Interviewee: Arthur Lawrence
Place of interview: Arthur Christopher Community Center
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VP: Valerie Perry (HCF)
Videographer: April Wood (HCF)
Transcriber: Homerow, Inc.
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BEGIN INTERVIEW

Valerie Perry: My name is Valerie Perry. I'm with Historic Charleston Foundation. And today, on March 20, 2019, I am interviewing Arthur Lawrence for an oral history program. We are at the Arthur Christopher Community Center at 265 Fishburne Street, Charleston, South Carolina 29403. Would you please say and spell your full name?

AL: My name is Arthur Lawrence, A-R-T-H-U-R L-A-W-R-E-N-C-E.

VP: When and where were you born?

AL: I was born here in Charleston in July. So, I'm a July people.

VP: Okay. What were your parents' names?

AL: My parents was Samuel Lawrence and Lillian Lawrence.

VP: And do you have any siblings?

AL: I have two sisters and one brother, so four of us altogether.

VP: How long have you lived in the area?

AL: Over 71 years.

VP: And did you leave the Lowcountry for any reasons: work or education or any other?

AL: Well, I served in the military, and I was back and forth out of Charleston. But I went to Vietnam in the 1960s, and I returned back to Charleston. And I was here ever since, because there's only one Charleston.

VP: And were you mostly living all of your life on the Westside?

AL: I was born on America Street, and we moved here on the Westside, and that's where we stayed.

VP: And when did your family settle here, in what decade?

AL: Probably about the end of the 18th Century.

VP: Okay. When you were first growing up, what was the Westside like?

AL: Oh. It was a village. Like, people always talk about a village. Well, the Westside was a village, you know, that everyone knew each other and took care of each other. And that's the kind of environment that all the kids grew up in.

VP: So, what houses did you live in during your lifetime here? You mentioned America Street. So, were there a few houses where you lived, like maybe perhaps with your parents and then on your own?

AL: Okay. When we came off America Street, we came to Kennedy Street, and that was 52 Kennedy. And it was a huge complex there. And you had three families up front. We were in the middle. You had two other families living in the rear, and you had another family upstairs. So, it was almost like a duplex. But, you know, during that time, you had to share a restroom, because it was one restroom downstairs, and all the family that live in the first duplex had to share that one restroom. And the family in the rear had another restroom that they shared.

VP: Can you describe the other types of houses that were around where you lived at that time and how they were constructed? And are a lot of them still there?

AL: Well, most of the houses was freedman's cottages and shotgun houses. And you still have some of the freedman's houses still there, but most of the houses that my family used to live in were demolished.

VP: So, you mentioned about when you grew up on Kennedy Street, and that was where several families lived. So, in that case, where your family lived, was it a modest house? How many rooms did your family have?

AL: Well, it was comfortable back then. You know, we had three rooms in our particular area. And we had a living room, we had a bedroom, then the other room that my father shared, and the other part was a kitchen.

VP: What about other notable characteristics of the house? For example, was there a house on your street that had noticeable architecture that you liked in that area?

AL: My father was an artist. And, you know, times were hard. What we used to do when we had extra newspaper, he used to put the paper on the wall for wallpaper. The houses used to have

leaks, cracks, and stuff like that. So, when he placed the wallpaper on the wall... And then sometimes the tenant that lived next door to you created a whole lot of noise, and he'd place those newspaper on the wall and block all that out. And everybody thought it was cute. And then, on one wall, he painted it, and he had little dots all over the wall. So, he was creative for what he had. And so, it was unique.

VP: Now, did you share a room with a brother or with siblings?

AL: Oh, yes, because in the front of our room, it was a huge bed. And that's where my brother and I shared. And then, on the far end, there was another bed where my two sisters shared.

VP: So, now we're going to talk a little bit about life ways. Can you define your neighborhood and its boundaries?

AL: All right. When we first moved over here, it was the Westside. The whole thing was the Westside. But when they brought the Interstate through, it cut off part of the neighborhood. And so, then the City created the Neighborhoods Association, definite area. But we maintained that name as Westside. And the boundary was from King Street to the Crosstown, Crosstown all the way to the Ashley River, the Ashley River to Lockwood, and Lockwood back to Fishburne, Hagood to Congress Street, and Congress Street back to King. And you have H, F, and I Street and go back to the Crosstown. So, that's the boundary of the Westside.

VP: It's one of the bigger neighborhoods downtown, isn't it?

AL: Oh, yes. It was a huge neighborhood. And I mean we had several things, like I alluded to earlier. You know, it's just like family. And the makeup of the neighborhood, it was 70% black, you know? And everyone knew each other.

VP: How would you describe the Westside to someone who has never been here?

AL: I think it's a vibrant place, and everyone now is trying to get in the Westside. We have the West Edge development with MUSC and other developments. And we have Joe Riley Stadium. We have the National Guard Armory. We have The Citadel football stadium. You have the Arthur Christopher Gym. You have Harmon Field history. You have Burke High School history. And you also have a tree on Ashley Avenue and Fishburne Street, and they call that the Hangman's Tree. That's where they used to hang slaves in the early 1800s. And that's about the makeup of the neighborhood.

VP: Thank you. So, would you please define downtown Charleston as you see it? What were the boundaries of your childhood?

AL: Well, you know, I had no boundaries, because I know we had a wonderful life. And we could travel all over the City, but six o'clock, you had to be home, you know. And some part of the City, you couldn't go in. And some part of the City is okay, because it was still kind of segregated back then. And some streets, you couldn't go on, like when Ashley Avenue and Rutledge Avenue was all white one time. And then, when they moved out to West Ashley and

some other places, then blacks took over those – took the streets. And what happened, if you passed the paper bag test, you could live on that street. But if you didn't pass the paper bag test, you had to live somewhere else in the neighborhood.

VP: Now, you have to tell me what the paper bag test is. I don't know.

AL: Okay. The brown paper bag, the paper bag that was brown that you used to put your grocery and stuff in. And the light-skinned people used to live on Rutledge and Ashley Avenue. And if you were dark, you couldn't live on there. You had trouble when you walked through there. It's just like when it was all white, you couldn't hardly walk through there. But when they move out, the upper-class blacks move in there. But if you were dark, you couldn't go there unless you passed the paper bag test.

VP: Okay. I think I got that. Let me ask you this. Were there any specific places that you felt were off limits to you?

AL: Well, mostly the business and restaurants were not integrated. And they were off limits to blacks. And so, you couldn't go in there. So, that's why blacks started developing their own restaurants and everything like that so that when you go to those different places, you wouldn't have to run into that.

VP: So, was there a specific restaurant that you remember from growing up that was one of your favorite from growing up [00:12:18 unintelligible]?

AL: There was a restaurant on the corner of Kennedy Street and President. And it's the Ladson House. And that's where everyone used to go, at the Ladson House.

VP: What exactly was your favorite dish at the Ladson House?

AL: It was seafood, you know? And sometime on a Friday, you go there, get the seafood or fried chicken. Or you had different types of sandwiches that people bought from there. And the people used to go there and have meetings and just to be entertained.

VP: And did they have entertainment, music at the Ladson House?

AL: Yes. Yes. They had almost like a ballroom that you could rent out. And you could go in there, and they would cater it and everything like that. So, it was great. It fit right into the neighborhood.

VP: And what kind of music did they play, and who was your favorite musician at that time?

AL: Well, my favorite musicians back then, it was James Brown, Lou Rawls, Isaac Hayes, and those type of musicians.

VP: But what about performers at the Ladson House? Any musician that performed there that…

AL: No. Most of all the big-time performers when they came to Charleston, they went to the King Street Palace. And that's where all the entertainers used to come. And that was the only place that we could go to, to see those entertainment. They used to have James Brown, Jackie Wilson. You know, everyone used to come there.

VP: What landmarks were here while you were growing up that maybe aren't here now? Churches, stores, schools, or and such[?]?

AL: Okay. When I was growing up, we had everything in our neighborhood. We had all the stores that we needed. You had Red & White, you had Piggly Wiggly, and you had a corner store just about on every block. And so, then you had the hardware store on Spring Street, Cross Hardware store, and they'd sell just about everything that you wanted on Cross Hardware. And so, that was the store that everyone frequently go to and visit if they had needed anything, because in the day, they used to sell the washtubs and everything like that. And you'd just go there and buy the metal tubs that you'd have to take a bath in. And the seeds if you're planting flowers or anything like that, you'd go there for that. You know, anything that you want to repair your house, you'd go there.

VP: And they're not... How long have they been gone?

AL: No. Oh, they were gone, ooh, way over 30 years now or more. And they're no longer here. And just about all the stores are gone. And the Ladson House building is still there, and County Hall is still there, but all the stores that we could visit is completely gone.

VP: I can think of one store that's been open for quite some time on Rutledge near Congress called Links and Meats. Was that open?

AL: Oh. That was probably Murray's. That probably was Murray's Meat Market, but they closed. They weren't open at that particular time. When we used to go and buy meat, you had to go on the corner of President and Spring Street. There was two meat markets there. One was across from each other on Spring and President Streets.

VP: What elementary, middle, and high school did you attend? And how did you get to school?

AL: Okay. We had to walk to school. So, I went to Rhett School right across the street from Burke. Then we left Rhett and went to Simonton High School on Morris Street, and left Simonton and came to Burke. And no transportation. You had to walk everyplace you had to walk to.

VP: So, Burke would have been close to you, as was Rhett.

AL: That's correct.

VP: But Simonton would've been a little bit of a distance.

AL: Yes. Yes. It was a good little distance from Fishburne Street to Morris Street. But kids, you know, were great. That when you met everyone in the morning time, and you could talk going to school. And then, after school, everyone came back home together and would talk and meet each other. So, it was a great experience.

VP: We talked a little bit about grocery stores and the hardware store, but what about clothing? Where did you go for clothing when you were a teenager?

AL: Okay. Clothing store, we went on King Street. And we went to Abraham, and we went to Needles and most of those clothing stores that went – and Bluestein's. And there was no problem going into those stores. And so, those were stores that were open. There's Condon's and stuff like that.

VP: We talked about corner stores and other stores that are in the Westside. Did you and your family go off the Peninsula anywhere to North Charleston or West Ashley to go shopping? Or did you pretty much do everything on the Peninsula?

AL: Practically everything on the Peninsula because, you know, in those days my father was an average hunter. And his friends, they used to go hunting all the time and go fishing. And so, most of that, they'd go out. And when they'd catch fish, they brought it back and shared with the other community people. But we didn't have to go out to [19:35 unintelligible] to get anything because we had just about practically everything right here in the community that we wanted.

VP: Growing up, did your family have a car?

AL: A car? No. We didn't have a car until my later days in high school. And so, ironic about that, my father couldn't drive. But he bought a boat. And so, whenever he wanted to go fishing, I had to take him and take him fishing and drive him around. But every place that we wanted to go, you either had to walk or catch a taxi.

VP: What about public transportation back then? The streetcars were an option -

AL: They had – no. They had buses back then, but we didn't frequently catch a bus. We'd walk because money was tight. And if you could walk to any location, you did that.

VP: Did your family attend church? And, if so, which church and how often?

AL: Well, we started out in McClellanville with Howard A.M.E. Church. My grandfather was the pastor of Howard A.M.E. Church in McClellanville. And when we came to Charleston, we started going to Mother Emanuel. And that's where I'm still at today. And we used to walk from Fishburne Street to Mother Emanuel and walk back.

VP: That was a little bit of a hike.

AL: Yes. Yes. That's how I used to stay fit.

VP: I have a question about after church, especially in light of that long walk to and from. So, after church, did usually your mother or father... Did you have a large meal after church usually?

AL: Well, the unique thing about it, my father was divorced early or was separated early. And so, what my father used to do, he used to cook the meal for the family on Saturday night. And so, once we returned home, you sat down and had a meal at the table. And then, if you had any homework or anything like that, you completed that and did your chores. Everyone in the family had some chores to do, yeah.

VP: So, there has been a lot that Mother Emanuel has gone through, I'm sure, over time and so much so in the last three years. Over your lifetime, have you seen the congregation incur change? Or has it remained the same?

AL: Well, they have changed. They have evolved in time. And, you know, you see growth with different ministers coming in with different ideas and trying to move the congregation forward. And I think that we came a long way, and I think that we still have a long way to go at the church. But just as long as everyone continues to work together and work with the leadership, I think the church will be all right.

VP: So, as a young adult and as an adult, what did you do for entertainment?

AL: Well, during Christmastime, you know, you used to make sure that Santa Claus brought you roller skates. And then, in the City and then in the neighborhood, you'd have street zones, that the police department used to block off the street. And all the kids went on that particular street and skate back and forth. And we called it doing the eagle and jumping the dream and stuff like that. And if you wanted to play cowboys and Indians, you used to take probably like a two-by-four and some rope and put it on the two-by-four. And there you had the mane of the horse. And put cardboard over the two-by-four as a saddle. And we used to create things to play with. Slingshots. We used to create that. But we used to find things to play with that didn't cost anything, you know. So, kids these days don't do that. They don't have that. They didn't have that opportunity.

VP: And you mentioned about the entertainment that was on King Street.

AL: Right. And the only theater that you could go to and see a movie was the Lincoln Theater on King Street. And they're no longer there. The Post and Courier owns all of that now.

VP: Right. And that was because of segregation.

AL: Correct.

VP: Where did people go to vote? Today, we've got voting over at Burke and at the Charter School for Math and Science. But when you were growing up and old enough to vote, where did you vote within the neighborhood?

AL: We voted at the – they called it The Green, where the old Citadel Buildings are off of King Street. They had an office on the side street, and you had to go there and register and vote.

VP: So, that was another long walk -

AL: Correct. [chuckles]

VP: - to go vote because there wasn't anything in the neighborhood.

AL: Correct, unless you wanted to sit in the back of the bus, you know? And most people would say, "We'd rather walk than sit in the back of the bus."

VP: Certainly. So, regarding race, growing up, did you interact much with others of different race? Or was it basically you were friends with people like you?

AL: No. You know, I had a relationship with everyone, you know, with a young lady that lived across from us on Kennedy Street. And she was a housekeeper downtown. And when she used to go to work, she used to take me to work with her and get a chance to meet a whole lot of people. And then, when they'd have something on the Isle of Palms, I used to go over Isle of Palms and help serve and things like that. So, I had a cross-section of people that we were close together.

VP: You mentioned McClellanville and that your grandfather was a minister, but did you ever visit Isle of Palms or Folly Beach or Sullivan's Island in the summer?

AL: Folly Beach, Isle of Palms, Kiawah, all of those were not on the table because you couldn't go there. And the only beach that you could go to is you had Mosquito Beach, and you had Riverside Beach unless you go all the way to Myrtle Beach to Atlantic Beach. And those were the only three beaches that you could visit during the summer.

VP: So, I know about Mosquito Beach, but where was Riverside Beach?

AL: Riverside Beach is, if you take a trip across the Arthur Ravenel Bridge, and when you go to the first red light and make a left and make another left to go down into Remleys Point, that's Riverside Beach.

VP: And the neighborhood surrounding that, is that maybe the Hamlin Neighborhood?

AL: Yes. Yes.

VP: So, let me just ask you a little bit about Mosquito Beach and Atlantic Beach. Were there motels there and restaurants there as well where you could get something from stores, where you could get something to eat, sandwiches?

AL: Yes. On Atlantic Beach, you had just about everything there: restaurants, a motel, and anything that you wanted. You had entertainment. And that was the only place that blacks

could've gone to. And then, same thing with Mosquito Beach and Riverside Beach. You know, they had everything there that the citizen wanted.

VP: So, one of the questions I have is with the movie, The Green Book, being out and people now paying attention to these various establishments, African American hotels and things like that. In your community, were there any hotels on the Westside or boarding houses that were part of that Green Book phenomenon?

AL: Right. We had St. James Hotel, where McDonald's and Arby's used to be located on Spring Street. And that's where most of the black entertainment used to come and stay there, at that particular hotel. And then, right across the street, you had Ann & Jean's [that] was a club on that corner of Hagood and Spring Streets. So, they had motels, and they had the Brooks Motel there on Morris Street. And then you had Pete's Restaurant and Motel on Coming Street.

VP: Where was that?

AL: Ah. That was a place that everyone would like to go to and eat because they used to serve lima beans. And when we used to play football, after the games, we'd go there and get that bowl of beans from Pete's. And he also had like a little motel in the back. And Mr. Jimmy in Orrs Court, he used to have a little store. But behind the store was a little motel that people could come and stay because they couldn't stay any other place. So, they used to have those places like that.

VP: So, regarding community organizations – Masons, men's clubs, women's clubs, fraternities – where did they meet in the neighborhood? And can you think of some of the names of those clubs?

AL: Well, they had a lodge on Coming Street that most everyone attended. And there was the Mason Lodge. And just about all the different lodges were in that particular building. And then, you had the Eastern Stars in there also. But most other organizations, you know, they were little and few.

VP: What about the Choraleers?

AL: The Choraleers House, yeah. Later on, they were established, and that's where they used to come and practice and get their craft down. And people would just go there sometimes for different things and different meetings.

VP: I know you're pretty healthy. You've been healthy, and you're active. You're pretty active. But if you or one of your siblings or a family member was ill and they needed a hospital, which hospitals back when you were growing up...

AL: Well, there was only one, and that was McClennan-Banks Hospital. But we had a doctor who used to make home visits, Dr. Hoffman. And his office was on Cannon Street. And if anyone in your family was ill or sick, you'd call him. And he'd give you an appointment time

when he was going to be to your house, and he'd show up at your house and then take care of his patient.

VP: So, that's the doctor. What about any other types of medical professionals, dentists, or any other businesses for medical? So, were they in the community, or were they mostly near the medical complex?

AL: Mostly, if you had something, [33:54 unintelligible] to see a dentist, hey, you didn't have one practically, you know? And one was on Cannon Street, Dr. Pickering. That was the dentist you would have to go see, and his office was right there. And my aunt used to work for him.

VP: So, we have a lot of storms and lots of flooding. You're also involved with sea level rise and what you told us earlier about working with our former Mayor Riley, being on the panel for sea level rise. So, let me ask you this. Do you recall any major disaster, such as hurricanes or fires that were larger than the ones that we've seen from Hurricane Hugo through today?

AL: Oh. Just about every storm that came through Charleston, you know, we were here. And I can remember one, Hurricane Hugo. That was one hurricane that we will never forget about, because when it came through, it really destroyed a whole lot of property. And if you left town, you had to wait a couple of days to get back into town. And we had a huge amount of flooding from that particular hurricane. We had Gracie and all those, but I think Hugo was one of the largest ones that we've experienced.

VP: And we sort of say, if we stayed through Hugo, we're ready to stay through all the others, right?

AL: I don't advise anybody to stay, you know? Because you never know what would happen.

VP: What about fires in the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s?

AL: No. I don't think we had much fire problem in this city. Probably, we might've had a few buildings that caught afire and stuff like that, but maybe the fire damage weren't that plentiful.

VP: So, how do you feel the community has changed after the '60s, '70s, and '80s for the better or for the worse? And how do you perceive those --

AL: I have a mixed feeling on that, because in the '60s, you know, it was probably 70% of the community was black. And then, during the '60s, you know, everyone practically left the City. Gentrification took over. And some way, it's all right; and in other way, it's bad because the people who live here and have homes, they're the ones that are being displaced. Because if they don't have the economic power, the means of paying the different taxes and maintain their homes, developer will come in and snap all their property up. And then, they probably have to go into a senior citizen living facility or go live with some of their family members. So, it's a double-edged sword for the community. And one time, I used to love in living Charleston, but now Charleston is losing the flavor and losing that hidden jewel, you know, when people came to Charleston and drank the water and experienced the beaches and different things that are

happening in the City. But the people that are on the top or in the middle are benefiting. But the people that are at the bottom, who's doing the hard work, is not because they can't afford to live on the Peninsula.

VP: So, let's take that one step further. Let's talk about your neighborhood. I know Westside is so much like what I'm experiencing in my neighborhood when I [00:38:38 unintelligible] with gentrification and with people really changing the perception of how things were, how manners should be -

AL: Correct.

VP: Why don't you explain that a little bit further, of how your [00:39:02 unintelligible].

AL: Right. And gentrification started happening in Charleston and especially the Westside, you know, like I alluded to earlier. It forced those people out, and things changed. And once someone move into you with the idea that what I believe in should go and what you used to do, you can't do anymore, and that's moving all those individuals out. And right now I see it as who has the power and who has the money will continue to move those individuals out who do not have the money or unless if you have two parents living in a house or two individuals. If one of those individuals dies, you just lose a large amount of your capital. And a single person can't maintain and own a house on the Peninsula unless you have the financial means of maintaining that property. And most of the kids, during segregation, they moved away. They moved to New York, Chicago, and those different places like that. And they bought houses and residences where they live, and they don't want to come back to South Carolina because they didn't have that same opportunity there. And so, most of those houses - they're losing most of those properties and along with heirs' property. Heirs' property is a big problem. And so, when you go to a lawyer now and there's two or three individuals, all they have to do is get one to say, "Hey. I want to sell, and I need my piece of the property." And you have to sell the property.

VP: So, let's delve in a little bit more about older people in the neighborhood, let's say in their 80s.

AL: Okay.

VP: And let's say that, when they pass on, from your understanding because you've been in the neighborhood so long and you're so well-connected, why do you think their children, who are probably in their 50s and 60s, maybe nearing retirement, wouldn't want to come back to Charleston?

AL: I think the memories still hold some of those dark days of what took place in Charleston and how they were treated and their families were treated. And they didn't have those opportunities there. So, they created a whole new environment where they live at. And to give that up and to come back home, and there's so much restriction on how you could develop your property now, and that plays a big part in it because the City created all these different ordinances: what you can put on there, could you add onto your property. And that's a thing, that

some of them probably don't have the financial means of coming and renovate the house up to standards that the City and these different boards have placed on property.

VP: So, now let's talk about working life, because this is always interesting. When you were growing up, did you have a job as soon as you could get one? And then let's talk about what you did before you entered the military and then a little bit about what you did after the military.

AL: Okay. Well, growing up, you know, my father taught everyone in our family to work. And one of my first jobs, like I said, I used to clean house for the Earhart family downtown. And I used to shine the brass and shine the silverware and stuff like that. And I moved away from that, and I went to Burke, and I took up brick masonry. And when I finished Burke, I came back here. And what happened, when they built their first gym on Fishburne Street, I worked on it and helped them build a gym. And then, after that, I was a crane operator for General Electric for about nine years. And so, that's what I did. And after General Electric was the military. In the military, I was a first sergeant for the United States Army and the Reserves, and then I was a unit administrator for the Department of Defense for 27 years. So, I did 28 years with the military and 27 years with the Department of Defense as a unit administrator.

VP: That's great. So, one of the things we want to ask you... I can't remember because I'm [00:44:45 unintelligible] so much, but you were Neighborhood President for a while.

AL: Yes.

VP: How many years did you -

AL: That was about 20 years, yes.

VP: That long?

AL: Yes. And when I took over, I saw how the neighborhood was going. It was going in the wrong direction, and senior citizens couldn't walk the street. And if people wanted to go to church, they were afraid to walk the street. And they had a whole lot of drug dealing in the community and people staying on the corner. And there was a problem, you know, drinking in the street. So, I started working with Mayor Riley and working with the Police Chief and different organizations to clean all that up. And I worked with a developer named Jeff Roberts to invest into the neighborhood and to build homes in the neighborhood. And so, all of us worked together as a team to make sure that the neighborhood changed. But there are a few individuals that treat people right and go straight down the line and make the neighborhood first. It's just about the neighborhood. It's not about any one particular person. If that one particular person's doing harm to the neighborhood, we did what we had to do to make sure that they do the right thing or they move out. But with that concept and working with Mr. Jeff Roberts, I think this whole neighborhood changed, and now you can see that. Right now people are fighting to get into this neighborhood.

VP: So, let's talk a little bit about working with the Police Chief. Do you feel, since you were the Neighborhood President, that there has been more of a police presence, and that has helped clean up the sort of bad element with the people hanging out on the streets?

AL: Yes, because we worked closely with the Team 1 of the police department and Chief Greenberg, Chief Mullen, and then now – well, all the police chiefs. We worked close together, and we have that special relationship, that we make sure that they walk the streets. And when they talk to young kids, the kids was afraid sometimes. But once they start talking with you out there, you know, the kids would always like to see them. When they'd see them in the street, they greeted them. And so, coming up here, I'd say almost six police officers live in the community, and they walk the beat in the community. And so, that made people more receptive to the police officers. And we're still doing that now. I have a meeting with the Chief tomorrow to take him around the City and show him different places that he doesn't know about. And so, we're still making sure the Chief connects with the people that he serves.

VP: So, I'd like to get back to one other thing. We all know that heirs' property is a tremendous issue.

AL: Correct.

VP: And you touched on it for a couple of moments, and I wonder if you could just explain for the audience how heirs' property – what it exactly is and why it's so problematic and if you feel there is a solution.

AL: Well, it came about... Well, it started back from slavery, because our ancestors knew that, if you own property, you own a piece of America. And what happened, you know, in those days in the 18th Century, people weren't telling them about wills and how to cut off their property for each individual. And so, they thought that their family members would have taken care of the property and make sure that each person gets their share. And so, it becomes a problem when you have people living on the property and someone living somewhere else up north. And they may run into hardship, and they see that as an investment, that they can get some money. And so, they go to a lawyer, and they sell. It happened in Mount Pleasant. We had a whole lot of people living on this piece of property, and they had to move their trailer and everything off because they never got together and subdivide the property, like my family did in Georgetown County. We got everyone together, and everyone had to pay a certain amount for the surveyor and a lawyer. And then, once that happened, we split the property up and put them in each individual's name so that we wouldn't have to fight that battle with heirs' property down the line. So, that's what people have to do. They have to get away from thinking about self and think about each other, how to take care of each other, like their grandparents used to do.

VP: Is there anything that I didn't ask that you'd like to touch on?

AL: Yes, integration. Integration was a bad thing for the black community. And why I say that, in the time that I was growing up, we had everything we needed. You had black businesses. You had the stores. You had the restaurants, filling stations, taxicabs, lawyers, doctors, everything. But when integration came about, people forgot about what they had, and they'd

want to go out and sample other people's venues and left their venue behind. So, their venue died. And they said, "Well, I can move out." And they moved out of the City. They moved out in the suburbs. And mostly when you moved out into the suburb, you ran into the same thing, segregation, because people didn't want you living next door to them, you know? And so, integration killed the black community. The black community was independent. They could've crippled any business downtown that they were spending their money with. But when they start leaving their business, their business start dying off. And Spring Street, Cannon Street, Kennedy Street, Hagood Avenue by the Ashley River, there used to be a development back there. There used to be a little black-owned shipyard over there. And we had everything. But seemed like, when integration happened, everyone left and turned their back on what they had working together. But what they don't understand: you have to have power, and you have to have some kind of leverage when you're dealing with people. And you can't depend on anyone else for something. The middle class left the City, went to the suburbs. And then, what you're left behind are those individuals that are practically on the bottom of the [00:53:26 unintelligible] level. That's when your drugs and everything started happening. They didn't have jobs or anything like that. And then they start giving things away. But what that created – it created a system that depends on other people, then depend on yourself to lift yourself up out of that problem. But integration hurt the black community.

VP: Do you still feel like... Do you feel things are improving now that integration...? Do you feel like an everyday [00:54:14 unintelligible]?

AL: With integration, things went under the table when you start wearing suit and tie. There used to be all kind of problems that you could have seen. It was outright. But when integration came, it went with suit and a tie, and you were still not at the table. And it's kind of still going on today, because if you walk into a business office - I know that's what I use to test the water - when I walk in there, in the boardroom or anyplace like that, and I see only one minority in there, I know something's wrong, because that's just one vote. And you can't change anything. You may voice your opinion, but if you don't have the support of everyone, you still lose. You're just sitting there. And people say you're a token, and that's how it is. And you turn on the TV now, and you look at everything on TV, the way our business is going, and you don't see any minority at the table, something is wrong. And so, that's how I look at it. I was on several boards, and I let them know that you have to change. You have to have a sample. The board should look like the community. And that will tell which direction you're going instead of trying to block people out. And the same thing. You can look at the school board. Right now you have four blacks on the school board, but they don't work together. And if they can work together, you can improve all the educational problems in Charleston County whether the superintendent is black or white. If it's about you and not about the students, then you have a problem. And then, with the all-black schools that are failing, everyone blames the superintendent, but you've got to blame the parents because it starts at home, not at the superintendent level. If the parents don't make sure their kid's reading at a first-grade or third-grade level when they get to first grade, they're lost. And you can't blame anybody else. You have to look in the mirror and say, "Hey. What have I done to improve my child's education and life?" And the younger people now are not doing that. And so, that's what - integration caused all of that. Because when I was coming up, you had to go to school. You had to take care of each other. And when you went to school, you couldn't talk back to the principal or the teachers. You had to sit there and learn. And if that occurred, before you

got home, your parents knew about it, and you were in big trouble. But now the parents go to school and want to fuss with the teachers and the principal, and they figure their child don't do any wrong.

VP: [00:58:06 Unintelligible].

AL: No. I think that's what... But Charleston itself is moving forward. But what I hate now when I look around at Charleston, all the huge development, huge condos and hotels. And they're losing that historical fabric of the City that's what people come to Charleston to see. They didn't come to Charleston to see these brick buildings – huge brick buildings that they're building now. They came to see the freedman cottages, all the woodwork on the houses downtown on the Battery, Rainbow Row, and things like that. And we are losing that because of the dollar value. And Charleston's becoming a goldmine, and everyone's trying to get a part of it. And if you're a resident, they're trying to move you out.

VP: You were excellent.

AL: Thank you.

VP: I knew you would be [00:59:15 unintelligible].

END OF RECORDING