

HJ: Right. That's all he'll ever be.

SM: Even though you disagree with some of his ideas.
HJ: Yah, but you know, what's a friend for if you can't disagree with your own friends? Then you come to an understanding later on. And Billy Mills is a good person, although I haven't seen him since his first year at Kansas University. When he went there, was the last time I've seen him. I've seen pictures of him.

SM: Well he really crashed the headlines with that Olympic championship, because that caught the fancy of the whole country, the idea that the first American winner was a native American. Herb, I think we're about through here, so I want to tell you again, I'm glad I found you.

HJ: There you go again. Just like Columbus said he found us. I was here. I wasn't lost, you didn't find me. (laughter)

SM: I was lost. I wandered around the city quite a while. That's why I got here early, because I was afraid I'd fumble.

HJ: Like Columbus was lost, we found him.

SM: Like someone said, he didn't know where he was going, he didn't know where he was when he got there, and he got there on borrowed money.

HJ: O.K.

SM: Herb, I've enjoyed talking with you. I never know what's going to happen when I start talking with someone. This has been a most interesting conversation--fun too. I appreciate it.