Linwood DeBrew
Interview Summary

Interviewee: Linwood DeBrew
Interviewer: Laura Puaca
Interview date: December 5, 2014
Location: Moton Community House, Newport News, Virginia
Length: 1 audio file, WAV format, 2:12:09.6

THE INTERVIEWEE: Linwood DeBrew was born in Scotland Neck, North Carolina on February 3, 1943. As a young child, he moved to Newport News, where he lived in Newsome Park with his family. DeBrew attended Newsome Park Elementary School and George Washington Carver High School, where he graduated in 1962. He also completed coursework at Hampton Institute, Thomas Nelson Community College, Christopher Newport College, and the Rochester Institute of Technology. DeBrew has been especially active in the struggle for civil rights for much of his life. As a teenager, he joined the youth branch of the local NAACP in 1957. Later, he joined the SCLC in 1967 and was a co-founder of the Black Unity Congress (BUC) that was established that same year. Additionally, he helped to establish the Greater Southeast Development Corporation (GSDC) and the Jefferson Avenue Merchants Association (JAMA) in the 1970s.

THE INTERVIEWER: Laura Puaca is Assistant Professor of History at Christopher Newport University, where she teaches the civil rights history class. She is also the founding director of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project, which she established in 2012.

DESCRPTION OF THE INTERIVEW: The interview was conducted at Linwood DeBrew's office at the Moton Community House in Newport News, Virginia. The interview took a life history approach, beginning with DeBrew's early upbringing, family life, education, and community relations. Next, DeBrew spoke at length about his own involvement in the political process and especially his work on behalf of civil rights. He has been active in a wide range of organizations, which he also discussed. Other themes include the ongoing nature of the struggle for racial justice and current issues related to race relations both in Hampton Roads and nationwide.

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START OF INTERVIEW

Laura Puaca: My name is Laura Puaca, and I'm conducting an interview with Mr. Linwood DeBrew. The date is Friday, December the 5th, and we're sitting in Mr. DeBrew's office at the Moton Community House in Newport News, Virginia. Good morning, Mr. DeBrew.

Linwood DeBrew: Greetings.

LP: As I mentioned, we like to take a life history approach. So, I'm gonna start by asking some questions about your childhood. Can you please state where, and when, you were born?

LD: I was told that I was born February the 3rd, 1943, in Scotland Neck, North Carolina--.

LP: And, go ahead.

LD: Which is in Halifax County. History records it as Plantation Valley.

LP: And, you were one of ten children?

LD: Yes.

LP: Were your siblings older or younger than you?

LD: One was older. She was a female, Susie DeBrew. We were the only two that were born in North Carolina. The others were born here in Newport News.

LP: Now, what did your parents do for a living?

LD: They were sharecroppers, when I was born. But, then, my father moved us to Newport News in order to get a job in the shipyard. So, we came to Newport News when I was a child. And, they resided in Newsome Park.

LP: OK. So, your parents came here in order to work. Your father came here in order to work at the shipyard.

LD: Yes.

LP: So, this was doing World War II, during the early 1940s?

LD: Yes, it was.

LP: OK. Do you know much about his work at the shipyard, what kind of work he was doing? You're probably too young to remember but--.

LD: I remember them telling me that he was working--. When he first came, he worked in something like a boiler room, feeding fuel to the boiler that helped to smelt down or melt down metal. And, that's basically what he did until--. I don't remember. When I began to become conscious of where he was employed, he was working two jobs. He was working at a furniture store as a delivery person--Goldstein Furniture Company, I believe it was. And, he was working a night job at one of the local black restaurants and hotels. I think it was known as Cosmo Inn, yes, on 25th Street, "2-5-and-J" [25th Street and Jefferson Avenue].

LP: And, did your mother work outside of the home?

LD: Yes, she did. Initially, she was a home keeper. But, when, I think, we got in about--. When I got in about the third or fourth grade, she was working at a local convenience store as a cashier.

LP: Now, you had mentioned, just before, that your family moved to Newsome Park. So, this must have been shortly after it opened.

LD: Yes, I think we were probably one of the first families to locate in Newsome Park because I believe it was in 19--. Right after--. I was only about three or four months old, from what I was told, when we came here. So, it had to be in 1943.

LP: Can you tell me a little bit about that community, what it was like to grow up there? It was an all black community.

LD: Yes, it was. It was all black. It was home. It was a tight-knit community, very close-knit. Seemed like every household was open for the next family. No one went hungry. Everyone

looked out for everyone. Children were very disciplined. Parents, I think, I think they was the village that raised the child, because every child in there belonged to every household 'cause if you did anything wrong, your parents knew about it before you got home [laughter]. And, it was a very secure community [within]. I don't remember much crime because we used to leave the doors open half--. Might as well left them open because they had a thing called a skeleton key, which [was] one key would fit everybody's house anyway. But, we slept outdoors [during the summer]. Nobody locked the doors or anything when they left home. It was just a wonderful, perfect environment for us as a community and as a family. But, ironically, we lived [pause] inside: we were surrounded by white communities. On the north side we had Briarfield. [There was also] Warwick Gardens at that time--. Warwick Gardens or something like that. And, then when we got to the railroad track--. See, actually, Newsome Park was in what was then known as Warwick County. And, when you [crossed] the railroad track it was in Newport News. And, Seven Oaks, Marshall Courts, [Stuart Gardens], and all that was the white community. And, on the west side, going towards the railroad tracks, of course, you had Parkview community which was basically trailer courts and what have you. So, we were surrounded, pretty much, by white communities. So, it was a hostile environment for those of us who was moving out [and about] because racism was very deep. I'm gonna say maybe it wasn't what we knew then as racism, but racial dislike was quite manifest because, as children, if we tried to come across the track, we had to come through a white community [that was hostile] to come what we called "downtown." And, "downtown" was where they had the movie theaters, the swimming pools. All of the cultural, and the entertainment, and all of the sports events was on this side of the track. So, we had to come through Seven Oaks coming this way, if we went to the swimming pool or Doris Miller, back then, which is not the same Doris Miller that it is now. Doris Miller now was World War II [World War II Recreation Center] back then: it was a white community's recreation center. And, where the [C. Waldo] Scott Center is now, that was the Doris Miller that we attended when we was young. But, we had to go through the Wickham Apartments, through the woods, 'cause there

were woods in between that area then. Marshall Avenue didn't have direct--. Streets didn't go all the way through. The only way through there was through the woods. And, we had to fight the white community to get through to enjoy life, a quality of life. And, we had to fight or find a secret way to try to get back 'cause if they caught you alone [you were beaten badly]. So, we had to travel in a group, in order to defend ourselves. And, then, that was from the white community. But, we also had to fight the black community because there was a competitiveness between Warwick County school, which was Carver High School and Newsome Park, and Huntington High School which was downtown [and East End]. And, we had this thing about territorial rights; and, usually it was over females [and sports]. We didn't want the guys over here coming over there messing with the girls, and, they didn't want us over here. So, that kind of rivalry took place. And, I think it all sprung from out of the friendly rival that existed between the two high schools, because you had only two high schools in the area. Because of segregation, all the black children on this side of the track went to Huntington. And, all of the black children on the other side of the track went to Carver. In Hampton, they went to Phenix. And so, it was healthy and a healthy community [when working in unity]. It was a healthy camaraderie. And, and, we depended on each other for food, clothing, and shelter. And, we survived as a village. But, for some time, we, in our community, Newsome Park, we were weak when we went to other parts of the communities. And, we wasn't together politically, religiously, socially, economically. We just wasn't together because, by being a new housing complex, most of the people was coming from different parts of the country. [Many of us were strangers to each other.] I think most of the people in Newsome Park was from various parts of North Carolina. A lot of them was family. And, a lot of them were not family but they might have been extended family because they came off of some of the same plantations. Well, they called them large farms, which was a softer term for plantation. And, they kind of knew each other, distantly. [So], they moved [about cautiously], if you lived on 44th Street, for instance, you wouldn't come to 41st Street. And, the only time you had that camaraderie was when you went to school. So, it was very territorial, although it was

respectful. But, when they start coming together as one another, and start respecting each other, [and trusting each other], we became a very powerful community. We had political groups, civic groups who dealt with voter registration, and what have you. And, we began to develop a strong citizenship participation. And, we began to become very conscious about how we were being treated or mistreated as a people. [We began to understand the complexities of systemic racism.]

LP: So, this happened over time.

LD: Yes, it took time. It took growth and development, consciousness, because I think a lot, I think--by virtue of the fact that a lot of our people parents, grand-parents, had came from North Carolina, from a sharecropppers' experience--they were very, overly cautious in dealing with white people. And, they were very cautious in teaching and raising us how to survive in a hostile environment. And we became, you know--. Learn to read and write and understand things that was going on. Nobody had a television, so we had to listen to radio. Everybody gathered around the radio. One house in the community might have a radio; and, everybody went there to listen to Joe Louis, or Jackie Robinson, or *Amos and Andy*, you know, anything that we could find or listen to hear about where black people were doing something progressive. And, the only communication was the radio at the time or the churches. And, we didn't have as many churches back then as we have now. I understand now that we might have one to two hundred churches between the waterfront and Mercury Boulevard. In Newsome Park, as a child, I remember only maybe three churches. That was Jefferson Park, and I think they had a church out there on 48th Street. That church is still there now from the Jackson Family. And, then they had the church out there on Roanoke Avenue, which is still there now, New Grafton.

LP: Did you or your family belong to any of those churches?

LD: All three of them [however, at different times.]

LP: All of them?

LD: Every one, 'cause we moved back-and-forth. And, If one family member became dissatisfied with this church and this preacher--as the children would grow up--I think, at least,

the entire family--. I think, pretty much, everybody in Newsome Park, at one time, came through Jefferson Park. [Sometimes the families divided when the church divided.]

LP: How long did your family live in Newsome Park?

LD: Until my mother and father passed. So, I would say--my mother--I would almost say seventy years.

LP: Hmm, long time.

LD: Yeah, because I was a child. I was three months old. My mother passed maybe two years ago, two, or three, years ago.

LP: I'm sorry.

LD: And, she was still living in Newsome Park.

LP: Were the buildings the same, or had they--. Had they torn down the original buildings and then created new ones in the '60s? Is that right, or--?

LD: That's interesting. The houses that we lived in, they were all white houses, like--. They used to make fun of them. We didn't realize it as a child that it was even a project 'cause it was home to us; and, we were proud of it. But they used to call it "Cardboard City" [laughter]. You know, they were built out of [inferior material]. Little white houses that had a kitchen, a living room, two bedrooms or three bedrooms, and a bathroom. And, they all looked alike [and painted with shipyard lead paint]. And, they was connected 'cause it was, from my understanding, it was built primarily for families of the military, for families who was coming here to find work that was military-related. And, Newsome Park, and Copeland Park, from my understanding of history, was one of the largest complexes built in the country. Newsome Park, of course, was all black. And, on the [east] side of Newsome Park was another large community, the same type of houses, called Copeland Park. It was all white. But, it was very similar. They had a drugstore, a little convenience area. And, in Newsome Park and then Copeland Park, they had very similar things, you know, [the separate but equal illusion. To somewhat understand the climate of Newsome Park you had to know that you had to depend on each other, because of the hatred and prejudice

that surrounded us and the climate that we had to live under. A climate of hate and the memory of the 1887 Racial Riot in Newport News, when white people attacked the black community for no apparent reason other than the fact that we were black, thus convicted in the womb. The governor sent in the National Guard to put down the riot. We still do not know the reason for the riot. It is my belief that the personality and life of Newsome and Copeland set the tone of the mentality of the black laborers and the white laborers and their families. The love and hate that hate produced.

Joseph Thomas Newsome was the editor of the *Newport News Star* weekly newspaper. A respected lawyer, newspaper editor, and civic leader, he was the first African-American lawyer in post-Civil War Newport News to practice before the Virginia Supreme Court. He was the son of former slaves. He was an active Republican; he ran for state attorney general as part of an all-black Republican slate, known as the Lily Black Republican Ticket. He was recognized as the spokesman for the black community during his time. He was an early activist in locating a site for Huntington High School, the first high school in Newport News for black students. He started the Warwick County Colored Voters League, an organization which lobbied for schools, community improvements and voter registration. Newsome Park was in Warwick County prior to Warwick consolidating with Newport News.

Copeland Park was named after Walter Scott Copeland, who was an owner of the local newspaper, *The Daily Press.* Copeland supported progressive reforms to improve welfare and education programs for poor whites. He was a strong backer of harsh segregation laws. He joined forces with the Anglo Saxon Clubs and supported the 1924 Racial Integrity Act. He and *The Daily Press* crusaded for eugenics and what became the Massenburg Bill, the strongest segregation law in the United States. Both the Racial Integrity Act and the Massenburg Bill was pushed by residents of the oldest continuous English speaking city in America, Hampton, Virginia. Walter Plecker pushed the Racial Integrity Act and Alvin Massenburg pushed the Massenburg Bill. They were white supremacist along with Walter Copeland.]

LP: Now, you had gone to Newsome Park Elementary School and later on to Carver. Is that correct?

LD: Yes.

LP: What was it like attending school there, and especially do you have any thoughts about how those schools compared to local white schools? Did you notice any differences?

LD: Well, at that age, to me, and I think most of us, school was school. You had to go, until--. It was mandatory to go until you were a certain age. Either you had to go there [or go] to what they called reformatory school, you know. The original school that I remember going to was a little [metal and] brick building. And of course, I failed the first grade. I had to repeat the first grade because my mother didn't really force me to go to school 'cause I was born with a medical situation (but they? 0:17:09.3) didn't have surgery that could deal with it at the time. So I had to wear a harness, you know, to kind of hold my intestines up, and that kind of thing, with a hernia. And, the children used to make fun of me, my mother said, so she wouldn't make me go to school. So, I had to repeat the first grade for missing so much time. But by the time the next year came around, I didn't wear the harness anymore. My mother decided not to put it on me 'cause children would make fun of me. I don't remember, but she did. And, she told me about it just before she passed, because I didn't know that I wasn't supposed to be playing sports or doing anything strenuous, which I did, you know. And, I developed problems over the years as a result of that, you know, tearing the tissues unknowingly. But it was good experience. (I've went back? 0:18:10.3): enjoyed going to the school there. By the fifth, sixth grade, seventh grade, I left Newsome Park and went to Carver Elementary. We were bussed to Carver Elementary and had a good relationship there. Stayed there, I think, one year, and, from there, went to Carver High School. And, I had a good relationship with the teachers. Most of the teachers, all of the teachers I ever had was female teachers, until we got into high school [and] we got into sports. And a lot of the teachers took close to me. And, some of my classmates used to call me the teacher's pet. But, the [students] they didn't understand--that the teachers, they told me, that they enjoyed working

with me because they had the SAT tests back then. And, in elementary school, I was making high school grades [on the test]. And, in high school, I was making college grades [on the test]. So, the teachers would take to me, and some of my classmates thought I was being, you know, treated differently. But, I guess I can--. Well, I know, now, because they [the teachers] told me they was trying to instill in me a desire to continue my education. And, they wanted to know why, you know, I wasn't putting forth no great effort to excel. And, it was, where you say, "elementary," you know. I could read and comprehend pretty much. And, that's what I used to excel on, comprehension. And, then when I got into high school, I think, three years, I was president of my class. I played football. I was captain of the football team [that won the state championship in 1961] .I was captain of the school patrol for two years, and various other activities that I participated in. I was like a chairperson or a captain. So, I guess, I had a good relationship with my peer group, yeah.

LP: Do you remember any teachers who were particularly influential?

LD. Yes. Miss [Marie L.] Holland: we called her "Ma Holland." That was in my twelfth grade. She taught literature; [she also introduced to me the readings of Shakespeare]. She was a very, very motivating, inspirational instructor. Miss [Harmon], one of my English teachers.

She taught--. Loved that woman, still love her because words that you--. When you read, she would always have--. She taught English, I believe. That's what she taught me. That's what I learned from her because she would give us new words every day, and the next day you had to use those words in a sentence. And, I still use a lot of those words, still remember. And, every time I think of those words, I think about her. In the seventh grade, there was a teacher named Ms. [May] Greene. Beautiful! But, she passed early. In the first grade--not the first year, the second year--there was a teacher by the name of Miss Davis. In the third grade, there was a teacher by the name of Ms. (Flemings? 0:21:41.4). All three of them--. All, one, two, three, four, five of those ladies had a very, tremendous impact on motivating me and inspiring me to continue to do what I was doing, studying. And, it was Mrs. [Flora Davis] Crittenden who used to stop me

in the hall all of the time and ask me why I was wasting my time. I didn't understand what she was talking about then. But she used to stop me all the time and tell me--'cause I used to shoot hooky a lot, skip class, yeah, a lot, and be walking the hall under the guise of being the school patrol [laughter]. And, she would stop me and told me I was wasting my time. But, at the time, I had no intention, nor desire, to go to college because most of our parents, and the men in our community, worked in the shipyard. So, everybody who was graduating from high school was automatically, pretty much instilled in them that they were going to get a job in the shipyard, you know. So, when people ask you what you want to be when you grow up, or what you gonna do, you would say, "I'm going to make money, and I'm going to get a job in the shipyard," 'cause you thought you could get your father to go there and just speak to somebody that they knew and they'd get you in. But, I couldn't get in the shipyard. I went down there and applied for the shipyard; and, the man told me I didn't know how to say "Yes, sir" right. 'Cause I was saying, "yes" and "no" because I had learned this in school [to speak English proper]. I hadn't learned the ethics of Jim Crow [very well]. You know, we had been taught the ethics of Jim Crow, but we was always trying to escape that, you know, Jim Crow-type, Sambo, mumbo-jumbo kind of stuff. So, rather than saying, what we would call "yassaboss" [Yes, sir, boss], we would try to be proper English and say, "Yes." But, at the time, I didn't know "yes" and "sir" was two different words. I thought "yassa"; you put "yassaboss" as one word. So, I go along be, proper, and present myself, in the ethics of Jim Crow--not looking white men in the eye, looking down, and saying, "yes." But, I didn't approach them properly, so I was sent back. I went to Hampton [Institute] for a short period, in my first year, after high school. I qualified academically, but I had [also] gotten a scholarship, football scholarship. And, after I quit Hampton--because I had impregnated the woman that I'm married to now--I went back to the shipyard to try to get in the Apprentice School. And, I still wasn't qualified, you know. So, I kicked that to the curb, with an attitude, 'cause I felt that I was being discriminated against, I was being treated unfairly, because I knew people I knew--friends, who were in the shipyard--and, I knew I was much more qualified

physically, academically, vocationally, or just as qualified, you know, to get a job in order to take care of myself and family. But, that was what the mind virus was; you were guaranteed a job. So, I couldn't get a job. [Although,] I didn't have a problem with working because I worked three months out of every year in North Carolina as a sharecropper['s grandson,] plowing mules, [working in tobacco, cotton, and peanuts,] helping my grandparents who were sharecroppers, plowing mules--working from sunup to sundown, four days a week, for four dollars [a day]. Had the weekend, that's what you got. So, I didn't have a problem with working because I treated that [work] as an exercise to get in shape when I came back here to play football or sports. So, so I enjoyed working, still enjoy working, you know, although I'm a little bit challenged now.

LP: Now, I have a question about the integration of the schools around here--.

LD: Oh, I wanted to point that out. In elementary school, I realized early that something was wrong because all the books we got either said "Daniel School" or "Wilson School" [or "Walter Reed," which were the Newport News white schools]; they were old books. All our schoolbooks were the old books. And, sometimes we had to erase and clean them out, [words like "nigger," "coons," "alligator bait," etc.] in order for them to be our books. So, I wanted to know why we couldn't get new books, you know. We always got hand-me-down books. What was your question?

LP: Oh, my question was I was curious with regard to the integration of schools around here--. Obviously, it took some time, many years, after the *Brown* ruling to actually go in effect around here. I was curious if--you probably weren't at the right age to experience much of the integration of the school yourself--I was curious about if you did? Or if any of your siblings, perhaps, went through that process? 'Cause they would have been younger than you. Maybe, you don't recall.

LD: That's a very good question. I went through all those experiences; everything that you asked I could respond to. I might not be able to answer it, but I can respond. Of course, when we went to school, it was segregated. And, I enjoyed the segregation, [being with my own kind]. And, I didn't ever find any fault with being a part of a segregated school, other than the fact that we

wasn't being treated fairly or equitably in getting the things that we needed, the books, or the same type of outings, field trips, or same type of support for sports and band and what have you. I felt like we was denied access to the quality of things that we needed in order to become excellent in the things that we were charged with doing. But, the teachers--. The teachers were second-to-none, I mean second-to-none. They treated you like family, like you were their own children. It made you really embrace your alma mater. You know, alma mater--[another] mother. You embraced them because they embraced you. They would call you: they wouldn't say, "Come here boy." Like Mrs. [Lillian] Lovett's husband [Dr. Walter Lovett, Sr.] was my football coach, and I remember him. And, I use what he said to me as a child to deal with all the children that I've dealt with here in the thirty-something years I've been here. He would always say, "Come here son" [or "child"]. He would call you "son" [or "child,"] and it made a difference. And, I've seen--. I've used it, and I see the difference it make with the young people. I never had a problem with young people, 'cause I would call them "son," [or "child,] like family. And, that's why we named this the "Moton Community House" and not the "Moton Community Center," or recreation center, because the word--just the word "rec"--is a mind virus. When people go in there, they gonna "make it a rec [wreck]." So, we say "house" because we know people act different in the house. They act different 'round the house. So, we never had problems here with dealing with drugs, or whatever, because we would always tell people, "Would you sell drugs in front of your house? Well, we don't want you to sell it in front of our house," and they understand that. Family, family strengthen[ing]. So, I forgot, off the--. I forgot what the question was. But about the differences in the integration. We knew, when we played football, for instance, they wouldn't put the football scores in the newspaper. But, the Apprentice School, [Newport News High, Warwick High] or Hampton High School, which were the white schools, they would always play them up. Our football heroes and stars--Jesse Patterson, James Guthrie, Leroy Keyes, [Earl Faison, Bennie McRae] Larry (Vaughn? 0:31.24.4), Delton Macklin--they would never go in the newspaper. But, Fred Anspach, I can remember Tommy Jordan from Warwick High

School; they was all in the newspaper. But, we knew our athletes were just as good, but they would never get their coverage. We had one guy that we played in our basketball league from Norcom [I.C. Norcom High School in Portsmouth], Johnny Morrison, scored a hundred and something points in one basketball game. And, they never printed it in the newspaper, still won't print it today, you know. But, we were playing against those kind of athletes. But, by being segregated, of course they didn't get, you know, solicited by big schools like William and Mary or Virginia Tech, because it was, you know, segregation. [The local newspaper always printed negative news about the black community, they still do it.]

LP: So, when you played other teams, say in football, did you--. Did you only play black teams or did you also play white teams?

LD: Only black teams.

LP: Only black teams.

LD: Only black teams. Everything we did was black. And, everything I do today, I try to do it black 'cause they were good years. They were good family, you know, good family. Everybody respected you, treated you fairly. I didn't--. We played with white guys, when we were young in our neighborhood, 'cause as I pointed out earlier, there were white communities all around Newsome Park. But, every now and then, we had a white guy from Briarfield, or from Seven Oaks [or Copeland Park] that would come and develop some type of camaraderie with one of the other black people in the community. And, they would be bold enough to come into the black community and play sand lot football with us. Over in the woods, just before you went to cross the tracks, there used to be a horse stable in there, ponies, and what have you. And, the white, they owned,--. It was owned by white people. And, we developed a good relationship with them, you know. So, that was the only relationship we had with white folks back then, other than the ice man, the insurance man, or somebody coming along trying to sell you something, you know. [And] the police. But, back then, in Newsome Park, most of our policemen were black; and, they grew up in the community. So, there was a good relationship with those police officers. We didn't

have, really start having a big bad relationship with police officers until the city of Newport News and Warwick merged [in 1958]. And, things seemed to be a different mentality. More white police officers came in with less knowledge about people in the community, [showing little respect]. And, there seemed to be more oppression, or harassment, or intimidation. The ("Black Annie,"? 0:34:31.9) which was the wagon that they bought around looking for us--. But, by that time, now, I knew that the schools had been, that the *Brown* v. *Board of Education* had been implemented, and I knew that there was massive resistance in the state of Virginia. But, I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it, because, as a young person, I was out in the world ripping and running, and then I figured I was out of the education, of the school thing, [although], I went to Hampton [Institute]. I remember when the schools finally began to integrate, because of my younger brothers and sisters who began to go to these schools. [Four had segregation experience and four had integration.] But, my younger brothers and sisters were so much younger than me, [four of them especially,] I was like their daddy, you know. I left home early, long before they even got into high school. So, I don't remember a lot of [their experience] because I became involved in the Civil Rights struggle. And, I never encouraged them to become involved [although three of my brothers were there]. But, as time went by, [the younger ones] became involved. So, I don't know. I know that the young people that became a part [were seeking self-knowledge]. By 1967, we put into effect the Black Unity Congress, which grew out of dissatisfaction [with discrimination and police brutality], primarily with what is going on today in Ferguson and in New York. In 1967, we were at a place--and I'll get back to the school thing--because (0:36:45.7) my first consciousness of the integration in the schools was when they had these young people begin to go to Newport News and they began to walk out of the class because they was having problems adjusting [to the harassment and discrimination]. And, many of them was coming to our organization for direction on how to deal with it, and, because most of them wanted to rebel, you know, just rebel [against white supremacy]. And, we were young, and we didn't know how to address the situation, either. So, it was like growing pains. But, back in about

1966, '67, we was at a place--we, meaning, me and a few friends of mine from Newsome Park--and we was at Sonny's Inn which was what we called a local watering hole. We went in and drank beers, and what have you, after work. It's still there, but it's owned now by an Asian family. And, people still go there. But, at that time, your so-called *hoity toity* and the *hoi poloi* could go and mix. And, we were there, about myself and six of my friends. And, there was a group of guys from downtown. And, there was another group of guys from the East End. They were three different black [neighborhoods] who really never got along. And, everybody was in there talking about police brutality. And, everybody was expressing their dissatisfaction with the way police was conducting themselves [and shooting black people]. And, someone in the group, of out of the three, mentioned, said, "If everybody in here talking about the same thing, we got the same problem. Why don't we get together and find out what our common differences are, and who our common enemy is, and who our common friend is?" ["Let us unite and help ourselves."] And, a meeting was set up that night between the three different groups, to meet at Webb's Grill, which was a grill located in the 600 block of 25th Street, next to what was then known as the Jefferson Theatre. [The original founders of the Black Unity Congress were Linwood DeBrew, Tommie Mitchell, Artis Lyles, Myron Cooke, Johnny Dixon, James Gilbert Harris, Frank Carney, Ronald Jones, and Raymond Whitley.] That was the strip: "2-5-and-J." If you lived in Newport News, or anywhere else in the world, if you came to Newport News, "2-5 and J" was the place to go find life, some say, "action." That was the action agenda. So, we met there that Saturday, at Webb's Grill, the three different groups, lot of good brothers--lot of good brothers [and sisters]. And, then from there we formed our organization known as the Black Unity Congress. And, we called it the Black Unity Congress because, after a lot of discussion, everybody figured that throughout the world, when people were having problems, they would form a congress. And, what we were trying to do was get--. We had so many people with so many different schools of thought, and so many different ideas on how to approach the situation, so they said, "Well, let's call it a congress, and then we'll work out a platform and strategies from there." And, then we

took that, as we got together as a group, and we began to introduce ourselves or interject ourselves into the local political climate, and became a little engaging to the so-called powers-that-be who was basically charged to be in charge of the black community, who were basically preachers, the religious groups, and the other social groups. We had a lot of social groups who wouldn't allow us, if you wasn't into a certain family, to participate in certain social groups. So, we just interjected ourselves into various meetings. Most of meetings at the time were being held at Peninsula Business College, which was a school that was owned by Jessie Rattley, you know. She was an educator at the time. That's before she became an elected politician; but, it was at her place that, if anything went down, people would come and meet. It was an accepted place. And, she and those folks was tied directly to the so-called political mainstream, Herb Bateman, is one of the names, (Alan Diamonstein? 0:41:40.2), [Paul Trible, Ted Morrison, and of course] Tom Downing. Those were the politicians back then. And, whenever they would call a meeting, they would call it there and the people would come out. And, they had had a shooting or killing, or something like that, in the community. And, the community was a little upset--just like they are in Ferguson and New York-- back then. So, they had this group. I'm trying to think of the name of the group. It was [The East End Voters League]. I know they [also] had the Peninsula Ministerial Alliance, and they was the ones that were heading up all the [local] churches. And the churches politically became one. And, they came up with the one shot [voting] strategy, one vote. That's how we voted for Jessie Rattley and got her elected, OK. Everybody came together on that, and we understood that was the only way we were going to get somebody elected. But, something happened in the community. I can't quite think of what it was. And, they tried to take members of the Black Unity Congress and put us on some of these committees they had formed. But, we understand that they was jive. They were window-dressing. We called them "fireman positions." What are "fireman positions"? Fireman positions, in the Civil Rights and Human Rights movement, meant positions that they gave you to [help] put out the fire [laughter] and to cool the people off. Today, they call them "coolers" [laughter]. Minister [Louis] Farrakhan called them

"apologists." And, the young people today, they don't want to hear nothing from no coolers and no apologists. They want to deal with the facts. Let's deal with it just like it is, which is what we was trying to say in the '60s. If we don't deal with it, then it's gone. It's like a dream deferred. What happened to a dream deferred, you know? It festers. It festers and festers, and simmers and simmers. And, but anyway, when they put--. They volunteered some of us and put us on various committees. I still got newspapers, articles, somewhere, I don't know. But, we turned them down. We turned all the positions down. And, when we turned the positions down, everybody began to put, turn us down. [We told them that truth crushed to the ground will rise again.]

LP: So, these were positions, like city-wide positions?

LD: Yes. But, they wasn't elected. They were "selected" positions, you know. They will make you--. They were what we call them, back then, "Head-Nigger-In-Charge-Of-Cleaning up-The-Bathroom" and dealing with anybody you think may have been drinking. Them kind of work tasks, you know. And then give you some sort of title, you know. It was--. You could put it on your resume, and it would say resume, but it wouldn't mean "resume" [laughter], that kind of thing. And, we understood that at an early age. But, anyway, when they put us on those committees, we turned them down. And, then, as we turned them down, the newspaper began to play us up as "Black Power kooks." And, as they began to give us these names, of course, we began to resist being named ["kooks"] because to be called "Black Power kook," to us, was like being called "Jim Crow," a "nigger," a "Jim Dandy," a "coon," you know. So, we began to do our research and address those particular situations. And, we began to look it at it political, from a political angle. And, we decided that, perhaps, we should run some of our own for city council. And myself, and a companion of ours, of mine, (Tommie Mitchell? 0:45.52.1), we announced, back in the '60s, that we was going to run [in the '70s]. And, I think--. And then we would go to school board meetings and try to get the school board to introduce what we called real history into the school curriculum, to teach about the contributions that black people have made to civilization and to building of America in a positive light, as opposed to being "cotton-picking

niggers." We wanted to teach the history of us, before we were subjected to slavery, because we viewed ourselves not as just American citizens or second-class citizens in America. We viewed ourselves as prisoners of war, and that we had a right to struggle against the forces that have oppressed us, and exploited us, and enslaved us. And, that we were not slaves because "slave" to us meant "indentured servant." We found no difference in the definition of "slave" and "indentured servant." So, we don't say, "We were slaves." We say, "We were enslaved," meaning that there's a force and a power over us that's trying to render us helpless or render us to be subjected to their whims and not our own. And, they teaching us everything about their greatness, but nothing about ours. And, as a result of that, the young people who were going through integration in the schools, at that time, began to come to us for a sense of direction, 'cause they longed for that kind of history of themselves, and they assumed that we knew it. [Young people like Darryl Whittaker, Patricia Whitted, Regina and Larry DeBrew] But, at the time, same time, we had black people who was in influential positions, and I don't want to call no names because they still have family around. And, these people was highly respected in certain social circles, or fraternities, and sororities; but, they would come to us, meaning Black Unity Congress, back then, and ask us not to teach anything to our people about their history. "Don't teach anything about dashikis, Afros, (0:48:21.0). Anything about their culture." I mean, we actually had--. And, they were black people, coming to us, asking us to do that. And, we would smile, you know, and say, "We accept any suggestion kindly." [laughter] So, I mean the things that some of--. We had doctors coming to us, telling us that we were inferior by blood. We had black people who were Mormons coming to us telling us that the only solution to the race problem was that black men and white women had to get married to come up with a different complexion. And, we were telling them, "Well, we don't feel like we got to have a complexion to make the connection, unless you trying to connect to a wicked system. And, that all people, regardless of their color, should be respected, (based on what color they manifest when brought into the world? 0:49:26.5)." And, of course, we was in the midst of that kind of confusion. We was charged with

being everything except a child of God. Young people who came in--. We began to be advanced in numbers [and in our thinking]. I think now of the hundreds--I mean we had hundreds--of local young people, [many unsung brothers and sisters] that came and joined into our movement. We called it a movement. Some of the most gigantic people I knew were guys that stood less than five feet tall, (Tony Burgess, Bernard Cordell, Michael Richmond, or Fred Whitby? 0:50:26.8)--these were short guys. Joe Jingelo [is what] we called him. [His legal name was] Joe Vann. These was guys who stood tall. All of them had been to Vietnam, and they come back and joined the movement. And, we were trying to reach them. They all had young brothers and sisters who was into the integration. So, I'm trying to think, Laura. I'm trying to think that--'cause I never gave it any thought. Now, we might have been in that age group, but that was kind of--. You asked a good question. But, a swing board between these children, today. They are the children of the children that we was influencing yesterday. And, to think back--. Now, I got to think back. Going another step, in that same year, '67, when the Black Unity Congress got together, they had the Black Power Conference in Newark, New Jersey. We sent representatives there. I was one of the representatives. And, it was, I say, Nathan Hare, Jesse Jackson, who was one of the narrators, Ossie Davis. I began to meet these kind of people. I was young. But, I was incited and excited about being in the midst of what I considered certain giants who was giving out this new information and this pride about self-empowerment, self-assertiveness, you know, feeling good about being black, because, I don't--. [I was introduced to Stokely Carmichael in 1967 by an old female friend of mine. Jean "Koko" McQueen, a former resident of Newsome Park and a 1963 graduate of Carver High School. She was his secretary.] You ever read the "Ethics of Jim Crow" ["The Ethics of Living Jim Crow"] by Richard Wright?

LP: I haven't read that.

LD: You should check it out. It teaches you how to act. When black people were coming along, if they all fess-up, your parents will always tell you, "Now, I'm getting ready to take you out to polite society and you got to know how to act. You don't do this or do that. I don't want to have

to be pulling on you. So, you have to know how to act." So, we always was taught how to act when we was going in the social circles of white America, especially among white people or people that we considered academically- or politically-correct. You had to know how to act. W.E.B. Du Bois, I believe, called it the *Souls of Black Folk*. He called it the "3-second Negro," where you were a 3-second person You had three seconds to figure out whether you were going to be "black," "colored," or a "nigger." And, you had to do it in three seconds, which meant, you had to grow up learning that diversification, not only America, but the world, because, remember, we was drafted and sent to Korea, Germany, France, and all of these places. And, I think that it was Robert R. Moton who was one of the advisors to the president, who they sent him over to France to tell the black troops, who was over there enjoying racial relationships, "Don't come back to America thinking that you gonna have that same enjoyment 'cause they lynching black folks over here if you look at a white woman too hard." So, but, Robert R. Moton, who was an advisor to five different presidents, was the one who went over there and told those troops that. So, it took us a little while to get Robert R. Moton's name accepted among some people 'cause he was not the best-liked guy among some black people, 'cause some black people consider him as one of the "Uncle Toms" that was used by [J. Edgar] Hoover and them to fight against Marcus Garvey. That's the information that's coming out, so. But, anyway, we had that fight and at the first Black United Conference, we had representation. And, we tried to introduce the Black Unity Congress concept of all the different "isms," and ideologies, and philosophies come together as one. It didn't happen that year. That was also the same year that [Maulana] Ron Karenga was there also. He had introduced "Kwanza" to the Black Power consciousness. We came back. We went to the 1968 Black Power Conference, which was in Philadelphia. And, we had a good relationship there because we had developed a relationship with Father (Powell. Father Powell? 0:55:45.0) was the spiritual leader of a Episcopalian Church over here on 27th (0:55:51.6) Street. But, he would come out in the community. And, we found out, back in late '66, '67, '68, if you go all over this country--even down to the Wilmington Ten, Black Panthers in Philadelphia,

Black Power Conference, even here--the Episcopalian Church worked very closely with dissatisfied groups in the community and allowed them to use their places of worship or houses of worship, also as a house of refuge. Trying to think of that church over there (0:56:34.1). Well, anyway.

LP: So, the Black Unity Congress was established in '67.

LD: In '67.

LP: How long did it last?

LD: '67, '68, '69 was when they put me in jail for treason, '70. I think, '70 might have been the last year that they was functional, because it was in '[71] that I transitioned into the Nation of Islam after I came out of jail. Right. And, I was trying to get [over] that jail thing. After '67 and '68, we became very entangled or engaged in [pause], in rift, I'll use that word, with the police, local police department. And, it became, I think, a personal thing with the then chief of police, Chief [W.F] Peach who he, and his family, from history, had ran roughshod over the [black] community. And, what Peach said, you know, that was the rule of thumb in the community, [rule with tactics of a totalitarian nature]. And, we would have community meetings, and, I think, at one of the meetings, he had a heart attack because some of the members in our group had stood up and called him a "pig," "Pig Peach," 'cause back there, in those days, police all over the country was referred to as "pigs." And, I think one of the guys got up and said, "Don't come down here and keep telling us what to do and how to do, 'cause you must understand that today's pig is tomorrow's pork chop" [laughter]. And, he had a heart attack [laughter]. It ain't funny, but it happened. And, there's another one of my [experiences, when Tommie Mitchell and I announced to run for city council in 1971. He was charged with assault on a police officer when he played the song "I Smell a Rat" on a jukebox at a local bar.] During that time, the police were so hostile and hell-bent on getting rid of us, that they would put shotguns in our faces if we was on the streets and say, "Nigger, get off the street," or "Boy, what you looking at?" you know. We had our office door, during that time, kicked in--front and back door--by police, with helicopters

over the top. And, we were sure that we would have been murdered that day. But, we had developed a relationship through a concept that we picked up at the second Black Power Conference called "United Front." They didn't come up with United Black Congress, but they did come up with Black United Front. And, we start building United Fronts all over the country. And, the Black United Fronts had begin to develop relationships with groups that [were] called the White Panthers, the Gray Panthers, the Students For Democratic Society, or Freedom and Peace Party, and the Underground Weatherman. We started developing working relationships, in the '60s, with white groups all over the country who the media began to call them "hippies," and then "yippies," and all that. And, we'd see that all of these names was assigned to bring in the groups and then turn them against each other. And, it kind of broke up the groups. It put them in social and entertainment circles down in the Ninth Circle, you know, smoking blunts, smoking dope, [dropping acid,] snorting dope, and stuff like that. Put them in the party and bought in Bootsy and the Rubber Band, and all these guys, [entertainers]. And, they started drinking, dropping pills, and what have you, and getting off into cyber space and the Mother Ship Connection [a concept developed by George Clinton, founder of the funk group Parliament Funkadelic]. They just went out to lunch and lost the consciousness [of the movement]. And, then they began to call white people and black people--who were working in the '60s--they call them their children and their children's children "bastards of the party." But, what they failed to realize was they call them that because they saying, "All of these young people, today, have guns, and they don't have no feeling [or direction]." They have the same spirit of the '60s, but they allowed COINTELPRO [Counter Intelligence Program, established by the F.B.I. to surveil domestic political organizations] the police, and the F.B.I. and the C.I.A., and all these education, or mis-education institutions, to kill off our leadership. And, today, you have no leadership. But, what--. And it may not be a bad thing, because, today, we have mentality in the streets rather than personality. So, they don't know whose head to cut off [laughter] [We have misguided missiles; when we have clear leadership, we have guided missiles]. And, so, but all of that came out of the '60s, and they were

beginning to--. We had developed a strong relationship with the national Black Panther organization. [We supported Dick Gregory for president in 1968.] And, as we developed that relationship, we began to develop stronger resistance to local police and national police. And, this was forty years ago. And, that's when I see what's happening, today. If we had dealt with it then, [we would have a better handle on it today]. We tried to get the community control of the police way back then [and some respectful dialogue]. But, every time we started, we got bust in the head and charged with treason, for instance. The Black Panther Party was started in Oakland, California because Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton had went out and had these books on telling people when they was arrested or stopped by police officers, they had certain rights. So, the police turned on those who was giving that information. Same thing happened here. If you tried to raise the level of consciousness of people on how to deal with, and communicate with, the police, they saw us as "trouble-makers" or "kooks." So, I was charged,--. The night that I was put in jail, with treason--with charges that Judge Phelps said constituted treason--I was simply asking a police officer why was he arresting a certain gentleman who was with me at the time. We was coming out of a restaurant, and they grabbed him. And, I asked [them], "Why?" And, they grabbed me. And, I pulled back kind of like Eric Garner did. "Don't know why you grabbing me!" And, I look around, police was coming from everywhere, you know. And, I began to, you know, fling against them, and what have you. And, I was overwhelmed, and grabbed, and handcuffed, and thrown in the police car. And, the gentleman that I was inquiring about, they had threw him in the black patty wagon. But, he never got to the police station. We never seen him again, until about two years later. We saw a picture of him in a Black Panther paper out in California. And, he was a agent. So, I was set-up, you know. And this is why, when I inquired, the police was already in place, you know. And, they beat me, beat me in the head, drug me--I got scars now--drug me, put me in handcuffs behind my back, threaten to cut my testicles out, and all of this--undress me, beat me with a water hose and (none of them brought? 1:04:24.5) a whole newspaper, wet down newspapers. Then, they charged me with assault on a police officer,

disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, breach of the peace, and inciting a riot. And, and it went to court, [a big lie]. The judge said it constituted treason, which was a law that had been put on the book by Governor [Spiro] Agnew of Maryland to try to catch H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael who were being charged with inciting riots as they spoke to different college students, on college campuses, throughout the country. Practically, everywhere they went, there was a riot afterwards. So, they came up with this, that anybody that started a riot gonna be charged with treason. And I was the first one after that that was charged with a riot, and so they charged me with treason. But, I was able to get out of that because it wasn't a law on the book in Virginia. They had put it on the books in Maryland. [Attorney Gus Butts had the charge dismissed on appeal.] So, then at the second--I mentioned the second Black Power Conference in Philadelphia--I was there the night that a gentleman by the name of--. (Price? 1:05:52.0) was the last name. (Floyd? 1:05:55.3) was his first name. (Floyd Price? 1:05:57.4).

LP: What was the first name--. (Floyd Price? 1:05:58.2)

LD: He was murdered by police officers here in Newport News at "2-5-and-J," in front of the Jefferson Theatre. I wasn't here. But by that time--. I had just got back in town--was Saturday night--I just got back from the Black Power Conference, and I was at home. And, I got a call that, "You better get down here right away, 'cause we gonna set this town on fire." I ask them, "What happened?" They said, "Man, they just shot a man in the back who was just inquiring about why the police officer was mistreating a black woman and the people [are] in the street." So, I said, "OK, I'll be down there in a minute." And, I dressed and started running downtown. I was in Newsome Park, but I could see on my way down here the flames. The city was already--. The Jefferson Avenue part was already in flames. And, so when I got down here, I found out that this gentleman and lady was in the movie theatre, coming out. I called the girl "Jingle Bell." That wasn't her name, though. [Her legal name was Madeleine Banks]. And, said that the police officer snatched her and started pulling her. And, this old man, (Floyd Price? 1:07:21.5), came up to the police officer, "Please Mr., don't drag her like that. We're tired of seeing you treating our

women like this (1:07:28.9).” And, when he was talking to this police officer, another police officer came up behind him and shot him in the back of the head, and in his back two times. And, everybody out there [saw what took place]. The streets was full at the time. It was also the weekend, and the House of Prayer was doing their annual convocation, So, a lot of out-of-town people in town, that night. And, when I got down here, like I said, it was already burning. People was in the streets by the hundreds. And, the police had pulled out of the community about two or three hours. So, unfortunately, all of the stores [were vandalized]. This street, this avenue was full of stores, but most of them was Jewish stores, Jewish merchants. And, I think practically every one of them had been, you know, broken into. People were walking the street with every kind of commodity that you can think of. Deprivation is terrible. Deprivation creates in you a desire that’s unimaginable. You’ll go in a place to rob a bank for money and take a bag of potato chips [laughter]. (The only thing is? 1:08:56.3), like this thing they do on the TV, spin the wheel [laughter] and win here. It’s a terrible thing. But, that’s what was going on that night. Now, police, a black police officer, who was there on the scene, took his badge off, threw it in the street, and turned his police dog loose. And, he quit the force that night. His name was Skip Johnson. They called him Skip Johnson. I don’t know what his other name was. I can’t remember. But, he later on joined our organization. And his brother was a police officer, also. He was a older police officer. But, this gentleman also worked in the Whittaker Memorial Hospital. Now, what I witnessed that night was when the police did come back after about two hours, or three hours, they came into the community with dogs, vicious dogs. I think the hospital had [reported] for 123 dog bites that night. Then, the state troopers came in. State troopers had black jacks longer than this. And, I witnessed black people and some black people walking the street. And, the police saying, “Nigger, get off of the street.” And, I witnessed one gentleman saying, “But, I’m not a part of them boys, I’m a good black man.” And, he was hit in the head. Said, “There ain’t no good niggers in town tonight.” Yep. I know brothers who was trying to get home [the next day], ‘cause they brought tanks in the town, in this town. And, police would jump off

the tanks, state troopers, and tell them to go this way or that way. You can't go up the street. They had two state troopers on each corner. And, you couldn't walk the streets. But, we knew the community then. And, there was a big ditch [that] used to run down there like a highway in the back of here. And, that's how people used to travel whenever they blocked the streets off. We knew the community. We had a lot of people and we had a lot of ways to circulate. But, anyway, going back to injustice, 'cause that's what this whole thing was about, from the first question you ask me when I was a child born in Plantation Valley: the long journey of injustice. Looking for fair treatment. Just be fair. And, they subpoena me, and six other gentlemen, for a grand jury investigation for starting that riot that night. They had a grand jury investigation, and I like to point this out because there are black people, and have been black people in this town, who went telling people that no one was never investigated or charged for that particular incident. And, it might have been white people. No one was never charged because they would never charge the guilty party. And, they was trying to charge innocent parties, but they couldn't find the justification because I was the person that they claimed led the riot. But, I wasn't in town; and, the reason they knew I wasn't in town [was] because they had assigned the former [*sic* future] chief of police, George Austin [became Newport News' first African-American police chief in 1975], as the person who was tracking me. And, he knew I wasn't in town when I was at the conference.

LP: This was in '68, is that right?

LD: That was about '68, that's correct. That's correct, 'cause I was coming from the 1968 Black Power Conference that was at the Church of the Advocate, in Philadelphia, which was an Episcopalian church, yeah. But, anyway, me, (Tommie Mitchell, Dalton Ford, Artis Lyles, Ronald Jones, and Myron Cook? 1:13:03.6). All of us was called before a grand jury, and we was asked did we start a riot that night. And, all of us told them, "No, your police department started a riot that night." But, that's not the greatest part of the insult, Laura. The greatest part of the insult was the next day. The newspaper pointed out that the man was shot attacking a police officer and

that he was shot in the front of his head. That was [the lie] in the newspaper the next day. Between the black mortician, the newspaper, and the police department, had forged that lie like that lie that they forged up there in Ferguson and everywhere else when there's a police murder. But, what happened here, they shipped the man's body out of town that night to Roanoke, Virginia, where his family was, and had Ruth Hardy Charity Funeral Home took the man and buried him. We were able to talk with Jessie Rattley, who was a community leader and who had [justice] in her heart, and mind and soul of the community was her compassion. And, we trusted in her, and we went to her, 'cause she knew Ruth Hardy Charity. And, she called Ruth Hardy Charity 'cause both of them was in the Virginia Municipal League, first black women in that kind of thing in the political circle. And, they was able to exhume the man's body and took pictures of all of the [bullet] holes in the back of his head and put pins in them and took pictures and sent them back to us, the Black Unity Congress. And, we disseminated the pictures all around the community. It was in the--. No, that wasn't in [their] newspaper. We put it in our [newsletter], right. And, he had the holes in the back of his head. And we had pictures that said, "As the town burned because Peach and the police was telling lies." And, this is why it's so hard for people to accept these police murders, as they're being presented, because we have experienced, and actually seen, you know, what's happening. People are asking, today, "Why is it so many Asians and so many white people--and people of other ethnicities and nationalities--[are] in the street today as a result of the Eric Garner incident?" because we say, "You don't have to be a certain color to see." You see what's happening. And, people (1:16:06.1)--. What we see happening today is just an insult to your whole soul. And, when you lose your whole soul, you only live as a shell. And, a shell has got to be a pretty empty, miserable condition. And, you go look in the mirror and see a shell of what you used to be. It's like going to a spider web, and seeing a shell in the spider web and the spider still moving because he had the ability to inject you with a projectile and suck out of you the essence of life and leave nothing but the shell. And, all you see what you formerly were. Now, you painting and fixing that up, but you ain't got no soul. You

don't care about nobody else. So, you don't want to serve fallen humanity. You don't feel it when you see oppression. You don't see it and experience it because of exploitation, you know, and social degradation. You don't see that? So, that's what we kind of [went] through all of that. And, I contend that what was known as the "bastards of the party" now the fruits of our labor is what's (1:17:24.3). We know low fruit can easily be picked; and, high fruit will eventually get ripe and fall to the ground. But, then all of the fruit is a seed. And, as a seed we intend to put the seed of humanity into every cell that there is and every aspect or component of life that exists. And I said, "We." I don't even have to ask nobody 'cause it's a mentality It ain't no personality no more, you know. We come up with John Hanson. People say, "Who was that?" We say, "He was the first black president. No, he was the first president of this country, though it may have had another name at the time. But, he was the first officer. He was there when George Washington was a general [laughter]. He was chief executive officer." So, it's like, "Linwood DeBrew. Who is that?" [In response to the question], "Oh, he lived, he died, you know. But, so-and-so think just like him." We all should be thinking like each other when it come to being fair, when it come to justice balancing the scales. You're gonna give me, you're gonna give me--. I was writing a book called, *Ain't That A Bitch*. And, I'm basing it on--it might sound, you know, this and that--but, I'm basing it on the woman that's on the Scales of Justice. I'm basing it on the woman who got her foot on a man on the ground. I'm basing it on a woman who is the Statue of Liberty. All of these, you know--. When a black man read the history and the aim, goal, and purpose of all the women, we are deceived into embracing those high principles. But, underneath it all is slavery, suffering, and death; prison, parole, and probation; deceit. That's what we get out of it. That's why we say, "Ain't that a bitch?" [laughter]. I mean 'cause, think of something that you value that America can ask the black man to do that we haven't tried. We've exhausted it, exhausted everything you can think of trying to be good, Jim Dandy. I mean, what else can we do? [pause] Now, we want to know why everybody, regardless of their color, they're coming together and being concerned about the same thing. In the black community, we always said to each other--

may be unsaid in certain polite or political circles--"Every nigger is next." We know that you gonna keep on killing us. You're gonna keep on killing us. And, if [you] gonna keep on killing us and this is all we gonna keep on getting, c'mon man. If you know you gonna die, and everybody's gotten to the point now they know they're gonna die, so who's afraid? These young people ain't afraid to die no more. When you talk to young black people, if they twenty-two or twenty-three, they'll tell you they already lived longer than they expected to live. Death is an easy way out. It's hard to live the kind of life that you want to live: peace of mind, contentment of heart, money, good home, friendships in all walks of life, a good, strong respect for family, you know, the building of civilization, culture, and refinement. Why we got to fight for everything? Why we got to beg for everything else? Why, when we came as a willing servant?

LP: I wanted to ask you just a few other questions, if you don't mind.

LD: Yeah, 'cause I went rambling. Forgive me.

LP: No, no, no, no, no, no, I think it's important to be able to connect what you're talking about to the present is really important. I still have a few questions, though. So, first of all, just in terms of, to back track a little bit, I was struck by when you submitted your pre-interview survey that you said you had become involved with the Black Unity Congress around the same time that you also became involved with the S.C.L.C. [Southern Christian Leadership Conference]? It was around the same year?

LD: Yes, yes.

LP: And, I was just curious about how, what your involvement was like in the S.C.L.C.? There are some folks who say that, you know, the S.C.L.C. would take, sort of took, a very different approach from, you know, other organizations. Like you mentioned, the Panthers, for example.

LD: Oh, ok. Very good.

LP: And, so I was sort of surprised to see that you joined both of them, it seemed like almost simultaneously, the same year.

LD: Right.

LP: Was it the same year or maybe a year off?

LD: Right. [About a year off. The Black Unity Congress and my relationship with the Panthers were first.]

LP: And, so, I was just curious about if you had, you know--. How did your experiences differ within the two organizations, in terms of the tactics used or the strategies employed?

LD: OK. That's a good question. Glad you asked that because you always--. You can also see that I was in N.A.A.C.P., National Association [for the Advancement] of Colored People.

LP: When you were, was that---?

LD: Young.

LP: Younger, yeah. I wanted to ask you about that too.

LD: Now, I'm a life member. Now, remember what I was saying, when the Black Unity Congress came into existence, our concept was what? To create a congress where every school of thought, "ism," or ideology could come under--. We could sit down and discuss strategies and different things and come up with the Black United Front. In other words, we know--I don't know, certain terms I could (1:23:58.9)--we knew that some, the educated class, we knew that they understood. And, we knew we needed the intellectuals in the movement because they the ones, if we gave them the picture, they could articulate it 'cause they could speak the language better than we could. We knew that we needed veterans in the movement because they'd have had that experience, you know. We knew that we needed females in the movement, nurses, teachers, and what have you. So, we realized that they all weren't coming to pick up no guns. Many of the women who came into the movement, in order for them to even begin to be comfortable with a gun, we had to start training them with a BB-gun, 'cause we had target practice, you know, because we joined the National Rifle Association. But, the little young boy in Cleveland—was twelve years old--got killed with a BB-gun. So, but, we weren't trying to--. We was trying to familiarize our women with self-defense. And, the Panther Party and all of these groups who were known as militant groups were simply groups who came into existence out of a

desire to defend themselves against aggression, whether it was the Ku Klux Klan--. Because when we started the Black Unity Congress, the Ku Klux Klan from Yorktown came to one [meeting]. We used to have house parties--rent parties--where we sold chicken, beer, and fish in order to [help] pay the rent, the lights, the gas [of different neighbors]. And, the Ku Klux Klansmen--Klan members--invaded one of our parties. And, that's when we--. And, we wasn't armed.

LP: You weren't armed?

LD: [Not] at that time. And, that's when we began to arm ourselves. [We went to the police for protection or gun permits. We were denied, so we exercised our Second Amendment rights. We also joined the NRA.] But, we knew everybody in the community wasn't gonna do that. But, we didn't want to run that element from out of our midst because, in studying history, we realized that everyone who ever had a struggle had a militant element. And, it was the militant--. We see it, today, throughout the world and ISIS. Everywhere you go, there's a militant element. The young people in Mexico, everywhere, there's a militant element; Hong Kong, everywhere. And, you don't run your militant element from amongst you. That's your protection. In the '60s, the community, academic community, and the socially accepted community--I'll go so far as to say some of the S.C.L.C. members, some of the N.A.A.C.P. members--they moved away from those of us who had a little militancy and wanted to move to mainstream. And, they got jobs running, the city bus, and all this, and they still saying to us, "Sit on the back of the bus." Sometimes, they wouldn't even let the militant element get on the bus. "We gonna keep them trouble makers from--," [the mainstream activists would say]. That's why I was saying earlier, to try to qualify, a lot of people heard of me or read about me. But, they don't know me, you know. So, I'm glad you talking to me [laughter], you know, because a lot of them would tell people that they know me and used that to get through the door, and tell a lie, or tell the truth a little smoothed over. Point in case: the young lady, Andrea Reedy, who was murdered by the Hampton Police Department a few years ago, shot eleven times. They had a meeting at the church, a community-wide meeting,

with a bunch of firemen, lots of firemen. Remember, when I said what “fireman” was? They were put out to cool you off. And, in that meeting they said, “Everybody in here, we gonna pray for the Reedy Family, and we gonna pray for the policemen that killed her.” Well, me, and some of the other people in there, we got up and left, ‘cause I’m not praying for no murderer, an outright murderer, unjustified murderer, unprovoked. And, when I got outside, when we got outside, there was a gentleman out there saying, “Y’all need to come back inside and listen to what’s being said in and get up under this prayer. And, this is the same thing I was telling Linwood DeBrew and them back in the ‘60s.” So, I’m standing there. I said, “Excuse me, sir, who are you?” He said, “I’m so-and-so-and-so.” I said, “Well, I don’t know you. I’m Linwood DeBrew [laughter]. Why are you out here telling these people this lie, and how long you been telling it?” So, that’s why I’m glad you asking me now. Back to the S.C.L.C. question. When we decided that we wanted to build this Black United Front, we [found out] that there was a guy over in Portsmouth named Ralph Reavis. And, S.C.L.C. was Martin Luther King’s organization. But, this town, Newport News, didn’t have no S.C.L.C. They had N.A.A.C.P., and everyone was of the N.A.A.C.P.-consciousness in this town. And, a lot of people, ill-informed, we used to say, “illiformed,” (would leave you a little? 1:29:40.0) “‘flicted” [afflicted]. But, they were ill-informed, thought that the S.C.L.C. and the N.A.A.C.P. were one and the same. But, it was a lie. But, it was the N.A.A.C.P.--. All your so-called black leadership in this town were members of the N.A.A.C.P. You go back and research and you’ll see it; and, you won’t see no history of S.C.L.C. So, we had to go to Portsmouth to join the S.C.L.C. Now, we knew that S.C.L.C. was tied closely to S.N.C.C. [Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee], Stokely Carmichael. In fact, if you study history and study it well, you’ll see that it was S.C.L.C. who put up some of the funding in order to bring S.N.C.C. into existence because they realized they had a militant element that they couldn’t separate themselves from, ‘cause everybody wasn’t gonna stand out there and get smacked and turn the other cheek. I’m one of that persuasion. But, we knew we needed these other people to bring about unity and togetherness. And, we knew everybody wasn’t politically

tied into one of the political action committees. I can't think of the name of the group. But, they all met at Jessie Rattley's school. So, that's how I joined the S.C.L.C. [We loved, admired, and respected Martin Luther King.] Now, you'll also notice that I joined the Nation of Islam--

LP: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that.

LD: --in 1971.

LP: How did you get involved with the Nation of Islam? What drew you to the Nation of Islam?

LD: I was drawn to the Nation of Islam because, as I mentioned in here, during '69, '70, after COINTELPRO, and they began to kill off and shoot up all our so-called leadership, and ran Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver out of the country, and killed Fred Hampton, and little Bobby Hutton, and different--. Bob Williams had left the country, from out of North Carolina. And, all our leadership was being scattered, and a whole lot of unknown, unsung heroes, brothers and sisters, were being murdered that have never been mentioned, never even talked about, was going to jail on trumped up charges. So, there was no other organization around, around about 1970, that had a militant, [no guns] conversation other than the Nation of Islam who had the Fruit of Islam, which was a military arm, who was a military outfit. The only thing other than that was the Bloods, and the Crips, and the gang-bangers that came about. I had no desire to be a part of that, the retrogressives. So, we was still moving towards unity, peace, moving towards civilization. And, that's what brought me there. Now, ironically, when you study the Nation of Islam, when you study the Black Panther Party, when you study S.C.L.C., you'll find out that all three of them were what? Part of COINTELPRO investigations. I was on all of them. So, they got--. F.B.I. got me three times [laughter]. So, you'll see a continuity and then you'll see similarity of consciousness. But, the separation was along social con[structs] and academic constructs, religious constructs that divided us. But, we had one thing in common in the '60s.

LP: What's that?

LD: The color of our skin, which was the same thing that we had in common in the 1600s when white people came into existence. See prior to white people coming into existence and realizing

that they had a common thing that could identify them from this common thing, they were known as Frenchmen, they were known as Italians, they were known as Irish, they were known as Germans. They were known through their ethnicity, through their historical, histories, and traditions, and connections. But, when they found out they all had something in common and the only thing that they had in common was the complexion that gave them the connection. And, that we was the only one that couldn't melt in; we had to be smelted in [laughter]. So, we stuck out, and we still stick out. That's why, today, we tell people if you really want to see, you got to look through our eyes. Why? Because our eyes are like your eyes. Why? Because it has a black pupil. But it has a brown pupil around it; it had the yellow pupil around it; and it has a large white group of (supporters? 1:34:55.4) that make this all, make us all able to see clearer now, even though we have this division between these two balls and sockets. We have a unison, and we see this division only on another person. We can see everything, but we can't see the closest thing to our eyes. Ain't that something? [The bridge.]

LP: Yeah, that's interesting.

LD: So, ask me another question.

LP: I know this is going backwards in time--.

LD: I don't want to bore you, but.

LP: No, no, no, I'm so glad you're willing to chat. I just have one other question, I know this is going backwards in time, but especially since you had mentioned the N.A.A.C.P., I was just curious, a little bit about your involvement in that. You had said that you had been involved in the youth group that was under Reverend [J. Cornelius] Fauntleroy--.

LD: Fauntleroy, yes.

LP: And you got involved in their--. What was it? Around 1957--.

LD: 1957.

LP: So, I was curious, so you would have been about fourteen years old at the time--.

LD: Somewhere along that neighborhood.

LP: So, a teenager. And, so, I was curious how you became involved in that organization, what kinds of things you were into--.

LD: You are good. You're good. Reverend Fauntleroy, incidentally, was our first [black] politician [in our time], here in Newport News, of substance. He ran against Tom Downing, who was a historical power force. And, I think his run, politically, gave Bobby Scott, [Jessie Rattley] and all the rest of us the food that we needed to get in the hunt. And, he worked very strongly in the shipyard, in the Union over there. And, he, we--. But--your question again--it was about 1957, N.A.A.C.P--.

LP: How you got involved--.

LD: Well, like I said, we lived in this little community called Newsome Park, surrounded by the white community, and then the railroad tracks over here, and you get downtown. And, and we only had one, two, three, four institutions of religious schools of thought. But, there was a church group, called the Mennonites, who had a church over here--.

LP: The Mennonites?

LD: --Mennonites. The Mennonites would run a bus to our neighborhood on Wednesdays and Fridays and pick us up and bring us to their religious facility. So, I became a Mennonite at a young age. We would get on the bus and come here. And, they were bringing black children from various parts of impoverished communities. And, they would offer these impoverished people field trips and all of this. And, we had to drink the blood of Jesus, meaning the school of thought, you know, and sing this song, you know. They were good people. They treated us very, very, very good, very fair. Brother Burkholder had us even calling him "brother" [laughter]. Sister Mary, Brother Joe, Sister Margaret; I remember them all. They were good people. They treated you fair. And, they--. But, how I got in the N.A.A.C.P. was a girl from another community that I became attracted to. She was the Reverend Fauntleroy's daughter, [very smart person]. And, she told us about the meeting of the youth group that was at Jessie Rattley's black college, Business College. And, that they were having a meeting. And, I went to the meeting chasing her [laughter].

And, it's just like in America when you go and capture the Africans and you come back and get enculturated and captured by the Egyptian history and culture. So, I went there chasing her and got captured by the schools of thought [laughter] about what was happening to us as a people and about the Civil Rights Movement and Emmett Till. And, I remember Emmett Till almost just like it was yesterday because that was the day my daddy slapped me. My daddy--. Was on [a] Sunday morning, I remember it just like it was yesterday. They announced on the television--we had got a television by this time, 1955. I think it was 1955--and they had discovered Emmett Till's mangled body in the Talihoutchie [Tallahatchie] River, somewhere down there in Mississippi. And, I was in the room, and it was a bunch of men, grown men there, and my daddy and them, they was participating in light libations, you know, and talking, and what have you. And, the announcement came on about they had found Emmett Till's mangled body and showed a pictured of how he was all mangled up. And, they started saying, "Well, don't worry about it. God gonna take care of the people that did it," and all that. And, I jumped up and said, "I get sick and tired of you grown men always talking about God and Jesus gonna do something. When y'all gonna do something?" And, my daddy smacked me [laughter] and said, "Boy, don't you be putting your mouth in grown folks' conversation." So, so that's what brought me [very close] to the N.A.A.C.P., in reflecting back on Emmett Till, and I didn't realize that until I was chasing after that girl. And, I, and, and, the thing about this, Laura--that was in 1957--I didn't see this young lady no more until about 1975. And, she was in the National of Islam. She was one of their teachers, the instructors at the Islamic school, yeah. She was married then [laughter]. I was, too. But, that's what--who--got me in touch with the N.A.A.C.P. But, I've always embraced the N.A.A.C.P, [and Martin Luther and his organization, S.C.L.C.] I've always embraced C.O.R.E. [Congress of Racial Equality]. I've always embraced the African Nationalist Liberation Party, or the African Pioneer Movement. I've always embraced any and everyone who had the consciousness to put their hand on an oppressor. I didn't care what they were saying so much as I looked through their ideologies and their philosophies. I wanted to know that they had a hand on

the same enemy. And, if they had their hand on the same enemy, I was willing to develop a working relationship [laughter].

LP: I just want to look at my notes quickly. I did want to ask you about this. So, later on in the '70s, you helped to establish the Greater Southeast Development Corporation.

LD: Yes.

LP: Is that correct? And, I was just wondering if you could just talk a little bit about the history of that, this organization, this group. How that came to be, what its main goals were/are?

LD: [pause]. Dissatisfaction. It came out of dissatisfaction, [deprivation, and degradation]. It came out of desire for justice. It came out of disunity. It came out of many years of people telling you to be patient. And, then, you realizing one day, that this ain't patience. This is tolerance. There's a difference. Now, we have enough intelligent people among us to do something for ourselves. We--. When I say we, I'm not talking to me in the mirror. It was a group of people.

LP: What year was this?

LD: About 1976, somewhere right after 1975. Between '76 and '77. Again, at Sonny's Inn, being the watering hole. But, this time, at a different level of consciousness. I was there and a guy by the name of (Steven Whitley? 1:43:49.4)--who today is known as Arthur Akbar--and a gentleman by the name of Conway Downing, [Jr.], who was an attorney. The three of us was just sitting there talking and Mr. Akbar was talking about--he had just come from the military--and talking about the [lack of unity among] businesses in this community [and the] need to build a business association. And, I was talking about the community need to get together. And, Conway Downing was talking about the fact that he was a lawyer, and we all had the where-with-all to get it together, why don't we do it. And, we gave each one a component. I was charged with bringing the broader community into the loop. Mr. Akbar was charged with bringing the business community into the loop. And, Mr. Downing was charged with bringing the so-called petit bourgeois element into the group. So, we started having meetings. We met with a lady named (Frances Worrell? 1:45:18.1) and her lieutenant, assistant, who was named George Hull. It was a

white woman and a white guy. And, they worked for the city of Newport News in the Community Development Department. They were having community meetings, [and they seemed to be very sincere]. And, we had read in the newspaper that they were having this meeting. And, we went to the meeting. And, we presented to them the idea that black people could get together and do something constructive in the community, if we had the assistance and cooperation of local government. So, they said, “Well, ok. We’ll help you. We’ll not only help you by holding meetings, and what have you, we’ll find some funding so y’all can go to some national conferences and workshops and get more information on this.” And, they did that. And, we went. Mr. Akbar went. I went. Mr. Downing didn’t go to those. And, we came back, and when we came back, I wrote a proposal to them, as a concept, and that we could do this. And, they said, “Well, if you can pull together the various task forces that you say you can build with, and come up with a strategem, then we will engage some of the professionals that you say you need, under contract, to assist in putting together a plan for the Southeast Community. So, Mr. Akbar went and got, and formed the Jefferson Avenue Merchants Association. And, they got about fifty to sixty different merchants in the community, ‘cause it was a lot of merchants at that time. Funeral homes, churches, and all, joined the association. I went and formed tenant associations or task force groups. We did about, I think about, five or six task or institutional task forces which was made up of--. We went and got people from the longshoremen or people that was with the union. (1:47:32.7), at the time, in the shipyard or people who worked at Horne Brothers, you know, to be on these task forces. Then, we went and got an institutional task force to deal with (1:47:45.3), Whittaker Memorial Hospital, and the schools. So, we got people like Homer Hines, former retired principals, school teachers, Marshall Williams people like that. And, then we had a recreation task force, and that was the task force that came up with the Moton. Then, we had a task force dealing with the environment. And, these task forces, we went on up but between the three of us, we probably pulled together maybe sixty or seventy people to start having meetings, as a community group, which was a continuation and an extension of a plan that a gentleman by

the name of (Solomon Travis? 1:48.37.6), Jessie Rattley [and] there was another gentleman. I can't think of his name--they had worked with the city on a plan called the Southeast Plan. And, in that plan, that was the first time we heard of "Southeast," 'cause we always referred to the community as "East End." And, that's when they came up with "Southeast." And, when we had questioned them on what "Southeast" meant, they said, "South of Mercury Boulevard and East of the railroad tracks." That was the community that they were referring to. Well, when we got in it--. So, we came up with this group. We said, "Well, we want to form this group, and we want to do these five projects, five catalytic projects. We want to do the Moton Theatre. We want to do the JAMA [Jefferson Avenue Merchants Association] Square. We want to do some loan programs because we want to make sure that capital was accessible." Anything that we were denied as minorities, we wanted to access. So, they, meaning the city, was able to enter into a contract with us after we formed this broad community-based group of participatory actions, or actors. And, we created a board of fifteen people out of that, and we named it "Greater Southeast" because we had looked at some activities outside of the boundaries that they had called the "Southeast Community." And, we had people on our board, initially, like (Martha Fields? 1:50:37.2) who was working with the planning commission over town, was on our board. Dorman Morris, who was president of the bank down here--. These was white people that was on our board. John Tannenbaum, which was a Jewish merchant in the community, you know. These--. So we picked, we called it the Greater Southeast Development Corporation, and we had five catalytic projects. And, each committee probably had about fifteen or twenty people or more. And, then, we added an advisory board to that. And, we were funded through the City Community Development Program to implement those five projects. And, the first thing we had, that we did was hire a consultant, two consultants, (Harland Bartholomew and Associates? 1:51:34.5), which was the physical consultants and engineers, urban planners. And, then an economic consultant, from out of Washington, D.C., who came in to help us put together five catalytic projects, and tried to identify funding strategies to approach the implementation of those.

And, as a result of the program, we put it on paper. It was approved by the housing authority and approved by the city of Newport News City Council, after much discourse and backroom haggling [laughter] and all kind of disagreements, you know. But, it was about removing the boot of oppression and giving us the opportunity to do for self, with a little assistance. We--. First project we presented was a shopping center. And, it's interesting that, today, we don't have--. The shopping center is still there, but there's not a [grocery] market in the shopping center. But, we were instrumental in bringing that whole shopping center concept together over twenty or twenty-five years ago, way back then. In 1980, I think we brought it into fruition around about 1982. When we first went to the city to buy the property, we were told that they weren't going to sell us the property. And, that we couldn't even put together enough money to get that property. That's what the white folks told us. So, we had to call in the federal government who came in and said, "Well, you got the property"--"you'' meaning the city—"you got the property through urban development. You got the money from us in order to create this vacant property, in the first place, for future development." And, we got the money from the people who are now asking you do something with it, so you got to sell it to them. So, they reluctantly sold it to us. But, we had gotten $250,000 through Community Development Block Grant [program], to use as an initial start-up capital to gain site control to do some of the planning, like architectural, or surveys, and what have you, or making sure the land would perk, and that kind of thing. So, we spent that kind of money to do that. But, then, we didn't have a developer. We went all over the country. Prudential Insurance Company, several Jewish groups out of New Jersey, that we approached to come in and do a joint-partnership to help develop the center. The city rejected them all and said, "We not gonna allow none of them to come in here and do no development." Again, it was Jessie Rattley. She never mentioned this to me, but Ed Joseph told me this before he died. Ed Joseph was the owner of Atlantic Homes, Great Atlantic. He told me, one day, we were talking, that the only reason he really came and did it--. He said it was Great Atlantic who came in and said they would partner with us. We was the limited partner, and they was the general partner in developing

the shopping center; [Oscar Blayton was our attorney]. They had the money, they had the name, they had the complexion to make the connection to get the job done. And, he said he did it because Jessie Rattley asked him to come and help us. And, he did it just on that. And, we developed a whole new company called Atlantic Associates, and we developed that shopping center. And, we was able to go out and negotiate, at the time, with Be-LO, Family Dollar, and Revco. Well, they were partnering as a team, a package deal. But, since we developed it, Be-LO went under. In fact, Revco went under. Family Dollar is the only one that's still been there this long period of time. The other ones had to go through bankruptcy, and what have you, and different other tenants took them over. Now, before Ed Joseph died, he had divested all his interests in commercial real estate, and he was getting out of this deal. And, we had in our contract with them the "First-Right-of-Refusal." So, they offered it to us to buy it, "us" meaning Greater Southeast Development Corporation. I was apprehensive, our board was apprehensive about, you know, buying it because we didn't think that we had a strong enough working relationship with the city in order to be successful. So, I turned around and convinced them to hire this economic consulting firm (Hammers, Siler, and George? 1:56:53.2) to come in and do an economic feasibility study to see whether or not it was a good deal. After they came in and did the study, they came back and told us that they didn't think it was a good deal for a black group, at this time, to take control of the center because the history of this community shows that black people don't support black people when they're in confrontational situations with the white community or the power structure. And, they cited, you know, the hospital, they cited Doc Smith, some of the long-standing black businesses that was in the community who had went out whenever they got in problems with the white community, with the white establishment, the power structure. They didn't get the support. So, we didn't buy it. Somebody else, (I assume? 1:57:51.0) buy it. Then, the next thing we did, we gave up our partnership in it, too, when they when out. We were partners in it for like fifteen years. That was one of our catalytic projects and Moton was the other one. We still here at the Moton. And, the main purpose for the Moton was to

maintain and go back and revive the history of great black people who had did great things in this city, to make sure the children and the offspring understood that we wasn't, as I said earlier, we were not just [always] "cotton-picking niggers." We were just not people who were sitting around waiting for somebody to give us something. We all had a desire. We came here to work, we don't mind working. We ain't afraid of work, but give us something with some decency tied to it [for our work]. We don't mind even working for minimum wage, but today we want living wages just like everybody else want, you know. So, that's the main purpose of the Moton; it's designed to implement programs and projects that would enliven the human spirit. And, [the programs] must be of appreciable size and scope. Now, "designed" don't necessarily mean that we gonna do this, but we gonna strive, you know?

LP: Yeah, that makes sense.

LD: And, that was--. That's two of the projects. And, then we wound up with the Sears Building, which came to us through the back door, kind of like. And, that was about Gloria Manufacturing. They used to be over here on 25th Street that housed about 400 or 500 [cut and sew] operators, basically females. Their building was leaking and was going under. So, we wanted to locate them in another facility. [After we got involved] they couldn't [help] them then because the federal government didn't have monies available for that. So, the Jews, who owned it, they cut a deal with some minorities. And, they came to us, as a minority organization, to help establish a (minority cutting soap? 2:00:06.8). That's how we got involved in that. But, as we grew, the Jewish ownership wiped out the minority ownership and we wound up in the bed with the Jewish owners who, for eight years, as our tenant, never paid us because they used the ploy of Chapter 11 for eight years. Every eleven months, they would go from Gloria Manufacturing to Solomon Array to Huntington this, to--. They kept changing their name, and they didn't have to pay us nothing [according to the law]. So, for eight years, we kept going deeper and deeper in debt. And, [even the] Cabbage Patch Dolls were made over there and everything, yeah. I was there when they came up with the concept--.

LP: Oh yeah?

LD:--of the Cabbage Patch Doll. Gloria Goodman, on a Saturday morning. And, I remember, she and her husband was talking about it, and I laughed. I started laughing. They said, “You can laugh all you want to. But, it’s a lot of lonely people in this world” [laughter]. And, that’s when they came up [with the concept as far as I know]. They made the doll there because they had the Haitians and the Asian women. And, they said they used them because they have small fingers, not like the fat [fingers] that American women have. And, their hands so--. And, then they send them [Cabbage Patch Dolls] to Cleveland, Georgia and had their heads put on and put them in a Cabbage Patch and gave them a birth certificate, yeah. So, that was the third project. And, then we created, like I said, Akbar did the Merchant’s Association, which was in JAMA Square Park, which is down Martin Luther King Plaza. It was a park they called JAMA. JAMA was an acronym for Jefferson Avenue Merchants Association. And, the merchants would pool their resources, oft times, and do little community activities to give the community the impression that we are not just here to exploit you: we want to do something back in the community, that kind of thing. Then, we had a farmers market concept which never materialized because soon as we came up with the idea to do a farmers market--no, it wasn’t the farmers market. At first, it was [a seafood] market--the concentration was to be on seafood, the seafood industry, ‘cause we want to do it in small [boat harbor]. But, right after that, the city decided that they wanted to concentrate on the seafood industry expressly. So, we had to look for another location. And, then we found a location down here on Jefferson Avenue and 26th Street. And, the city condemned that property and knocked it down. So, we were then shut-out. And, years later, we was able to write a grant and get the old Colonial Store, which was over here on Hampton Avenue, for a site for a farmers market. And, after we got that, we paid that, another Jewish family who said that that building was vacant for five years, and the community (rather than--? 2:03:27.3). The drug users had started using it for a shooting gallery. “Shooting gallery” mean where you go and, you know, do your drugs, and what have you. So, we decided we want to buy it and convert it into a farmers

market, after five years. When we bought it, the city then came and condemned it and said it had asbestos in it. We had a study done, our architectural firm who said it won't [no asbestos in the building]. But, by that time, the city had tore it down. And, then, they said we needed to give the money back to them [that we had bought the building with] because we had failed to complete our job in a timely manner [laughter]. So, I said, "Give money back to you? We didn't get the money from you. We got the money from the federal government. And, I'm not going to give the money back to you." So, they took me to court and said we took some money from them, and all this kind of thing. And, I told them that, "Under the law, it said we could give the money to another non-profit." But, since the city wanted to put a police station over there, [at least that's what we were told] which was against the national policies, that's why I went to court because I wanted the court to explain to them what I couldn't articulate [laughter]. And, it was explained to them that they couldn't use the money to do that. They had to take the money and put it back into something that a non-profit in the community was doing. And, that's how we got the daycare center over there. That's just part of that struggle.

LP: So, just to sort of wrap-up a little bit, is there anything that I may have missed that you would like to have included, that you'd like to talk about that I didn't ask about?

LD: I'll probably think about it a couple of days from now.

LP: [laughter].

LD: [laughter]. I don't, I don't know. I think you did pretty good in extracting from me some things that I had done put in the back of my head. But, I can tell you this, and I don't know, every step of the way has been a challenge and a hindrance. And, I'm expecting some more challenges and some hindrances because I don't know what the city or the state plans for this community right here. But, I'm not comfortable as I sit in the community. We now have a program that we run called C.A.R.E., Citizens for a Renewed Environment. And, we know, Sam Cooke said, "Everything must change. It's been a long time coming, but change must come." We also know, from when I was in Newsome Park Elementary School, that everybody is taught that you are a

product of your environment. But, some kind of way, we got away from that. And, now, the world is talking about environmental justice. And, under that, they talking about environmental change, climate change. And, we said today, as I said, G.S.D.C. [Greater Southeast Development Corporation] came up out of a racist climate. And, now we know that every white person may not be a racist, but we want them to know that we know that they may be managers of white supremacy because this is a system that's systemic with racism. And, if you got to manage it, whether you is or not, in order to keep your job and feed your family, you may be implementing some policies that's not quite so acceptable by the masses or the majority of the people. So, you become a little robotic, a little computerized, a little high-tech in your thinking, and sometimes depend on machines to think for you, so that you don't have this human element. And, you can say, "Wipe-off the whole community." What I mean, why I said that--I say that because this week, Monday, Tuesday, they had a meeting over at ODU [Old Dominion University]. It was a meeting about climate change. It was a meeting about sea-rise, recurrent flooding, and storm surge, and talking about the fact that fifty million years ago, approximately, a meteor dropped in this area and compressed part of the area. And, the area is rising, and that Newport News and Virginia Beach, and this area--next to the area down there that had the flood, in New Orleans--that this is the next area, most vulnerable area, in the entire country, for flooding and storm surge, this area. There was no one at the meeting, or even invited to the meeting, from the city of Newport News. So, we said that not only do the leaders of Newport News not care about this community, but it appears that they don't care about the citizens of Newport News period. And, any time a government of leadership, forward-thinking, intelligent, well-trained people are implementing, or are in charge of, an environment that's supposed to produce food, clothing, and shelter, an enabling environment, where people can live without oppression, allow a whole community to go without a grocery store, without creating an enabling environment or creating, or advancing or engaging, the community in educational programs for aquaculture, aquaculture, or agriculture to feed themselves, it's as if you think people can eat something to guarantee they

won't get hungry again, dissatisfaction. The last political election for state officials, I noticed, even federal officials, Bobby Scott and whoever was running, there was no real advertisement or solicitation in this community by political powers-that-be [that's got] me to thinking that this community has been written-off. And, [is] accepting the fact that a storm surge is gonna to come, [so] they have not put into place facilities or strategies to get the people up out of here, in case of emergency disaster. That's my thinking.

LP: Is there anything else you wanted to add or?

LD: Probably isn't.

LP: You're good? [laughter]. Well, I want to thank you, again, very much, for participating in this project.

LD: And thank you for allowing me to say a few words for the sake of clarity [laughter]. I thank you very much.

LP: Thank you.

LD: And, if it's jumbled, or whatever, maybe we can do it again or do it over. We'll do it. In Hollywood--this ain't Hollywood--they always have a do-over.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Dr. Natalie S. Robertson, May 19, 2015

Edited by Laura Puaca, May 6, 2016

Edited by Linwood DeBrew, July 10, 2016

Edited by Emily Brown, April 15, 2017

Edited by Laura Puaca, January 4, 2018