

**Albert McIver Jr.**  
**Interview Summary**

Interviewee: Albert McIver, Jr.

Interviewers: R. Joshua Sipe and Alexander Szymanski

Interview Date: October 18, 2014

Location: Hampton Main Public Library Meeting Room A, Hampton, Virginia

Length: 1 audio file, WAV format, 109:08

**THE INTERVIEWEE.** Albert McIver, Jr., who was born in Darlington, South Carolina in 1942, has lived in the Hampton Roads area most of his life. Growing up in Newport News and working in the Newport News Shipyard for thirty years (1965-1995), McIver remembers much about life during segregation and the conditions in the area. McIver, though not active in the civil rights movement, saw and experienced the effects of the movement in both his personal and professional life. McIver has strong memories of both positive and negative experiences regarding race relations in the community as well as the shipyard where he worked. Faith has become a very important part of McIver's life and he is an active participant in his church and the study of the Bible.

**THE INTERVIEWERS.** R. Joshua Sipe is a third year history major at Christopher Newport University and is working with the Hampton Roads Oral History Project in conjunction with Dr. Laura Puaca. Alexander Szymanski is a third year history and American Studies double major at Christopher Newport University and is also working with the Hampton Roads Oral History Project in conjunction with Dr. Laura Puaca.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW.** The interview was conducted in Meeting Room A at the Hampton Main Public Library, a quiet and cozy venue. Albert McIver was very excited to participate in the Hampton Roads Oral History Project and it was obvious very early on that he has a very light and kind hearted personality, full of laughter. The interview took a life history approach exploring McIver's life from childhood through adulthood, with a large portion of questions pertaining to life in a segregated society and the effects of the civil rights movement on McIver's life. McIver discusses the community of Newsome Park where he grew up and life under segregation. He also discusses race relations at the Newport News Shipyard and the transitions of ownerships and unions there. In addition to this, McIver discusses life after segregation and the long standing effects of segregation and racial prejudice in the community.

## **Albert McIver, Jr--Transcript**

Interviewee: Albert McIver, Jr.

Interviewers: Joshua Sipe and Alex Szymanski

Interview Date: October 18, 2014

Location: Hampton Roads Public Library Meeting Room A

Length: 1 audio file, WAV format, 01:49:08

### **START OF INTERVIEW**

Alex Szymanski: This is Joshua Sipe and Alex Szymanski interviewing Albert McIver, Jr. on October the 18<sup>th</sup> in Hampton Public Library in meeting room A.

Joshua Sipe: Alright, Mr. McIver, we like to use what's called a life history approach, so we're gonna begin with some questions about your childhood. First, where and when were you born?

Albert McIver Jr.: I was born in Darlington, South Carolina, 1942.

JS: Okay, what did your parents do for a living?

AM: At that time, my father worked at a drug store and my mother worked for a doctor until we came up here to Newport News and then my father obtained a job at the C&O Railroad.

JS: Can you repeat the name of the railroad for us?

AM: Chesapeake and Ohio.

JS: When did you make that move to Newport News?

AM: In '43

JS: In '43? How old were you?

AM: I was nine months old then.

JS: Okay, what influenced your family to move from Darlington to Newport News?

AM: Beg your pardon?

JS: What influenced your family to move from Darlington?

AM: Oh, I was the big influence because they needed a better job to order to take care of me and everything because the work they had down there didn't really give enough. This was before I was born. So after I was born, that's when they decided to make that move here to Newport News.

JS: Okay, where in Newport News exactly did you grow up?

AM: Newsome Park. That is a project. I explain to you why, how that came about.

JS: Okay.

AM: Newsome Park was a project, right? And the reason why they built this spot was--. Being a seaport town, you had people working in the shipyard, the railroad, the longshoremen and you had an army base up in Fort Eustis and you had Langley and some of the other businesses. And so they had to find a place to house these people, because there's a lot of the serviceman getting out of the service and they had to have somewhere to stay so that is why they built Newsome Park.

JS: Okay. What was it like growing up in the Newsome Park area?

AM: It was a family type, family-like kinda atmosphere, because it was very close. That was during the time period when you could go out of your apartment, leave the doors open, don't have to worry about anything, [people] taking anything and we all looked out for each other. We lived in poverty and didn't realize it because we were, like I was saying, a close knit group of people. Matter of fact, they still have a reunion every year at Labor Day down at the park, the old Newsome Park. Yeah, they called it "the village"

because, like I said, you know when anytime you live in poverty and don't even realize it you know it--we had a good time. Now when they built Newsome Park for the blacks, for the minority, they built Copeland Park for the whites. Both neighborhoods were identical in every respect. And Newsome Park ran from Madison Avenue to Chestnut, Copeland Park from Chestnut to Aberdeen Road.

JS: Was--did you have any interactions with the people from Copeland Park?

AM: No, I mean, this was back in the '40s and '50s. [laughter] You know it's one of those things: you don't bother me, I don't bother you. So that's the way it was.

JS: Besides the segregated housing areas, what other experiences did you have with segregation in public facilities growing up?

AM: Well, transportation, stores. They had separate water fountains, naturally. And especially when you travel by bus, you know, you had a section for whites and a section for the blacks and it was smaller and you know. It was a tight area. That's why a lot of people used to pack their food to take with them so they'd have you go around to this place, you know that, and some people put the food in the shoe box or even bags, the shopping bags, and like the ham sandwiches, chicken sandwiches whatever. During that time, there was very little chances of food spoiling because it's all naturally grown. Now with all the pesticides, insecticides, and steroids you can't keep it [or] only a short period of time. Back then you could keep it out all night long and it'd still be good next day.

JS: Gotcha, I remember you telling me about your father working for the railroad--.

AM: Right.

JS: And your experiences on the passenger cars, I believe?

AM: Yeah.

JS: Can you explain a little bit about your experiences with your dad working with the railroad?

AM: What were you talking about, dining cars?

JS: Mmhmm.

AM: Now, naturally, we all know that segregation was at its peak--this was when I was a little boy—[but] I ate in the dining cars on the train and there was no like, you know, hostility. Ain't any of that going on, because I ate there up in the front and I enjoyed it, only because he--. By the railroad being government subsidized. And my father worked for the railroad, and I don't know if he had any significance, but I did eat from the dining cars from my early childhood on up. And I enjoyed some of the best meals you could imagine. Oh yeah, the food was excellent. And the service was too because, you know, they had pure linen tablecloth and then the linen napkins and, you know, the silver dinnerware and everything. China plates and--. Oh yes, at its best. And the food was off the chain. Matter of fact they used to--. The cook tried to entice the passengers when they pulled into the stations. What they would do was like they would fry some chicken right? And it'd be a nice golden brown and, when the train stopped, they would sit at the table just barely taking a bite of the chicken and the passengers standing, their mouths drooling, like "I can't wait to get on this train." [laughter] And, during that time, you didn't get crushed ice in your water glass, it was shaved ice. And so the glass, the water glass was real frosty and everything. And everything was cooked from scratch on the train, oh yes. And like I said there was--. But, you know, they never classified us as chefs. Only cooks. But they'd put some chefs to shame today if they were around because

they were really good. They have a small area to work with and prepared those meals for all those people. It was really something else. It was a fascinating journey.

JS: When you would eat in the dining cars, did you have any interactions with the white patrons that were eating there as well or did you have to eat at a different time?

AM: No. We ate at the same time.

JS: Oh, okay.

AM: There was no interaction with them and, like I said, everybody enjoyed their meal and that was it.

JS: Alright, well we know that in 1952 the Newport News library was desegregated.

What do you remember about this event? You would have been about ten years old.

AM: You know, when they started the desegregation, naturally, there was some hostility, but not like it was in the extreme Deep South. Because we seemed like we got along a little better here than the, you know, Deep South. Yeah, sure, there were some hostilities, yes there was, but not that much. Because like the stores, they--like Grant--they didn't have nowhere to sit. You had to stand to eat your food when go in there and find it. And the shipyard, you know, they had the separate restrooms. Matter of fact, the only thing that separated the blacks from the whites were the walls, and they'd go all the way up. They would use this side of the restroom; we used this side of it. And it was no two different buildings. It was all in the same building, in the shipyard that is. And during desegregation, this officer came on the ship--this was at the railroad--he saw the black--I mean brown--water fountain for the blacks and the white water fountain and he said, "When I come back, I want this gone," and it was. So it--. The only place where it wasn't here, where we really had a lot of interaction, was up there around Petersburg but not

here. It kind of went pretty smooth because I know, in the Deep South, we had to get on the bus in front, pay, then get back off and get on the back, board the bus in the back. We got on the front door, paid--we paid our fair--and walked to the back of the bus, you know. We didn't have to get off and get back on. This is what they seemed to have things--whatever they have for us they have for the whites and it wasn't like it was, like I said, in the extreme Deep South no. Go ahead.

JS: Okay, well we'd like to now turn to a few questions about your education, so first where did you attend elementary school?

AM: Started out at Newsome Park Elementary, which was off of Marshall Avenue. From there--. I attended there from the first--. Matter of fact, the first grade class was 1948.

[laughter] And I attended Newsome Park Elementary up until the sixth grade 'cause [in] seventh grade, we transferred to Carver Elementary, which was off of Jefferson now.

Crittenden Intermediate--that used to be Carver High School. And the elementary school still back there [was] Carver Elementary. We had the elementary, the junior high, and high school all in one campus and--. Okay go ahead.

JS: So when you attended Carver High School, it was a segregated high school. Correct?

AM: Oh, yes.

JS: What was it like attending Carver?

AM: Like I said, we all had a family type atmosphere. We had a teacher that taught us and everybody went to Carver High. Her name was Marie Holland. She didn't have any children, never was married, but she took us as her children and we felt like she was our mother to many of us. And I tell, you they used to bus students from Fort Eustis-- minority students--all the way to Carver, which was eighteen miles one way. So that was

the first time we had Hispanics and, naturally, blacks attending Carver back in the day. And the school, we had a--. The only thing that we realized what had happened back then was the books and material we used. It was already used material, especially the books because you could see where somebody had marked them and all that. And they told you "Take good care of your books." Hey, this thing is ancient, you know? Other schools-- they had new material to work with. But we made the best, do with what we had. And the teachers, like I said, were very close to the students and we got along really well, real well. Go ahead.

JS: So besides the classrooms, were you involved in any extracurriculars at Carver?

AM: Yes. I played in band. Matter of fact, we had a dance band. We used to entertain the soldiers on weekends. And we'd just go up there and play for them and some of the musicians (13:46) went on to play back up to Tina Turner, and James Brown, Patti Labelle. Oh yes.

AS: What instrument did you play?

AM: Trombone. Matter of fact, Carver had a string orchestra [cough], the only school in this area that had a full chord string orchestra. And (Marcus Davis?) was our director and we'd practice all year long until we go up to, made the preparation to go up to Petersburg to the college of Virginia State and give a concert. And we had a guest director that come down from New York Philharmonic or the Boston Pops to direct us that one day. Matter of fact, we'd leave early in the morning, get on the bus early in the morning and travel to Petersburg. As soon as we got off the bus, we went straight into the auditorium where we met our guest director and we were practicing all morning long until we take a break and



then we'd go back and gave, you know—sorry—and just slept all night and caught the bus back the next day [laughter].

JS: In 1958, which was near the middle of your high school experience, seventeen black students integrated the Norfolk schools, known as the Norfolk 17. Do you remember hearing about the integration of the Norfolk schools?

AM: Yes, matter of fact my best friend's ex wife now, she was the first one to integrate Norview [Norview High School, Norfolk, Virginia]. Yes. And that transition as it came, as I said, it took some time. It wasn't like, you know, school integrated, everybody happy go lucky, no. It took time because, one time, they were saying that blacks had to take a test to see whether or not they qualified to go to the school that was being integrated. And you know, things like that. You know, we experienced these things but we dealt with it. There's no need to get bent out of shape because you know this was something you had to deal with and so we did. And so opp--. We told ourselves we could do better and so we did.

JS: Did the integration of Norfolk--. Did it have any impact on you at Carver? Was there any thoughts of integrating the schools in Newport News?

AM: You see, I graduated in 1960 and Norfolk--. You know, you see things on TV and you say, "Well, that's over there but it wasn't really here." But I noticed the difference between Norfolk and here. How should I put this? People had more of a drive, I would say. It's like the schools--they still had Booker T. [Booker T. Washington High School, Norfolk, Virginia] and I. C. Norcom [I. C. Norcom High School, Portsmouth, Virginia]. They never did close those schools. They kept the school and the school names. But, over here, all the schools changed because Carver, Phenix [Phenix High school, Hampton,

Virginia], Huntington. Oh now, Huntington kept the name, Huntington Intermediate now. And when they first integrated Phenix, they changed. When they had to become a high school, they changed during integration. They changed to Pembroke High. As so all the names went all right? [laughter] But this place over here, I don't know how you'd put this, but it was sort of laid back and went with the flow.

JS: So now after high school you attended Norfolk State right?

AM: Yes.

JS: Ok. Why did you decide to attend that school?

AM: Well, going back to my English teacher Ma Holland--. We called her Ma Holland. She told me, she said, "Albert, you'd be better off if you were to attend Grambling in Grambling, Louisiana." So I thought about that and I said, "Grambling in Louisiana? That's a long ways from home. And if something went down, I can't just run around the corner and say, 'Mom, I want to come home.'" [laughter] So I decided to attend Norfolk State. At the time I went there it was called "Little State" because it was part of Virginia State in Petersburg and, later on, they broke of and became Norfolk State. There were no dormitories; we had to stay in people's homes over there. Yes, because I lived in a house there on--with a family--on Corprew Avenue, the same, the main street the school's on, for a few years. And they used to house us, and they would fix the meals for us and so forth, and that was back before you had a cafeteria, you had regular meals. And that's what it was back then, there were no dormitories what so ever. Matter of fact the only buildings they had at Norfolk State was the gym, the main building, which was Tidewater Hall, and the building for the nurses. And they had a building for auto mechanics. That was about it at that time. And like I said, I picked Norfolk State--. And this is what I try

to share with students today: while you're in high school, your early years in high school, make sure you have a real good idea of what you want to do, what you want to major in. You cannot wait until graduation and say, "Oh, I think I want to do this. I want to do that." No, you must make preparation long before that, four years matter of fact, before you graduate high school. Because I learned a hard, cruel lesson when I went to Norfolk State. On the day we had to pick our major I said, "Shoot, I don't want to spend a lot of time here." I looked down. I saw Phys. Ed. I said, "I'll take that." [laughter] Thought it'd be a soft course, breeze right on through. And one of my first classes was kinesiology and it was the shock treatment of my life. I said, "What? What is this here?" I said, "Man, I didn't know I had to go through all this," you know [laughter]. But it was a lesson to be learned. That's why I emphasize the fact--. Make sure, you know, have a good idea of what you want to do before graduation. And you have a real--. And another thing--. Matter of fact, I talked to the students of Hampton U when I was in the hospital--the student nurse--and I told them just this. You know, whatever you have a passion for, you will do well. If you in there for just the money, you're not going to make it because there will be times where you'll be challenged and you will say, "Well, gee whiz, I'm so sick and tired of this thing." You know, when you're on a job that you can't stand and you'll be so glad when the time is for you to go home? No, you're not putting your all and all into this thing. But when you're doing something you really truly have a passion, for you will be one of the best. You will do your best, that be medicine or whatever it may be, you will be the best.

JS: Now you mentioned that your teacher, as you called her Ma Holland--.

AM: Yeah.

JS: Suggested you go to Grambling State, what--. Why was that? That she wanted you to attend Grambling?

AM: She emphasized the fact that it was a small school then and they had more time to spend with individual students. That's why she said it'd be more beneficial for me to go to Grambling at the time. So she was right, I was wrong. [laughter] Oh, I did spend some time at Hampton U, pre-college. But being an only child, first time away from home, a spoiled brat, yes. [laughter] And Hampton U.—well, Hampton Institute then--eight weeks and I said, "Wow." Stayed in Harper's Hall. They had the terrace and all this and it's like going on a cruise for the first time. And I only went there for so many weeks because the academic standards were set high even back then. So my best bet was Norfolk State at the time because, by being state funded, they had to accept me too. Like I was saying, being focused on what you really want to do is very important. My son, who's forty-five now, he always liked electronics. And this is what I never understood--. Anyway, he attended Bethel and they said he had a learning disability. My mother, being who she was, she was a very bold person, she said, "Now, my grandson will walk across that stage and he will receive a diploma like anyone else," and he did. But they said he had a learning disability. This same child, my son, worked with SeaBASS, NASA and now-- yes [laughter]. But he "had a learning disability" and [laughter] he also worked for Babcock, Babcock & Wilcox biogenic group. Worked with General Electric, that's who he's employed with right now. And so his job, it was--. I was praying for him because sometimes they'd send him all the way out to business in North Dakota, no man land. They'd call him if something if something breaks down. He was in computers, matter of fact, electrician. And that's where they'd send him to troubleshoot and fly him back. And

I never understood this thing about learning disability. And now look at what he has accomplished because that's what he loves, has a passion for. Even when he was a little boy, we bought him a little electronic set and he was--. And that's how it all started. Study your child. See where their interests really lie and focus on that, no matter what it may be, whether it be hairstyles or whatever. But let them make the decision. Don't tell them, "I want you to be a doctor. I want you to be a lawyer." Let the child be what they want to be, and they will be successful. They really will.

JS: So while you were at Norfolk State, what all activities were you involved in?

AM: What now?

JS: When attended Norfolk State, what all activities were you involved in on campus?

AM: Oh like fraternities and--?

JS: Greek life, or sports or--?

AM: Yes, I tried sports, because, like I said, being a phys. ed. major, I was in gymnastics, right? Parallel bars and rings and all that. And Dr. (Bell?) would never give in. He said, "Albert, I want you on that grid iron." I said, "I ain't played not day one in high school and you want me to go out there and get with these big guys that played all through high school." But I had to do it because the doctor of my department told me I had to go out there. So, yeah--. So I went out there and tried my luck at football and they had me on defense. Now, I only weighed 170 pounds. I'm going up against 235, 240, 250 [pound] big bruisers that graduated from Booker T. and I. C. Norcom and all that. And I said--. Matter of fact, my nickname was "Jelly" because [laughter] I was like--how do you say it? Somebody they practiced on. Every weekend, it was every Friday, I would go home on crutches. My dad would rub me down and work on me. I'd go back. Same thing next

weekend. But I made the team, Norfolk State football team. It wasn't like it was today because, like I said, back then it was the sixties. And so I was in the locker room and I put my equipment up and I saw these folks come in. This was spring training. All the bruising and the beating--I was so sore at times I couldn't lie down to bed. I had to prop myself between the dresser doors and the wall in order to get some sleep. Yeah, oh yeah, they drilled you hard back in the day. Matter of fact, one of them made the Green Bay Packers back there then. Yeah, a guy named Baker. And one of them went to camp up there for the New York Giants and one weekend he came back and he was like, "Aw, heck no, I ain't--" [laughter] But anyway, when I was putting my stuff up and I saw this other guys coming in from spring training--big bruisers, I mean legs like tree trunks--I said, "Who are those guys?" He said, "They are the regulars." I left my helmet in the thing, in the locker, and never saw it again. I walked out of there. But I played in the band and it was just like I did in high school. Played in the band there, too. I enjoyed it there. I never did join any of the fraternities, no. I like military science. Matter of fact, the instructor used to be the bench warmer for the Los Angeles Rams, [laughter] Captain J.B. (Carter?), and, oh, he was something else. I mean, like he had me well groomed. And we went on that parade route in our uniform. No shades and you better be clean shaven. No beard, no this kind of stuff [gestures to face]. Matter of fact, he kept a pair of tweezers in his pocket and if he saw any sign of facial hair, he'd pluck the hair out of your face on the parade ground and ask you, "Is this hair?" There was one fellow there, he would test the system. He wore a pair of shades out there with his dress uniform, took the shades— Captain (Carter?) took the shades off, threw them on the ground, and crushed them. He'd go up behind me and check and see if your hair was well cut and everything. [He'd] pull

your pants leg up, make sure you know, you had the right color socks on and make sure the brass buckle and belt was shiny and everything, the whole nine yards. Very strict. And so it give you a taste of what the real army would be like, but you'd go through that and then some. But you know--. know you've heard the old saying about the shower, the shave, and--I won't use the another word--but you know, the three "Ss," and be out there in twenty minutes. And, you know, this was--especially if a person lived a sheltered life, it made you grow up fast. It really would. And it's by attending Norfolk State. It made me grow up fast because then I began to realize what I wanted to do. And I got to the point I felt like I was wasting my parents' money because I wasn't doing as well as I should have and that's why I decided to drop out but that was--. I wanted to go back but I was going to pay my own way. But the reason why I didn't go back--. I met a young lady then and all of the sudden--. And I worked at the ship yard, as a matter of fact, because my father told me, "Son, I love you, but you finished high school. You're not gonna sit around here and not do nothing." I said, "Okay. You only have to say it one time," and so I went up and got a job at the ship yard. And, naturally, the family came along and there was a baby on the way. So I knew I had to take care of family because my daddy always instilled this in me: if you're man enough to make a child, be man enough to take care of it. And I always bear that in mind. Be man enough to take care of what you brought in here, bring in this world. And that's the problem today. A lot of men, young ones, young men [coughs] are not man enough to take care of their responsibilities. That's why you have gangs now, but I don't want to get into that so go ahead and ask the question.

JS: What interested, you said you went to the shipyard--

AM: Yes.

JS: After college. What interested you in going to the shipyard, opposed to another career field?

AM: It was kinda easy to get into at the time, and it paid good money. Like I said, the shipyard, the longshore men, the railroad: those were the big money makers then. That's why people, you know, come from different parts of the country. Mainly it is there that they wind up as. And they used to call the place "Shipyard, Virginia." One comes from the Carolinas [and says,] "I'm going to Shipyard, Virginia" because, at the time, it paid a fairly decent salary, even better than the railroad. And, matter of fact, you had a little clock there and you'd go into the store and the salesman asks you-- Well, the first thing they ask you is your name and where you work. "I work at the shipyard." "Pick anything out you want in here. Railroad? Oh, go and get what you want. Are you a longshoreman?" They didn't care. But you work somewhere like a fast food restaurant-- they didn't have them back then but, say, work the restaurant or something like that, well it was a different atmosphere all together, demeanor. They act like, "Okay, well, we'll see what we can do for you." But [to] others, "Oh man go ahead, help yourself," because of money.

JS: So we know, for example, in 1964, the year before you started working at the shipyard, the shipyard had a lawsuit filed against them for violating the 1964 Civil Rights Act that resulted in an effort towards equal salaries and promotion opportunities for African Americans.

AM: Right.

JS: Did this have a personal impact on you at all?



AM: Yes, it did because, like I said, I started working there in '65. That was during the time where you had to say, "Yes sir, no sir" to your supervisor and everybody in management. And I had a supervisor. I'll never forget it. I was working in pipe fitting at the time and he told us-- We went up on the ship way, the submarine program, [34:38]. I'll never forget that morning. We walked into his office, all three of us black, and we were looking for the supervisor and we said we were looking for McGee. Oh, I didn't mean to call his name, but-- And he stood up and he walked over to us and he asked us, "You haven't been here long, have you boy?" and [we said] "No, not long." [He said], "Let me explain something to you. My name is Mr. so-and-so and it's 'Yes, sir' and 'No, sir' to me." Okay, so be it. But the white workers can call him, you know, his pet name and all this stuff but we couldn't. So when they passed down the memorandum about— first, they had to take away [this practice]. You don't have to say "yes sir" or "no sir" to your boss. And when some of the supervisors read it, [laughter] they said, "Well, you 'Nigroes' don't have to say 'yes, sir, no sir' to-- And one of the workers corrected him and say, "You mean Negro." "I said 'Nigroes, Nigroes,'" like he was straining to get the word at the time. [laughter] Oh yeah, it was something else back in the-- Not all of them were like that. You had some that worked along with you and they didn't go through all that. You see, the shipyard, being the size company that it was, it did generate a lot of money. Big time. Because-- What got them in trouble, they started taking a lot of money off the top. And that's how Tenneco took over, and then from Tenneco to the other company now, Huntington Ingalls. But before, when it was Newport News Shipyard and Dry-Dock Company, everybody made money. The reason I say that [is because] they had piecework. I used to argue that statement one time in a meeting. I said, "When you got rid

of piecework, you got rid of a lot of your quality workers.” They went to Norfolk Naval Yard. Because piecework, what they would do--. You know piecework? They would bid on the job and say, “Well, it takes so many work hours to complete this job.” And they’d write a ticket up on there and the statement would say, “It will take ten hours to paint this room.” Now you had your mate working with you, and they’d write the ticket up with ten hours to paint this room up and you did it in five. So that’s five hours extra going into your check and, therefore, you had some of the best welders, painters, fitters you could imagine working at the shipyard because of piecework. Sure, we weren’t paid the same salary as your supervisors and general foremen. But the money we made, plus the piecework--. Hey, we were happy. Everybody was happy. And, matter of fact, the Navy made a statement one time [that] they felt safer sailing on the ships built in the Newport News Shipyard than any other shipyard because--. The reason why I say that [is because] we put our best into it. There was a lot of pride in our work. It wasn’t one of those things where I was just there for the money anymore, it was out of pride, too. I’d get down there go to the shipyard an hour earlier before my time started and make preparations, you know, get ready for the job. And we were standing there and just lollygag, you know for an hour, until it was time to get to work but we’d get up ready to go. And we had--. It was strict then, too. It was very strict on the part of the job performance. That’s what we’d--. Because you had somebody working with you, you had somebody like the watcher watching the watchee. No, if you had somebody working with you knowing you had the piecework, you made sure the fellow working with you did his part as well as you did yours. It was one of those things where, “Hey, look man, this is my livelihood.” And I look at the fact that, one day, I may have a son go to serve on the ship I put together. I

want to be--. I want to put my best effort into putting this thing together because of that. I won't be there to throw something together because you never know nephew, son maybe on that boat and it could fall apart. And I could never live it down because I didn't do what I was supposed to do. And that's why, like I said a lot of pride was there. And they had a rock engraved on there, "We build the best ships in the world even at a loss." Now, naturally, when Tenneco took over, they took the rock down [laughter] we didn't build nothing at no loss. But go ahead [laughter] ask me your question.

JS: You talked about--. You briefly touched on race relations, kind of, at the shipyard. Can you maybe expand more on the relations between maybe the white workers and black workers there and--?

AM: Well--. We worked together. When it came down to doing a job, we worked together. Only a few little incidents that you had some that may show some indifference. But all in all, no, we got along. We really did. And, matter of fact, when we got rid of the company union and took on this outside union that they have today, black and white were together. Oh yes, that--. Matter of fact, they had to bring the riot squad down from Richmond [laughter].

JS: Was that the riot, or--. Excuse me. Was that the strike in 1979?

AM: Yes, it was.

JS: Can you maybe explain a little bit about what brought on the strike?

AM: Okay, we had what you call a company union. The company union--you see, the representative was employed by the company so they're not gonna do so much to help you. And so it was brought up this thing about the steel workers, which were not--. The people were not employed by the company. So we didn't get better representation as the

workers got because we felt that [41:40] our salary, we should have been making more than what we were, although we had piecework and all this too. But so many little things that we felt should be changed. And so somebody brought up the Steel Workers of America. So when they brought the union down here to try to get in the shipyard, oh it went through some changes, mind you. It went through some serious changes because during that time it was the thing to try to change retirement. You worked thirty, forty years in a company and your retirement pay was three hundred dollars a month. What kind of money is that to live off of after you worked thirty to forty years? That's one of the reasons why they brought this other union in--one of the main reasons--especially benefits and all that too. So when they brought the steel workers in, it was a little rioting naturally, until the internal police come. And the Newport News policemen, they felt like they were backed up against a wall. But one of the cops walked in one of the bars on Washington Avenue, was flexing his muscles, and when the whole bar got up he running down Washington Avenue, left his squad car and everything. [laughter] You're talking about thirty thousand folks--all three shifts--working in that shipyard. And with that all on strike, no. It's like the longshoremen. When longshoremen strike, nobody move. East coast, west coast, no. And no one cross the line, not in longshore. But we weren't quite like that because--they called them scabs, you heard the term--one fellow was going through the gate to work while we were on strike and the news reporter caught a picture of it. As he was going through the gate this guy kind of leaning back with an umbrella in one hand and had his foot in this guy's behind as he was going through the gate. [laughter] So, oh yeah, there were some fights and everything but they got the union in there. And it wasn't an overnight thing. Where it back then they were paying three

hundred-some dollars a month, now they get over a thousand now. But it took years of negotiating and it's, like I said, it's not an overnight thing. It took years of negotiating and it finally brought this--you know, made these changes so it could really benefit the people.

JS: You mentioned how that, during the strike, both blacks and whites worked together during the strike.

AM: Mmhmm, they did.

JS: Did this, do you think bettered race relations--the strike in the shipyard?

AM: [pause] It--. For the race relations, for the early stages of it, it did. It was really tied tight. But then, after time goes by, you know, it kind of [reversed]. Not all the ways back to the way it was at first. But it changed somewhat. Matter of fact, it changed from my understanding of it now, even much more now than it was back then when I was there. It's back to almost where it was. The country--. Politics play a major part in the division of this country, a very major part, because--. Let me share this with you: when I first got married, we lived out there in Briarfield Manor. You don't know nothing about that. It was out there on Briarfield Road. And that was my first experience living in a mixed neighborhood. And there were some rough whites and some rough blacks out there. And that was my first time experiencing that. Now, when I first moved in there, this white fellow came over, introduced himself, and he brought a six pack of Pabst Blue Ribbon. He loved that Blue Ribbon. And we got along with them because he was in the same boat I was in. We were both struggling, we were both poor, in a manner of speaking. And so you had your poor white, poor blacks. They got along. Now, you come down to the wealthy section. That's where that division came about. You know, the have and the have

nots. And the one that benefitted out of all this through my early childhood up until now was the Jews. The Jews, the Greeks, and the Italians, they really capitalized on this big time because they served both. On Jefferson Avenue with the blacks, you had most of the clothes stores were owned by Jews. On Washington Avenue side with the whites, owned by Jews. Yeah, oh yeah, they were the money makers and they--how do you say it? The Greeks, they had both of them. The Greeks had the restaurants and the Jews had the clothing stores and so forth. And both of them made money, they all made it. Started in the black neighborhoods. Yeah both. And then the Chinese, the Korean mainly, they took over the restaurant business over there by the shipyard. Got in with the first one, started the restaurant--that was 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, the restaurant right at the gate. It was Koreans moved in and bought the place. And as they got started, situated, they sent for their cousins and they bought the building next to them and then it was like a domino effect from there all the way down Washington Avenue. They were taking over the restaurants, and the reason why they did that: food. All the time that the Greeks and the Jews had it, you'd get, what, bacon and eggs, and sausage and eggs, whatever, for breakfast they'd serve the workers. Lunch, you got hamburgers, steak hamburgers. But when the Koreans took over, guy walked past the restaurant and they were just packed in there. He was serving grits along with the bacon and eggs and sausage and all this. Lunch time: packed again. I said, "What the heck?" I walked in there. They had fried chicken, collard greens, yam and everything, that's what. They looked at the clientele. So you got a bunch of blacks coming from the Carolinas. And, 'round here, I know what they want. They studying and say, "Put them collard greens and chitlins in there and that'll draw the crowd in here." [laughter] And it's a lesson to be learned: study your clientele, cater to what they really

want, and you'll really be successful, especially in a restaurant. Clothing? Yeah. One of the most popular shoes was Stacy Adams. You couldn't wear them bad boys out [laughter]. I don't care how long you keep them. You couldn't outwear a pair of Stacy Adams. You would leave here before they would. But we had--. I don't want to get ahead so go ahead and ask another question.

AS: You mentioned that things were different from when it was Newport News shipyard versus Tenneco. Do you think, which--. I know Tenneco was took over like three years after you started working there so it was a majority of your time there. But do you have like a preference to like which one was better towards you as a worker?

AM: When the other company took over?

AS: Mmhhh, like was Newport News or Tenneco better to their employees?

AM: Well, I tell you--. Like I said, what happened there, the first company to take over was Tenneco, and what Tenneco did, they did away with piecework. And that was a slap in the face because a lot of your skilled workers went to Norfolk Naval Yard, 'cause they were so used to making the extra money, 'cause you had a regular check and a bonus check. But when they did that, that kind of caused a little spiral down, downhill for the quality of work. You didn't know it at the time. It didn't go away completely now, but it did make a change in the atmosphere of the yard.

JS: When you, what in--. Where did you live with your wife prior to living in the integrated subdivision?

AM: Well, we moved from Briarfield to Colony Hills. Moving on up [laughter]. That was--. You know where Colony Hills is? It's townhouses off of Main Street and Jefferson. Matter of fact, between Warwick and Jefferson. So we moved up there and this

was during desegregation, 'cause I was the second black family to move into Colony Hills. And they welcomed us to the neighborhood, 'cause the next morning I got up, went downstairs in our old townhouse, someone had sliced up a watermelon [51:57] and placed slices of watermelon from one end of our car to the other. I said "Okay, [laughter] here we go folks." But my little feisty ex-wife, she took the slices of watermelon and placed them on everybody's car in our section. I said, "Aw heck, here we go." But then, after that, things settled down, you know. Got along. Matter of fact, along came this little boy came down to our apartment. One day he said, "Hi, my name is so-and-so. Do you have some cookies for me?" and I said "Yes." And so I gave him some cookies and chocolate milk and he said, "Thank you" and he left. Then, I met his parents later on and they were very friendly. Matter of fact, after they got to know us, then we became very friendly with everybody out there. And we used to have parties together. And now, it wasn't just like "Bam, make this transition" like it's Superman in a phone booth. No, it wasn't quite that quick because I'll tell you what happened to me, I--. One day, I came home from work and the resident manager kept getting on me saying, "Mr. McIver, why don't you use our pool facility?" I said, "Nah, no, we ain't, no." Like I said, we were the second family up there, and then others started moving up there. And I said, "Well, nah." And he kept on getting on me about using the pool so I said, "Okay." So I get in my little pants and I got my little swimwear and everything and a towel. And it's all fenced in. When I walked through the gate, pool was packed. People laughing and talking and having fun, and--. That's a weird feeling. When I walked through the gate, everything got quiet. I said, "Oh gosh." I said, "I'm in here now so now I'm not going to back down." So the lifeguard looked at me. I went up to him. "Are you a resident?" I handed him my card



and he said, "Okay, feel free to use our facility." Well, at the time I was packing the weight. I weighed 235, 240. Had attitude with it, too [laughter]. The first thing I did, I went to the diving board and I dove in [laughter]. And I was swimming on the bottom and I came up. I saw how people [were] kind of inching to the side of the pool [but] they were still talking and looking so I went back to the diving board and I dove in again. And I swim down the bottom and I came up. Pool empty. I said, "Okay." So I just swim all day and had myself a good time in the pool. [laughter]

AM: It was one of those things that the transition took time to come about. After they get to learn you, you know, they begin to change over a period of time.

AS: Mmhhh.

JS: Did-- was there any backlash from like you swimming in the pool? Did anyone say anything to you after like you swam in the pool or did everyone just kind of--?

AM: Oh no, they didn't say nothing to me. No.

JS: Okay.

AM: Like I said, 240. No. [laughter] But, no, no they didn't. Matter of fact, when my wife and I split up and had a package that had come down, one of the couples signed for it and left a note on my door saying they have it and I come pick it up. Like I said, we all-. And then they learn that I could cook and [laughter] and they would bring the ingredients and I would bake cakes for them and all that stuff [laughter]. Well, I grew up learning--. I had to learn how to cook. That's one of the things they taught the children: pay bills and learn how to cook and be able to take--. Clean your place and cook, 'cause you don't know who you marry. She might not be able to boil water. At least you will be able to survive. And yeah, so (56:14). We cook things from scratch back then. Yeah. It

wasn't all boxed and prepackaged and none of that, no, no. Just like--. That's what bothers me about the food chains today. A lot of stuff was prepackaged and this teacher-- I don't know what state it was--but she decided to change the food chain from prepackaged food to food cooked from scratch. GPA went up, crime went down, just by the mere fact of changing the way they prepared the food for the students. Makes a difference because all that steroid they put in meat, and the insecticide and pesticide they put in vegetables, all that is going into the body. The body wasn't designed to consume chemicals. And then we get sick. Where you go? You go to the doctor. And what do you get? More chemicals. "Take these pills, but the side effects can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea." "Wait a minute, hold it." [laughter] So we live in this chemical world now. It would be so wonderful if you go back to the natural way of growing products. It would get--. It makes a difference in our attitude and everything else. It would.

JS: Mmhmm.

AM: Because there was a time, I know I'm getting back off, but Newsome Park--. There were two places, the one place was on 48th Street, the other place was on 16th Street, where you gotta buy chicken. It wasn't in a showcase, it was live. You bought that chicken and they kill it and clean it, and boom, you got it. You take it home and they had--. The chicken had the little fine feathers on it, and we all had gas stoves over at Old Newsome Park, so you hold the chicken over it and singe the little hairs off of it and cut it up and put it in the ice box there or the refrigerator. But, you know, one thing about the mothers back then, they always seasoned the meats a day before they prepare it. Always seasoned. Whether seafood, or poultry, or beef, they always seasoned it the day before. And the next day they prepared it. And, like I said, it was live chicken. And you go to the

fish market--you know you got fresh fish 'cause they always told us look at the gills: rich red and the eyes are clear, that's fresh fish. But 'cause the eyes are murky and the gills look kinda grey to you, no, don't bother with it. We were taught all these things. Matter of fact, back in Newsome Park, people had gardens over there by the--. There is a canal that runs on the back side of the apartment complexes and people plant gardens there. They had tomatoes, okras, and cucumbers and--. So we had, excuse me, as much for a lawn and all that, no. But they loved to plant a lot of flowers, tulips, and especially magnolias. All kinds of flowers they had and everything. It was like old school. And we took showers. There was no bath tubs in Newsome Park, no, no, no, no. You had a little small shower and the bathroom so small you could stand in it and touch both walls when you stuck your hand out. And it was like living in the military because you had those coal stoves that you would fire up and it warmed the place up. It warmed the whole house right. And up at night, you make sure that bad boy, you know, is nice and warm. But everybody make a b-line for the bed 'cause it had the heavy quilts 'cause that stove gonna burn out during the course of the night. But you had on heavy quilts that kept you warm during the night. I don't care if it was snowing outside or not, you were warm in the quilt. Now when you get up in the morning, you had to fire that stove up or you take like a military shower. You don't linger in that bad boy long. You shower down real fast, dry off and then you rub down in Vaseline. The whole body rubbed down in Vaseline. And, parents always give us a tea spoon of cod liver oil. That cod liver, that liver, I don't know if you know anything about that. It was a fish oil, cod liver oil. You get a teaspoon of that every morning before breakfast. And, they had this--. [laughter] I know this is back in the restaurant now, fatback. They would fry fatback. They used the grease to season the

greens with it. That why they used fatback. And we also ate the fatback with a thing called hoecake bread. Hoecake bread was made with flour, milk, a little water, and baking powder. They'd cook in the frying pan and flip it and that was called hoecake bread. And had this thing called--. Big gallon can of King's Syrup. So we had the fatback, King's Syrup and hoecake bread. It was pretty good. [laughter]

JS: Can you spell hoecake bread for--? Hoecake bread.

AM: Hoecake? No [laughter].

AM: Fool you. Hoecake- I think it's h-o-o. Or is it h-o? I know it's got h-o-c-a-k-e. Hoecake. Work with it.

JS: Okay, thank you.

AM: Mmhmm. Yeah, hoecake. And go ahead.

JS: Can we clarify a couple of the dates? You moved into the integrated neighborhood in what year?

AM: The seventies.

JS: Okay, the seventies. And then you moved into the townhouses during—

AM: It was mid-seventies.

JS: Mid-seventies.

AM: Yes.

JS: So we know your kids weren't born 'til 1969 and 1976. While the older one might have experienced some integration, it's unlikely that your younger one did. You might, say, we know that you graduated too early to be affected by desegregation yourself.

AM: Right.

JS: But we were wondering, were your children affected at all?

AM: No, except my daughter. [laughter] She's the baby. She's 36 now--or 38--no 36, 36. Come to get old, I remember her birthday. But, nah, she was at Bethel and they went to school out there in Poquoson. [laughter] "Nigger, go home." I said, "Come on." She was shocked 'cause she was already attending an integrated school and then, when she went out to Poquoson, that what she was faced with. Well, you got Poquoson--it kind of takes you back in time a little bit. Seaford is a place that'll take you back in time, too. Because you still got the old soda machine. I went down there. Everything is loose. I said, "What the heck?" 'cause they had an--. Amoco [Amoco Corporation: oil refinery] had a refinery back there. But Seaford and Poquoson kinda takes you back in time. And it's changed now, somewhat. But she was at Bethel when she experienced this racism. Oh, yes. And, let's see, wow. I knew you'd think that all that would probably be long gone by now. But, no. It's still around anyway. Sad to say and I don't think it'll--. It won't leave here 'cause my son was in the navy--he was stationed out there in Bremerton, Washington on the Vincent--and, naturally, he ran into some of the skinheads, 'cause that is their territory. And he is a big bruiser too. And the guy looked at him (1:05). He said, "Don't even think about it." [laughter] But, you know as far as that goes it's still around. Now, the thing is--. Can I share this with you?

JS: Mmhmm.

AM: When--. I'm gonna take you back to slavery when you had blacks, you had whites, and you had mulatos, because the slave master go down in the quarters and sleep with some of the slaves and they had children. The real fair skinned ones worked in the kitchen, the dark skin ones in the field. And so this thing that was started then kept on, on up until integration, and all that. So that's why you have the real fair skin blacks where

you really can't tell them from a white person. Poquoson is one of them. Yeah, it is. And then you have places in Carolina like Ahoskie. Wilmington is another. They have sandy hair, blue eyes, and even got a redneck. [laughter] 'Cause I look for this fellow about twenty minutes, 'cause they said, "Go see so-so. He's a (1:06:14) brother." I walked past him about three or four times. I said "I'm looking for so and so, on the ship main," 'cause they didn't have no names on the hard hat then. And he (1:06:24.5; snatched me behind from the production area?). He said, "I'm the one you're looking for," and I looked at him. I said "What?" "Yes, I am the man you are looking for." I said, "Dang." [laughter] Well, oh yes. Matter of fact, they used to boast about the fact that they could go to, during the time theaters were segregated, "I sit down with the white folks 'cause they didn't know no difference." [laughter] They did. They used that to work against it, you know in time.

JS: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

AS: I want to go back to your work history for just a second. When we were talking about the strike in 1979 earlier, you were talking about like scabs. Does that mean you, or yourself were part of the strike?

AM: Yeah, I stayed home.

AS: You stayed home?

AM: I'd ride down the street and see them lined up and ride on down to the beach.

[whistling] Lay in the sun there and had a good time. But, you know, my father told me this: wherever you work, make sure the company you work for has a union, 'cause they're your mouthpiece. They're the ones that can speak for you. You can't do it yourself. You have to have a union. That's why, let's see, longshoreman is very popular

as far as that goes. 'Cause when they say we gonna shut down, they would shut down East coast, West coast, everything. Nothing moved in and out of there. And when they negotiate, they normally get what they want. Now we had the Steelworkers of America. They really come a mighty long ways for negotiating and getting the workers what they deserve. They really do. So you definitely, excuse me, need a union.

JS: Okay. You brought up about just a minute ago about the segregated theaters that you experienced. What other areas of society--I know it was all segregated--but what are some of the most memorable places that you remember being segregated growing up and into your young adulthood?

AM: Well, okay. Like I said the theaters were segregated. And the restaurants--some you could stand up and eat, but you couldn't sit down. And the bus terminal, oh gosh. That really stands out. Because when you pull into the bus station you see this great big arrow with "Colored" written beneath there, and pointing. The arrow's guiding you 'round behind the bus terminal and you go inside this small enclosure, this small room, and they had a window way up top, like you feeding a ferocious lion or something. And you look over in the hole and you see there is like a big ballroom where the whites would eat at. They had--. That had somewhat of an effect on me to see this, to experience this thing.

JS: Mmhmm.

AM: And it wasn't pleasant. And you know, in order to really experience it, you had to be me. You have to be in my skin and then you can see how a person felt during that time period. To walk in a place like that.

JS: Mmhmm.

AM: And it did--. It wasn't a pleasant feeling at the time, but you learn to deal with it. You learn to deal with it. And then there was when I went in the stores and I stood there and they wait on everybody except me, and I'm standing there waiting, and I said, "Well, look, I come here to buy something, too." "Oh, I didn't see you." I look like Casper or somebody? You know, the friendly ghost? But, you know, you run into situations like that you tolerate it, you know, in time. And, like I said, it was rough back then.

JS: Mmhmm.

AM: But, I learn to deal with things, cope with it. Like I said, in the shipyard, same thing: one of the guys was talking to me--like I said we were working together--and he slipped up and said, "You one happy little nigger." I didn't say nothing. He caught himself. [laughter] And I just played it along like I didn't know, like it wasn't no big thing. I've been called worse. So [chuckle] it's been going on from there. And there's one time--. And I was the only minority in the gang when they--same fellow, who the guy I worked with--they all left me you know in the ship bay, and this was during the Christmas break. And this one guy I was working with he said, "Mack, I want you to give a gift to the supervisor." I said "Awe, heck no." "No, no, Mack, c'mon." I said, "Okay." So I said my little speech and handed him the gift. He took the gift. And I stuck my hand out and wished him a Merry Christmas. He put his hand in his pocket as usual. And I said, "Okay, that's the last time I'll ever offer you a gift." [laughter] And I saw him, years later, out in the store with my mom and I spoke to him and I say, "Mr." and all that. I said "How you doing?" "Hey Mack, I'm doing alright." And I said, "Okay, you haven't changed now a darn bit." [laughter] This is years later. [laughter] I said, "Wow." And I said, "Some people never change so accept it for what it is." And I know that they used to



question me 'cause something happened. I took this girl home, which was white, and the supervisor saw it. And I'm out on my job the next day and--this is after, you know, desegregation--and my supervisor came out and he say, "Mack, you blank blank that white gal?" I said, "No," which I wasn't. We were just friends. "Oh, you don't have to lie to me, Mack." I said, "Look, I said that I'm not." Then he left. Then here comes the general foreman. I told him the same thing. And then the construction supervisor asked me that too. He said, "Mack, I want to explain something to you. The way I was brought up, (1:13:26-1:13:28) I was taught that black and white are not supposed to mix. This was instilled in me from my early childhood on up." I wanted to tell him, "Since you're a grown man, have you thought about making a decision for yourself?" But I listened to him and he said, "That's just the way I am." I said now--. He said, "How you feel if your daughter or son brought home a white person?" I said, "Put it to you this way, if the two truly care for each other, love each other, fine with me. 'Cause that is their life not mine, they've got to live. I can't live their life for them. They only do that themselves." So you be Asian, Greek, or whatever, as long as they truly love themselves, love each other--not out to make a statement, but truly love each other. Because there'll be some rough times, there'll be some good times. But when you truly love each other, you can overcome all obstacles in life. You really truly can. That even holds true today in everything. If you truly love. 'Cause don't get into relationships because he makes good money. Don't get into relationships 'cause they look good, cause over a period of time, that look good can change. When the wrinkles set in and they're bent over and the pot bellies and all that, that will soon disappear. You can look at that one, run away [laughter]. But do it because of the passion, because of the love. And I'll say this much too: when you put Christ first

in your life, you can overcome any kind of obstacle that come your way. You can, because you have a mediator. Even relationship between husband and wife, that can resolve any kind of situation. Even when you run into things on your job, you go to him and he will make a way out of no way. As long as you rely on him, put him first. I started out in a Methodist church, which was affiliated with the Catholics at the time: African Methodist. Then I went from there to non-denominational, and then I really began to learn even more, 'cause there, you know, it's not a predominantly black. It's open to all who ever want to worship and that's the way it should be. Don't go--. 'Cause we all were created by him. No matter how we look--we yellow, black, white--all come back down to our divine creator. And that has been--. It should be the--. How you say it? The backbone--not backbone--but the centerpiece in our life. Whether it be marriage, job, or whatever, always rely on him. Because He preaches. 'Cause he came to die for all of us on that cross. This for the blacks, for the whites, for the red man and the yellow man, for the whole world. He said, "I come to shed my blood for the whole world, through my blood all may be saved." May be saved through his sacrifice. And that's what I focus on too.

JS: Mmhmm.

AM: Through his sacrifice. And there's so much to learn about the word. You never say you know it all. You can read from Genesis to Malachi and from Matthew to Revelations. You still will not learn it all or know it all. No. So that's why we have to study the Bible daily. And I mean study it, not just breeze through it. Study the word, ask questions, so you can learn about what he expects out of us as his pride and joy, 'cause mankind is. We just beneath his angels. And I learn more in my later years than I have earlier, because

early years, in my childhood, they didn't have access to the internet and everything else. So you can really learn a lot now [such as] the bridge, that 400 year gap between the Old Testament and New Testament, the Dead Sea Scroll, where they say they have found now to bridge that gap, what really happened. How you could learn--. Just like this thing about Nimrod, the first hero in the Bible. And this fellow, who was a white fellow, my therapist, he asked me, "Why do we call"--'cause most of the whites call each other nimrod--"why do we call each other nimrod?" I am a black guy, and I said, "You asking me?" [laughter] But, I told him. Nimrod, like I said was the first hero. Nimrod was the one that was responsible for building the towers to the heavens. And you know the story. When God saw they were trying to do that, he moved the heavens. But it wasn't that God thought that he could do this. No. He was--. He saw how stupid man could be to think that he could build a tower to the heavens when he was the creator. No. That's why it means that you're so stupid that you thought you do that. That's where the term nimrod comes from. [laughter]

JS: So would you, can you give us maybe some more examples--. You talked about how your friend slipped up when speaking to you one day and the supervisor not wanting to shake your hand and being ignored and stuff. Can you maybe talk about some more of your experiences like that with dealing with white people either in the shipyard or in the community?

AM: Well, like I said, during the segregation part, they must split it down the middle, and--. Well, we knew we were segregated. And it's one of those things. Like my preacher said one time, [chuckle], he said that "the southern white will let you know from the very beginning 'I don't want to be bothered with you.' A northern white, he will smile and

grin like everything's okay, but don't turn your back." [laughter] Well, I'll tell you, I'm telling it like it is. Alright. And that's why a lot of blacks, when they were moving from the Deep South going north, thought they'd find better jobs and all this. That's why they call New York the Big Apple. Once they got there, it wasn't what they thought it would be 'cause when you got there you still working in people's homes, cleaning toilets at the sub-station and all this stuff. It wasn't like you had some big time job. And, well, the only one that could cure the problem is, of course, education, and then you'll never--. Even then. Now, as far as black and white relationships around here, the one thing that fascinate me was that we could play together, work together, but we it comes down to going to church we all went our separate ways. [laughter] Matter of fact, I went to this white church at that time and the fellow I worked with looked like he could hardly speak. [whispers, pretending to be his colleague whispering] "Hi, there Mack." I said, "Hey, how you doing?" This is church man. And when we sat down--my wife and I and the kids--we were the only two sitting in that section. Everybody moved to the back, either that or the front of us. 'Cause what it was, they had a Bible study there--I was living in Bribington Manor--so they come around and pick my children up, you know, take them to Sunday school, Bible study. And when we went to the church, it was a Baptist church, I experienced that. 'Cause before, when I'm in the shipyard,[loudly] "Hey Mack, how you doing buddy!?!?" "Hey man alright!" But in church, [whispers] "Hi, how you doing Mack." I said, "Dang." Then when I saw him the next day, I said "Uh uh. I thought I had to put on hearing aides to hear you speak to me when I was in that church with you. Of all places, the church, I could barely hear what you were saying." And now he coming here, no. 'Cause those things like that. You know, like of all places you expect that they

might--. Now, the preacher did preach something on that too, that we all part of his creation. I don't care who you are. I felt good about that. But still, the fact remains that I experienced this thing of segregation, whether it was desegregated or not. Matter of fact, one of the doctors I got to, he still had a place for the whites to sit and still had a place for the blacks to sit. This was when I working at--. I was in school then. He was a good doctor but he believed in the old way, segregation. And the beach. [laughter] Lord, have mercy. I know you heard about--. You know about Buckroe?

AS: Mmhmm.

AM: Blacks had a beach right next to it called Bayshore. Yes. And when we were in the water the only thing that separated Bayshore from Buckroe was a wire fence that ran out in the water. I could look over there and see the white folks, white folks could look over it and see me. Yes, Bayshore and Buckroe, side by side. And when they first integrated, it was--. Yeah, we went through that, too. When we first went on the Buckroe side, "Nigger go home, nigger go home." "Aw, shut up. We're over here now so [laughter] live with it." Oh, but really the two beaches was--. That's all that separated the two beaches. And some may, I don't want to say argue the point, but said we had more going for us during segregation than we did during integration. The reason why I say that, we had all kind of clubs and beaches. We had Bayshore here in Hampton. We had Log Cabin in Williamsburg. We had beaches over there in Norfolk with rides and all that, and Sunset Lake, Chesapeake. And clubs, oh gosh, we had clubs on (Pembroke?) and Newport News 'cause James Brown used to perform there on (Pembroke?) at the--. Oh, what did they call that club? I can't think of the name of it now, but he would perform there. Fats Domino, JB Donaham had performance there and all kinds of entertainment. But when

integration took place, those clubs went, fell in the dust. They disappeared. Although like I say, (1:25:38) by integrating we had access to other clubs then. And that kinda pushed the other ones to the side. And the beaches went too, 'cause of, you know, 'cause of integration. It was a good thing and a sad thing in a way because some of the things we had are gone now, except an old man like me to tell you about back in the days about Bayshore. This is all around Richmond. They built the Richmond Hotel on the beach, the Magnolia Inn and all kinds of motels and hotels right there on the water. Now, you have expensive condos and homes on the water now, where Bayshore used to be. And where Log Cabin used to be, the Sanitation Department own that now. Fort Eustis used to be--. That land used to be called Mulberry Island, which was owned by blacks. But because the children didn't try to hold on to it, the military bought that land and now it's Fort Eustis. Up that way, Patrick Henry Mall was land owned by blacks. But the kids sold it out for little or nothing. So, like I said, that transition brought on a lot of changes. Yes, it did. And that's why the children didn't try to hold on to what they had. They could have at least like--. Well, matter of fact, Mercury Boulevard used to be Military Highway. And what happened is a family from New York came down here and bought Military Highway, and they changed the name to Mercury because the first astronaut,--you know about that--trained at Langley. That's when the name changed to Mercury Boulevard. But what else? I could say that blacks and whites, we got along in a lot of cases. Yes, we did. Even after segregation--after, you know, integration--we still got along, pretty well. And I would say, today, we get along even better today than we did back in the day. I experience that everywhere I go now, 'cause this lady asked me did I need any help. [I said] No. Now one thing I'll tell you--what happened to me--this was right back in the

sixties. No, was it the sixties? Yeah, during the transition of integration, my car broke down [laughter] and this white lady stopped [and said,] “You want me to give you a ride?” [I said,] “Heck no!” [She said,] “Hot as two dogs out there!” I said, “No, heck, no.” [laughter] I don’t feel (like going through no changes?; 1:28:49.4), so go ahead. [laughter] Oh, even with integration, it still--. No, it’s there ‘cause I was taking my date home one night on Pembroke. She had a blonde wig on. I never did get a good look at the car, but they passed me on Pembroke, and I heard brakes squeal [makes braking sound] and they turn around and came up behind me, I’m sure, ‘cause she was in my arms like this here you know. And I’m driving, so I kept on driving. I just said, “The heck with it.” And then they pull up alongside and kinda got a look at her face, and they backed off and went on. It had to be a cop ‘cause it happened to me before. I was up there in Denbigh and I was going through the woods to get to this house. And the cop pulled up behind me. This is before, yeah before, integration. And he followed us down this dirt road in the woods. And she was one of those real fair skinned ladies and she had straight hair. But when he got a look at her--. She got out of the car, ‘cause we were at the house then, and she asked him, “What’s the matter, officer?” He said, “We had a call. There were two black males in the area doing something.” I said, “Two black males?” And she looked nothing like she was black. I said, “Okay.” [laughter] So again, I had to say something. I guess that saying two black males--. This a woman and I’m a man. She has long hair, I have short hair, you know. I’m black and she’s fair skinned. That’s a far cry from two black males, isn’t it? But yes, I experienced that. And you know, like I say, you go through these different changes. You just shuck it off and just keep on trucking, you know. Keep on going.

JS: Were you ever a part of any protests, whether at work--we know you were a part of the strike--or in the community for the civil rights movement in general?

AM: Was I part of the protest?

JS: Mmhmm.

AM: Not really, no, no. It was never around me at the time, the protesting part. I'm trying to think. Except for the beach. Yes, because when they hollering about "nigger, go home," I went down there anyway and they wasn't throwing nothing at us, but they act like they was gonna throw something at us. But we kept going down there, and they kept calling us the same old thing, and we kept going. So I guess they say, "Oh the heck with it, you know. They down here now so we might as well deal with it." That was the time I did. And some of my classmates experienced more so up there in Petersburg than we did down here 'cause up there, there's a little place right outside of Petersburg that's supposed to be in Klan territory and they would have a meeting up there every year. And, when my friend was up there--she was going to school up there at Virginia State--and she said, "They're having a parade up here." And I told her, "You just flunked history" or something like that. She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "That is the Ku Klux Klan having a rally, you dummy. [laughter] You thought it was a parade!" [laughter] But, I rode with a Klansman. He was driving a tow truck, mind you. Okay, alright, let me tell you this story. He came to pick up my car and I was sitting in the front with him and we were riding along there and he said--I don't know what prompted this--he said, "I am, I'm gonna tell you, I'm a member of the Klu Klux Klan." I started to bail out of the truck right then. [laughter] "Aw, heck no. Get my car, I'll get somebody." He said, "But let me explain something to you about the Klan. We weren't like it is today, you know.



(1:33.18) What we used to do was take care of our own.” I said, “Really?” He said, “Yeah, whenever anybody got out of place--like they beat their wives and all that--we would go around there and chastise him. We made sure everything was in order. That’s the way the Klan was. That’s the way we were, to take care of our own.” And he went on and on explaining about how the Klan started and so forth, and we spent a good little time in there and I said, “Okay.” So we sat there and talked and after we got my car to the shop I thanked him and he did shake my hand. Yeah. [laughter] And, we went on our merry way. Yes, I did have, as I say, a close encounter with the [laughter] the Ku Klux Klan. “Well,” I said, “I’ll be darn.”

JS: When was that?

AM: That was during segregation. Yeah.

JS: Wow.

AM: In the sixties.

JS: Wow.

AM: Yeah, rode with the Klan.

JS: So, looking back, do you see anything that are unfinished legacies of the civil rights movement?

AM: Unfinished legacies? All that people went through--the beatings, the firehoses, the dogs, and all this--I don’t want to say that it was all done in vain, but it feels like a lot was lost if you look at the situation today. There’s a lot of black on black crime, drugs, and all those things whereas, at one time, blacks had a lot of pride. I’ll give you an example, some of us like that--. Tommy Hilfiger made that statement, “If I’d known blacks would buy my products as much as they do, I woulda never would have made it.”

If that was back there then, during those years, we wouldn't have never bought not even a stitch from him. But now the blacks say, "Well, whoopie, big deal. I want that thing 'cause it looks good." They have lost somewhat that drive, that togetherness. The neighborhood used to be tight. We used to visit each other and share things with each other. It's gone. I live on the same street-- I mean, well, where I live it's different. But other areas, you live on the same street and same block and hardly know anybody there. We don't have that bond that we used to have, like I was telling you about at Old Newsome Park. We still meet together there. It's not there now. It's everybody for self, going their separate ways. That's the sad part about it. And I don't know if we'll ever really regain that or not. I doubt it. Just like where I live-- You know where I live? I live out there in-- I live in Grange Court off of Aberdeen Road, that area. (1:37:03) Leaving Newsome Park, going there, that's a big transition. Now all that land there was owned by Hampton University. It was farm land. Farm land made a deal with (Great Atlantic?): if they would build houses for the minorities, they could have the land. And which they did. They built Granger Court--that's how it came about--next to the old Aberdeen, which is a historical area. And all the new homes back in sixties started in sixty-five-- Actually, it was sixty-four. That's how the neighborhood came about. And leaving old wooden shanties--I wish I could meet y'all again and show you pictures of old Newsome Park-- and moving out to Granger Court where we had tub, bath tub and shower [laughter] and nice back yard and front yard. And that was a big switch, big change. And, like I said, integration brought on a lot of positive things to now, but some things are lost, too, as well. Yeah. And, well, [pause] the race today-- Like I said before, they're more or less all for self now. We don't have that bond that you used to have, that togetherness you used

to have. It's not there. And, I don't know, it's--. That's the way it is now. And, like I said, politics played a big, a very important part in this because the country has been divided behind that. Just like now about the same sex marriage: the church is, they're divided about that. Some pastors say he will lose this church before he will marry a gay couple, he will go to jail first. And some say, "Hey, it's alright with me." But you know what it's really centered around? Money. Everything is money. Whatever pays the big bucks, that's where I'll go. Sure, that's what it all comes down to. If it pay big bucks, darn right I'll take it. He could be funny as I don't know what, sweet as a lollipop. Sure, he can come on in, as long has he pays the bucks. When they--. But the only thing about that though, we still got to answer to someone that is far greater than all of us. Don't think that he's gonna say, "Oh well, they just doing their thing." No. He wrote laws down there for us to go by. And they were written over two-thousand years ago. He still wants us to go by those things. Not one--. He insists that we go by his law. Yeah. So was the integration: having that love for one another, that's what he preaches to, having love for one another. I experience a lot of it now. Even then back in the days, 'cause when I ran into--. It's funny, when I go to my doctors, just about everybody I run into is into the word. And they show a lot of love. It's not too many times that I didn't experience that. And I said, "Wow," so the end time must be getting close then. We beginning to experience that kind of love for one another, that's right. If they can only instill it in the minority race again--because you hear about all these shootings and killings and, matter of fact, this thing about that girl [Hannah Graham] up there in Charlottesville that's missing. And you got this fellow [Jessie Mathews Jr.] up there. One thing that bothers me about that, he's not saying anything. If I didn't do nothing, I'd be like Daffy Duck, "Heck

no, I didn't do nothing!" But he's not saying nothing. And, then, to show guilt when you running from here all the way down to Texas, that means you have something to hide. Hey, plain and simple. But you know something like that can also cause a division in the race in time because, first things, some of them said--I don't want to say all of them said-- "You people do what y'all did." I didn't do that! He did it you know, if he did. Don't categorize me with one, or two or three other individuals. I am who I am. You are who you are. But don't--. 'Cause that's one of the problems we've had: when you look at a black person, you look at somebody to jump and dance and play basketball and play football. We go beyond that. It's like, say, we look at a white person: "Oh, that's an old redneck. He don't care nothing about us." No, y'all go beyond that. And wasn't for the whites helping Harriet Tubman to transport the slaves from the United States to Canada-- the Quakers--we'd still be going back (1:42:40) [laughter] But any way we, that's a prime example to show you how blacks and whites work together. You can work together. You can do partisan things. And we can make this thing work. But it takes the efforts, effort on both parties to do so. Yes, it does. And let's see, it has its upside and downsides, like anything in life. It does. So what else you'd like to ask me? I'm on a roll now, now go ahead. [laughter] Throw it at me. [laughter]

JS: So you talked about, like, the disunity that has occurred since the civil rights movement. Is there any failures that you see the movement, like, didn't accomplish that it set out to do?

AM: Well, the civil rights, like I said before, had this thing where this togetherness was supposed to have been, that's lost, I told you that was lost.

JS: Mmhmm.

AM: And what the civil rights was--. What really what the civil rights was saying is just this: I can do the same thing you can. I can accomplish the same thing you can accomplish. I'm no different than you are. We all came from the same mold, just give me a chance to prove myself. 'Cause we have a prime example now: we got a black president. I never thought I'd ever see that. And a whole lot of other folks black and white [never thought they would see] a black President. And now, I'm willing to say that there may be some things lost--like I said that togetherness--but there are some things that we gained. When I saw this teenager that was on some talk show, *Steve Harvey*, who's a Eagle Scout--I think he was around what eleven, twelve, seventeen. Not seventeen. Twelve. And he [the host, Steve Harvey] said, "What you do you want to do in life?" and he said, "I want to go to Harvard." Only thing I was talking about [going to] Harvard, "Heck no." But now I got to see this young black kid want to go to Harvard. Yes. And he has earned all kind of awards. When I look at that and now I say that all the struggle we went through--. I wouldn't say it was all a wash 'cause I could see positive things come out of this thing too, as well as the negative. And it's a good thing. So sometime, you got to pay the price in order to get some things you want. And I feel like we have accomplished a lot. It's still a long ways to go, but we have accomplished a lot as people. Not as black, not as white, not as Asian, or Greek, or whatever. But, as a people, we have accomplished a lot. And I hope that they continue to do so. And, we all know, the church plays a very, very important part in how things go. Because they say that once a country loses its moral fibers, then it's doomed for destruction. But, as long as we have that on our side--you know, the moral fibers--we will always be around. But once that goes,

that's it. We will fall. And then like I say, I know you probably heard this term too, about "Oh, we the second Rome." Have you?

JS: I have not, not really no.

AM: The reason why they ask this question, "Are we the second Rome?" What was the most mighty, most powerful empire, ever? The Roman Empire. [knock on the door] Uh oh.

JS: Alright Mr. McIver, we'd like to thank you for your time. Is there any closing remarks you'd like to make?

AM: Well, I think I just about summed it up just now when I was telling you about Second Rome--was the mightiest empire to ever rule the world, from Africa to Scotland for almost a thousand years. Now, let's see, is the United State the Second Rome? Because we are the most powerful nation on earth now. And we have a lot of things going on all over the world. Now the difference between Rome and the United States is our moral fiber. You keep those going and we will be successful. We won't fall like Rome did. And, just like (1:47:44) integration and so forth, in the end--. And then you know about the Mexicans coming into our border and so forth. The United States has always been like a beacon for other people in other parts of the world. That's why up there in New York, the people came from different parts of the world through Ellison Island [sic. Ellis Island] and my people came in through Charleston. But, yeah, we were in slave ships stacked in layers and lot of us died in transport. But now we here, let's make the best of it. What happened in the past, happened in the past. Sure, you gonna use the past to study where we come from in order to focus on where we want to go. So use that as--. How you should say it? A method of guiding us through these things, 'cause we

went through a lot and we'll go through a lot. But, as long as we try to stick together and do it as a people, we will be very successful. That's my two cent worth. [laughter]

JS: Alright. Well, thank you Mr. McIver. We really appreciate it. And that concludes our interview with Mr. Albert McIver, Jr.

AM: Right.

AS: Thank you very much for taking time out of your day to do this with us.

**End of Interview**

Transcribed by Joshua Sipe and Alexander Szymanski, December 6, 2014

Edited by Katie Fisher, February 19, 2015

Edited by Laura Puaca, March 15, 2015