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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with:

Paul Greenberg
21 August 2007
Little Rock, Arkansas

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. This is Tuesday, August 21, 2007. I'm sitting here in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* offices with Paul Greenberg, the editorial page editor of the *Democrat-Gazette*. [This interview is being conducted for the *Arkansas Democrat Project* of the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History.] And Paul, the first thing I need to do is to ask you if I do have your permission to make this tape and to turn it over to the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville].

Paul Greenberg: Yes, you have my permission.

JM: Okay, very good. Now, I know you've had a long and distinguished career in getting here, and I remember you—I was working here and you were working in Pine Bluff—at the time—but let's just go back and cover some of that ground. The first thing I need to do is ask you when and where were you

born?

PG: I was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, on January 21, 1937.

JM: Okay, what—what were your parents' names?

PG: I am the son of Ben and Sarah Greenberg.

JM: S-A-R-A-H?

PG: Yes.

JM: Okay.

PG: Greenberg. G-R-E-E-N-B-E-R-G.

JM: B-E-R-G. Right. And what did your father do?

PG: My father had a number of different enterprises, but he was by trade and inclination a shoemaker or a shoe repairman. That was his father's trade and he learned it together working with my grandfather, Chaim Klitsky, who took the name Greenberg when he came to this country and settled in Chicago [Illinois], where my father was born.

JM: Where did he come from when he came here?

PG: Zeyda Chaim—that's Grandpa Charlie to you—came from Sokolov, Poland, a small town and one of several Sokolovs in Poland.

JM: Spell that.

PG: Sokolov. S-O-K-O-L-O-V.

JM: Okay. All right. Did you go to school in Shreveport?

PG: Yes, I certainly did. I went to Hamilton Terrace and Creswell Elementary School. I went to Byrd High School in Shreveport, and I spent two years at Centenary College of Louisiana in Shreveport before attending the University of Missouri School of Journalism. I also did graduate work at the University

of Missouri in history, getting a master's degree there, before doing some post-graduate work at Columbia University in New York.

JM: Okay. How did you get interested in Journalism?

PG: I don't remember when I first got interested in journalism. It has been such a long-time avocation and interest of mine. I was on the high school newspaper. As I child, I would draw mock newspapers. I would listen to the well-modulated voices of radio news announcers. So I always was interested in journalism, especially print journalism and radio journalism.

JM: Okay, you went—you say you went two years to Centenary College in Shreveport and then three years to the University of Missouri, where you got a degree in journalism and a master's in history. And then you went from there to Columbia for two years. Is that correct?

PG: Correct.

JM: And you were studying what at Columbia—history?

PG: American history.

JM: Okay. What did you—where did you go from there? What was your first job?

PG: My first job was with the *Pine Bluff Commercial* in 1962. The legendary Patrick J. Owens was leaving for a year to take a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard [University]. Edmond Freeman, who would become the publisher of the *Commercial* and may already have been the publisher at that point, was looking for someone to spell—that is, relieve—Pat for one year. I was looking for a job. I had already done my active-duty time in the [Army] Reserves between my undergraduate degree and my graduate work at

Columbia. I had just failed my oral exams for the PhD twice at Columbia, and was no longer welcome in its program. I just thought I would take a year out for this job. It really sounded good, writing editorials for a year. The University of Missouri Placement Bureau suggested that I write Pine Bluff. I did. I came down, interviewed, and was hired shortly before going to Reserve summer camp, I believe. And then came back and spent the next year and a little more in Pine Bluff.

JM: And that was what year—1962?

PG: That would've been 1962 to 1963.

JM: Okay. And so you wrote editorials for the *Pine Bluff Commercial*.

PG: Right. Under the tutelage of Ed Freeman, the publisher.

JM: Okay, okay. I know Ed. And so how long were you—how long were you with the *Commercial*?

PG: I was with the *Commercial* thirty years until the spring of 1992. That's not counting one year away with the *Chicago Daily News* in 1966 to 1967 as an editorial writer, and, immediately after leaving the *Commercial* in 1963, a few months waiting for a job to open in New York with *Time* magazine. By the time that job came open, however, it would have been 1964. Ed Freeman had already called me and told me that Pat Owens had decided to go to the *Arkansas Gazette*. The job was open again, and I leapt at the chance to come back to Pine Bluff.

JM: Okay. You had been at, what, the *Chicago Daily News*, did you say?

PG: I was an editorial writer for one year to the day for the *Chicago Daily News* from October 1, 1966, until September 30, 1967.

JM: You didn't particularly care for that job with the *Daily News*?

PG: No, I didn't. I thought that it would get better and better as that year progressed, but I was not happy with how I was being edited and with the general feeling on the editorial page, although I very much liked Chicago—always have—and Chicago was the center of my father's family. So I had plenty of kinfolk in Chicago.

JM: Okay. What was the thrust of the *Chicago Daily News's* editorial page? Was it liberal, conservative, or could you characterize it?

PG: I guess the best description would be liberal Republican.

JM: Oh, okay.

PG: It supported Chuck Percy against Paul Douglas at one point. And I remember that decision in particular as being made more on the basis of political calculation rather than great principle. Agree or disagree with Paul Douglas, he was a great [U.S.] Senator and a great man.

JM: Yes. I remember him. But—so you came back to Pine Bluff. I know in the course of your work at—at the *Commercial*, you won the Pulitzer Prize, right?

PG: Right.

JM: What year did you win the Pulitzer?

PG: I won the Pulitzer in 1969 for editorials about civil rights written during 1968.

JM: Okay. And a lot of that was about [Arkansas Governor] Orval Faubus. Is that correct?

PG: I would have to look it up, but I do not think Orval Faubus figured heavily in the subjects of the editorials that were submitted for the Pulitzer. I know that George Wallace was running for president that year, and one of our appeals to

reason and against George Wallace was included in our submissions. Most of the editorials dealt with the integration of Pine Bluff schools and society.

JM: Okay. Was that the year that Wallace carried Arkansas, as did—as did [J. William] Fulbright and [Winthrop] Rockefeller. Isn't that correct? [Laughs]

PG: Yes. That is just about my favorite election return from Arkansas showing the eclectic disposition of the Arkansas electorate.

JM: Yes. [Laughs] It really—that was really a duke's mixture. Okay. But your commentary on civil rights was strongly pro-civil rights.

PG: Yes, it was pro-integration, pro-civil rights, anti-Wallace, against massive resistance, against the Southern Manifesto that Fulbright had signed, and so on.

JM: Yes, okay. I remember that one, but, at any rate, then you came back to the *Commercial* after Chicago, and you stayed there until—did you say 1992? Did you stay there until they—the *Democrat* hired you? Okay.

PG: From 1967 to 1992 would've been my continuous service with the *Commercial*.

JM: Yes, okay. Let's back up a little bit, though—you were in the service. I know that you were in the U.S. Army Artillery at that famous place: Fort Sill, Oklahoma. [Laughs]

PG: It beat a lot of other Army posts.

JM: Okay. [Laughs] And then you also lectured in history at Hunter College, and I assume that's after you got out of the Army.

PG: That's right. That's while I was a graduate student at Columbia. I was a young instructor at Hunter.

- JM: Okay, and you taught history at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. Is that correct?
- PG: I taught a survey course in American history at I think it was already UAPB then. I'm not sure. It may still have been AM&N. [Arkansas Mechanical and Normal]
- JM: Okay. You were at Pine Bluff during much of the—well, you were there before there ever was a war between the *Arkansas Gazette* and the *Arkansas Democrat*. And then you were there through much of the war, including after Gannett bought the *Gazette* in 1986. What was your observation of the two newspapers at that time—two Little Rock newspapers? What opinions did you have about those two newspapers.
- PG: For the most part, having not that much time to read a lot of papers, we really did not keep up with the *Democrat*. It was the obscure paper. With great respect for you and Gene Foreman, who is an alumnus of the *Pine Bluff Commercial*. And he served as managing editor for a time while I was writing editorials. I continue to have the greatest respect for Gene to this day. I have no idea what Gene's politics are. He was the perfect, objective managing editor. He had nothing to do with the opinion side of the paper, and I certainly did my best to have no opinions about the news side of the operation. He was definitely the most outstanding managing editor that I've ever served with. So we didn't really pay much attention to the *Democrat*, but we read—or, certainly, I read—the *Arkansas Gazette* every day. The *Gazette's* editorial policy, which was liberal, afforded a kind of great umbrella for smaller newspapers like the *Commercial* throughout the state in espousing positions

that they knew would not be popular at home. But here we had the state's, I guess, largest daily taking positions that were even more liberal, especially on civil rights, so it provided a certain amount of cover for many Arkansas papers.

JM: So you think some of them were able to come out and say things that may not have otherwise said simply because it was—[laughs] the *Gazette* was farther out than they were and probably was catching most of the heat or . . .

PG: I don't know whether it was catching most of the heat. We caught quite a bit of it, but we were not out there alone. And the *Gazette* had a certain amount of respectability, perhaps because of the 1957 [Little Rock Central High School desegregation] crisis and the Pulitzer Prize it had won in that crisis. So that when we did come out for integration and respect for civil rights and the law of the land, we were together with a quite respectable and even respected voice in the state.

JM: You and the paper were pushing for integration of the Pine Bluff schools.

PG: Yes.

JM: And how did that go?

PG: It was a grade-by-grade integration, and it went without any great incident—except that the composition of the school board changed, and members more attached to the old way and favoring limited integration were elected in place of those who had adopted the integration plan. The false hope was held out that through a system of voluntary choice on the part of the students and their families, integration would proceed, if at all, quite slowly. Our position—certainly, in 1969 or even earlier—was that this approach to integration would

not be acceptable to the courts—that we had to fully integrate. As it turned out, that was one of our few predictions that proved accurate, but it did not take a legal genius to see that the so-called freedom-of-choice plan was essentially an evasion—an alternative—to full integration and would not pass legal muster.

JM: Yes. That probably had already been demonstrated to a degree in Little Rock that [laughs] the federal courts were not going to tolerate the evasions forever.

PG: And we were not hesitant about integrating. We thought the courts were right.

JM: Yes. So what—you say that they—and I'd forgotten that they started on a grade-by-grade basis. Did they start at the lower grades and work up or top grades and work down?

PG: Oh, no, the lower grades and work up, which to us made a good deal more sense, rather than beginning racial integration at the same time kids were entering adolescence. [Laughs] Like the kids don't have enough disruption in their lives from their own hormonal systems and parental jitters.

JM: Which is what some people thought. Virgil Blossom in Little Rock, the school board foreman, was trying to start at the upper grades and—instead of starting at the lower grades. But at any rate—okay, so what kind of newspaper was the *Gazette* then, aside from just the editorial policy.

PG: It had very good news coverage of Arkansas news. We relied on it heavily in basing our editorials on the facts. Its editorial policy was much more liberal than ours. No one seemed to really notice, perhaps, because the only issue that counted in those days was The issue—the race issue.

JM: Hmm.

PG: And we were at least as liberal as the *Gazette* in that quarter. Our style was quite different. I would say ours was a much more conservative and traditional approach, emphasizing law of the land, the need to respect the Constitution, rights of American citizens, and so on. And we went farther, I think, in attempting to conciliate the people on the other side, although not too far. We did show our contempt for the racist element there. While the *Gazette's* tone was quite different. I think the *Gazette's* tone became increasingly patronizing and condescending, and I don't think that did its attempt to sell its case much good.

JM: This would've been probably after [*Gazette* editorials editor Harry] Ashmore had left. Is that—was Ashmore gone by then?

PG: Oh, yes.

JM: Yes, okay.

PG: The *Gazette* then had Patrick J. Owens for a brief period. He was a natural writer. It had Jerry Dean, who was in my opinion one of the great editorial line writers and wits around.

JM: You mean Jerry Neal?

PG: I'm sorry, Jerry Neal. Jerry Dean was another friend.

JM: He's another journalist, but . . .

PG: Yes, I am so sorry.

JM: That's all right.

PG: And it had those two stars.

JM: Was J. O. Powell there then?

PG: J. O. Powell was at the helm.

JM: Yes, okay—there then. Okay. As time wore on, Walter bought the paper here, and eventually he just decided to take the *Gazette* head on and went to mornings and, I guess, about 1979, and started giving away free classifieds and everything. What was your observation of what was happening? Were you paying much attention to what was happening to the two newspapers in their battles at that time?

PG: Not too much in the early 1980s. I would imagine my memory is not exact about those years. Like so many others, I assumed that Walter Hussman's cause was doomed from the start—that no one would ever unseat the *Arkansas Gazette* in this state. And it wasn't until at least the mid-1980s, I would guess—and it's a very loose guess—that I actually started to read the *Arkansas Democrat*. And that was in large part because you could read between the lines of the *Arkansas Gazette*'s news coverage and see where it was responding in a kind of second-day story to stories that the *Democrat* had led the way on.

JM: Had originated. Okay.

PG: So I don't remember exactly when it was, but I began taking the *Democrat* at home because I realized at some point that if I wanted to know what was going on in the state, I was going to have to take John Robert Starr's *Arkansas Democrat*.

JM: Okay. And then in 1986, the—the *Gazette* in 1984, I think, had filed suit against the *Democrat* and the trial was in 1986. The *Gazette* lost that trial, and then, before the year was out, Gannett bought the *Gazette*. Did you have any impressions yourself on—on the merits of the *Gazette* suing the *Democrat*

for anti-trust violations?

PG: Just a general prejudice against newspapers going to make their case [in court]. I've never [laughs] much cottoned to the idea that newspapermen should sue others for libel, or that newspapers should go to court to enhance their circulation, or their drawing power, rather than depend on their own quality to do so.

JM: It strikes me—and I don't know whether it did you or not—that that was probably a rather big mistake on the part of the *Gazette*—the suing them in the first place—and then an even bigger mistake [laughs] in not winning the suit.

PG: Well, the proof was in not winning the suit. If it had won, perhaps things might be different and I would've been proven wrong. But it did not.

JM: Yes, okay. Did you have any impressions about it when—? I'm sure you had followed then, when Gannett bought the *Gazette*.

PG: Deep, deep disappointment not unmixed with contempt for a family ownership that would sell its birthright. So I was very disappointed that the ownership of the *Arkansas Gazette*—the legendary, the fabled, the great *Arkansas Gazette*—was going to be owned by an out-of-state, national, characterless chain.

JM: Named Gannett, whose—I always considered *USA Today* as sort of a TV-type bulletin board [laughter]—that it was hardly even counted as a newspaper in my view. But at any rate, so—so as it did turn out, not a lot of other people—and as an aside, I hope the sale of the *Wall Street Journal* to [Rupert] Murdoch [laughs] doesn't prove to be as bad.

PG: Well, I've always had a very sentimental attachment to the principle of anti-

trust, and even the aura of anti-trust law, which I think Thurman Arnold once said was a sentiment in search of law to back it up. [Laughter] It's a very loose form of law. But I like newspapers with a sense of place. I would much prefer family ownership, however eccentric, to corporate ownership. I think that the history of journalism in this state would have been quite different if a Walter Hussman had not come along—if he had not come from a newspaper family—if he himself did not have this personal sense of both pride and shame that goes with personal ownership—identifiably personal ownership of a newspaper. So I certainly am a small town, small community, small newspaper kind of person.

JM: There has been—and I don't know whether this is a fair question or not, but I'm going to ask you—but other people have commented on this—there is some feeling that the *Gazette*—one of the reasons that the *Gazette* lost the war was its own arrogance. Would you agree with that?

PG: Just read the editorials written during its last stages. One phrase I remember that struck people in Pine Bluff and probably throughout the state—I'm not sure if it's—if it's accurate or only apocryphal—but the phrase is, "The civilizing influence of central Arkansas." Now, can you imagine how that set with folks in Pine Bluff and Russellville and everywhere else?

JM: Yes, I can imagine.

PG: Yes, there was a terrible condescension in the atmosphere of the editorials.

JM: Did they write that editorial before or after it sold?

PG: I'm—I'm not sure it matters whether the ownership at the time was the Patterson family or the Gannett family. There was a cavalier disdain for

anyone beyond the "enlightened" readers and editors of the *Arkansas Gazette*.

JM: [Laughs]

PG: And not—not [laughs] necessarily the readers, either.

JM: That was pretty far out. I can imagine that that people in Weiner and . . .

PG: Well, there was an intellectual arrogance that was not always well based or justified, I thought.

JM: Did you think that it extended to the news pages, too, or was this just basically the editorials?

PG: The most evident site of the disease was the editorial page. But, of course, its orientation—even in the news columns—conformed to what might be called the civilized, elitist view of events.

JM: Okay. I know that the *Gazette*, at that time, and I guess from what—they never had brooked a whole lot of opposite opinions in their editorial page—and forever they didn't have an op-ed page, but they didn't—as I recall, they didn't have any columnists who were saying they were liberal, but they didn't have any conservative columnists that I can remember. [Laughs] I don't know whether you remember any or not, but . . .

PG: I think that was the trick. I'm sure there were token conservatives, and if you ask someone like my friend, Bob McCord, he could reel off a conservative or two, but—or maybe many. But none, as you say, that we can remember. I don't think William F. Buckley was in there.

JM: No, I don't think so. [Laughs]

PG: I don't think anyone with a bite of a . . .

JM: George—George Will.

PG: . . . of a Thomas Sowell was in there.

JM: Yes.

PG: I don't think anyone who really echoed and captured what was happening in large segments of the American public back then—I don't think they had anyone who captured the rebirth of conservative fervor in the country.

JM: Okay. Now, I think that—after Bob went over there, I believe that—McCord we're talking about—that maybe that Hugh Patterson had hired him to come over and start an op-ed page.

PG: Yes, he was the op-ed editor for a while.

JM: And I think that maybe he did try to get some conservative opinions in there.

PG: Right. But my impression was that the conservatives he ran were pretty namby-pamby.

JM: Were they? Okay.

PG: And without great persuasive power. Of course, he was looking for, I suppose, what he considered respectable conservatives.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

PG: Well, my idea of a conservative would be closer to Buckley or someone like that.

JM: Yes, okay. [Laughs] But at any rate—so you—were you surprised that the *Democrat* won the war? I guess maybe it depends on the time we're talking about.

PG: Exactly. Early in the war I would have been amazed if someone had told me that the *Democrat* would win. But with each passing year, it became clear that the *Democrat* was getting stronger and stronger. So at the end people

began calling it a horse race. And then neck and neck. And then the *Democrat* began to emerge as a winner.

JM: Okay. How did it happen that—that you came to the *Democrat* as the editorial page editor?

PG: Oh, Walter Hussman gave me a call—said he would like to talk to me—have lunch with me, and I thought it might be about my syndicated column, which had run very briefly in his newspaper before I realized—and other of my customers in the state realized—that they did not want a columnist who appeared that morning in the *Democrat*—and neither did my own publisher, who by then was no longer Ed Freeman, but the Don-Rey papers [owned by Donald W. Reynolds]. And so I had to call off that brief experiment.

JM: Why did they object to your column appearing in the *Democrat*?

PG: They didn't want Paul Greenberg of the *Pine Bluff Commercial* competing with the Paul Greenberg people could read in the *Democrat*.

JM: Oh, okay, yes.

PG: Which made perfect sense if only I had thought about it.

JM: Yes, I understand. Okay, I see what you mean. At any rate, Walter called you; go on from there.

PG: And we had lunch together and he suggested that I consider becoming the editorial page editor of the *Democrat-Gazette*, a prospect that thrilled me.

JM: Okay. And so this was in—I take it—in 1992?

PG: The spring of 1992.

JM: This is after the war is over that, I believe, that the *Gazette* went out in October of 1991 and had closed—he had bought the assets. So he had the

only newspaper in town by that time. Okay. You went ahead and joined the *Democrat-Gazette*?

PG: Yes, I did.

JM: Yes, okay. What kind of an understanding did you and Walter have about your freedom to write editorials and also about the type of policy that you would have?

PG: I drew up a long list of areas where I thought we might have disagreements, and he didn't seem to object to those. We've been remarkably on the same wave-length. And on those few occasions where we might have differed, I get to write a personal column, and I have adopted this same policy toward our editorial writers. If they take a view different from our editorial policy or our institutional memory, they are perfectly free to turn it into a personal column, and we will do our best to run it.

JM: Okay—a little different than the approach of Sam Dickinson. I don't know if you remember Sam or not, but he wrote editorials for the *Democrat* during the integration crisis, and later went to Shreveport with the Shreveport paper. But at any rate, he said that—he's ninety-five or ninety-six now—he said that sometimes he just had to write something, you know, that didn't correspond with what he thought and everything. But then he would write a letter to the editor unsigned [laughs] and get that unsigned letter to the editor in the paper.

PG: Everyone has his own curious approach to these things. I have never believed that a writer ought to write something he disagrees with. If I can't find it in myself to write an editorial, some other editorial writer may volunteer. And there have been some occasions when Walter Hussman has written an

editorial on his own.

JM: Oh, really? Okay. Unsigned, of course.

PG: All the editorials reflect the opinion of the paper.

JM: Yes, they are all unsigned. Okay. Is this a—was this on times when you and he did not see eye to eye on the issue or just . . .?

PG: Yes, but I can't—I can scarcely remember, speaking now, when they were. They were so rare. I think at one point I opposed a constitutional amendment to require a balanced budget, and I believe Walter's opinion differed. And I think I simply wrote a personal column to that effect.

JM: Hmm. Okay. And he wrote an editorial in support of . . .

PG: I don't recall whether he did or not. I don't think he did. I don't think he ever got around to writing anything on the subject.

JM: All right. And do you remember what the areas are that you originally thought that you might have disagreements on that you had listed for him?

PG: No. Oh, there was a—I'm a strong believer in the separation of church and state, and I thought we might have a disagreement along those lines. But we didn't, in large part because I never confused the separation of church of state with the separation of religious ideas from public discussion. Some people confuse the two. And I've never thought that religious ideas should be censored or declared *verboden* [forbidden] in public discussions. I've always recognized, especially in this country, the influence of religious ideas.

JM: Paul, are—I don't guess very many of us like to be pigeon-holed or categorized—but what if someone said, "Are you a liberal or a conservative?"

How would you describe yourself? It seems to me you have some—you write

some conservative things, but you also have some very—what people would consider very liberal opinions, too.

PG: I have been asked that question before. And my standard response is I am an ideologically unreliable conservative. In many ways, a fairer description of my instincts would be a reactionary. I respond strongly to some of the—what I consider the left-wing follies of the time.

JM: [Laughs] Okay. I can remember—and I guess a lot of people do in Arkansas—your Clinton editorials and everything. Did you ever catch much heat in all the time that you were writing editorials against William J. Clinton?

PG: Oh, we got a lot of criticism. But I'm not sure if it ever rose to the level that I would talk about "heat." Not the way our editorials in Pine Bluff about racial integration did.

JM: Okay.

PG: We were essentially accused of not supporting the home boy.

JM: Okay. And that was true, I suppose, that . . .

PG: No, we never supported Bill Clinton. And we—we were consistent in our criticism of his politics and his political style and what we considered a lack of character.

JM: Okay, even from—I suppose you were still at Pine Bluff when he was governor—most of that time and everything. Did you ever support him . . .?

PG: Yes, on an occasion or two, but mainly because of the poor alternatives.

JM: Yes, okay. And—but starting—you came . . .

PG: And also we were one of those who said, "Well, he may be an opportunist now, but as he matures, he will develop character and be much better," and we

were consistently disappointed in that hope.

JM: But then in 1992, of course, you joined the paper. And then it was that year that he ran for president and got the Democratic nomination. And the paper did oppose him, as I seem to remember.

PG: Yes. We did not formally endorse anyone in that election, but we did run an editorial called "NOT For Bill Clinton."

JM: Yes, okay. [Laughs]

PG: That was the [Ross] Perot/[George H. W.] Bush/Clinton three-way race.

JM: Yes. You were [laughs]—is it safe to infer that you were not wild about any of them or . . . ?

PG: We didn't feel strongly enough to endorse any of them. But we did feel strongly against Clinton.

JM: Okay.

JM: Paul, what's been your observation, aside from the editorial department—the editorial section—about how the *Democrat-Gazette* has developed as a news paper since it won the war and became the only game in town?

PG: It's developed solidly, I think. It's still an old-fashioned newspaper in the sense that it is a paper—that it is a paper of record. Its news hole is substantial. If you want to know what's going on statewide in Arkansas, this is the paper to read. It has not cut back on coverage. It's a very solid, fact-filled newspaper, and I've always liked that kind of paper, rather than the razzmatazz Gannett model.

JM: Okay. Have you—were you surprised that Walter continued that kind of a newspaper—that he kept that big of a news hole? I think some people were

saying—well, you know, they were—they were predicting that he would—when he won the war and had no competition, he'd really tighten up.

PG: This was a common expectation. I didn't share it, nor did I deride it. I am on the opinion side and know nothing about what goes on over on the business side. I do know that the familiar model is that the winning paper starts cutting back and decides that now's the time to make a lot of money for the ownership. And I do know that the *Democrat-Gazette* has not followed that model, and I can't tell you how proud I am of that decision and of Walter Hussman for having made it.

JM: What was your relationship with John Robert Starr and, particularly, from the sense that he wrote so many columns—opinion columns? And, of course, you were writing editorials—but John Robert was a—a managing editor, to speak, who was also writing tons of [laughs] opinion columns. Did you all ever have any problems over that?

PG: No. I got the biggest kick out of John Robert's columns. I thought he was a great—I thought his columns were a great asset to the paper, although in principle I've always been against anyone both writing opinion and covering the news or directing the news. One of the things that our opinion staff does is not cover the news, not do reporting, [and] not write news stories at the same time. This was an innovation in the newspaper when I came along, but it's a principle I've always believed ever since the University of Missouri School of Journalism taught it to me. That there should be a wall of separation between news and opinion at the paper.

JM: Okay, yes. I sort of [laughs] grew up with that opinion, too.

PG: I wish I had a John Robert Starr today as a columnist. Everybody had to read him. Maybe you read him to—to laugh out loud. Maybe you read him just to see what this crazy editor was going to say next. But, dog-gone it, you read him.

JM: Yes, yes. Yes, that is true. A lot of people—and they read him—they loved him or they hated him, but . . .

PG: I even wrote a parody of his style one time. I don't know if I could locate it now, but it was a great joy to write it. It was a satirical piece about how I—how I'm never wrong—how I'm never wrong and everybody else is and that kind of thing. I had a wonderful time writing that. I never heard from John Robert. He took it all in stride.

JM: You published it, then?

PG: Yes.

JM: Oh, did you?

PG: Okay. Okay. [Laughs]

JM: I'd like to see that.

PG: But it was not written in malice. It was written in high good spirits.

JM: Yes, okay. So is there anything else that we haven't discussed about your association with the *Democrat-Gazette* that you'd like to—you want to comment on?

PG: Not off hand.

JM: Yes, okay.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Paul, I note that—besides one Pulitzer, you have—you have come very close

to some others. I believe that you were recommended for a Pulitzer in 1978, but—but the final group that made the decision turned it down. Is that correct?

PG: Yes.

JM: Okay. What were those editorials about?

PG: Those editorials were about education, and they were critical of what were then modern innovations in education, like social promotion and the self-esteem cult and a general slippage of standards.

JM: Okay. And then in—and then in 1986 you were a finalist for the prize, I believe. Do you remember what your editorials in that case were about?

PG: Goodness, I don't believe I do.

JM: Okay. And you were a—received an honorary Doctor of Letters from Rhodes College in 1995. Is that correct? And—and that's—that's Rhodes in Memphis, is that correct?

PG: That is Rhodes in Memphis.

JM: Used to be—what the name of that college used to be—I've forgotten, but it . . .

PG: Southwestern or . . . ?

JM: Yes, then something else, too, but I've forgotten. But, yes, it's a very good college. Have you—have you had opportunities to go somewhere else since you've been here at the *Democrat-Gazette*—other newspapers? I would assume that you've had offers.

PG: As I've gotten older, the offers have become fewer and fewer. [Laughter]

But, yes, shortly after I got the Pulitzer and after I came here there would be

occasional feelers. I left Arkansas once. I didn't—I don't propose to leave it again. I don't seem to thrive very well above a certain degree of latitude.

JM: [Laughs] Okay. But I note that in reading you that you [laughs]—in relation to that, that you do write a lot about—I say a lot—I'm not sure that's fair—about what it means to be a Southerner—about what is a Southerner. Is that a particularly favorite subject of yours?

PG: Yes.

JM: Okay, do you want to . . . ?

PG: Like ever other Southerner, I could talk endlessly about the South, but I will not bore you.

JM: Yes, okay. [Laughs] All right. But you did grow up in the South. Okay. All right. Anything else, Paul, that you can think of that we haven't touched on that we—about the newspaper business or about the—the *Democrat*?

PG: I can't think of a thing. You mentioned my honorary degree from . . .

JM: Rhodes.

PG: Rhodes. I would be remiss in not mentioning one I received too late to make that resume from Lyon . . .

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Okay, this is Jerry McConnell here again with Paul Greenberg. This is side two of this tape, and we were discussing—had been discussing the honorary Doctor of Letters from Rhodes College in Memphis, but that's not the only one that you've received, I take it.

PG: Yes, I got a Doctor of Humane Letters from Lyon College in Batesville.

JM: Batesville, Arkansas. Okay, very good. All right. Anything else—anything

else that you can think of about your career or about the *Democrat* that we haven't discussed that you want to say something about?

PG: No, thank you.

JM: Okay. Well, very good. I have really appreciated this interview. It's been enlightening, and I've enjoyed it, and I thank you very much, Paul.

PG: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce Riggs]