

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

LAWRENCE RIDGLE
JUNE 9, 1999

ROUVEROL: This is Alicia Rouverol of the Southern Oral History Program. Today's date is June 9th 1999. And I'm interviewing Lawrence Ridgle, Jr.--Sarge is his nickname—in Durham, North Carolina. This is part of the New Immigrants project for the Listening for a Change project at the Southern Oral History Program. And this is my tape number 6999SR.1. And we'll be picking up on where we left off last week.

I thought we'd start by going back and kind of filling in a couple of things that I had questions on or that I wasn't clear on. When you talked about the men on the porch working in the neighborhood, they were making like bands to go around the outside of the barrels? Is that right?

RIDGLE: Umm-hmm. To secure the barrel, you know. They put a top in it and then they have to have something to squeeze the top tight to keep it from coming out. They have metal bands today. But in that day they had to make them by hand. It was hard work and didn't pay much.

AR: Now when you were talking about your dad working at American Tobacco—he worked in a storage house. Is that right?

LR: Umm-hmm.

AR: Now what kinds of jobs would have been available to him as an African American at that time.

LR: Well, at that time () he had one of the better jobs for blacks that were uneducated. And, in fact, the storage department was like--. I think they called it the

supply department. And downtown where they manufactured, actually manufactured the cigarettes, they didn't have any blacks in no positions.

I remember as a kid I used to go down there and where they make the cigarettes, the machine that made the cigarettes, blacks couldn't work in there. Only white ladies worked up there and fix-its, guys that fixed the machine when it malfunctioned or something. And I used to go—it used to be so hot in that factory because--.

In fact, my sister worked down there. In fact, the American Tobacco Company used to be like a family orientated job. When they needed somebody to work they didn't necessarily like go to the employment office or put out some kind of, put it in the paper or something. They asked people on the job, "Have you got a child or you got somebody in your family that needs a job?" So everybody that used to work there until the union got there it was more or less—everybody was kin.

But blacks in the manufacturing department where the cigarettes were actually made, they did not work. There were some jobs like getting the tobacco ready to be processed for manufacturing. Now they had one or two guys and those were exclusive jobs that you could get because they used to put rum and a real good smelling syrup—they used to put it in the tobacco. They had a mix. They would mix it and then toast it before it would go to the machines to be put into a cigarette. And they had about two or three fellows that I can remember that kept those jobs and retired from them. Now those were the best jobs.

The blacks down there, they did all the manual labor like getting the tobacco off the box cars, off of the trucks and before they got thrashing machines, they used to have hundreds of women. They worked on the line there. Tobacco would come in after it had

been re-dried and they would have to take the stems up with their hands. And they had long conveyor belts with women on both sides. And it was almost like a slave house. They had a young white foreman. And they would build a platform in between these belts. And these guys walked up and down that belt pushing people. And they didn't line the (). They couldn't go get a drink of water. They did give them like one break in the morning and one break in the afternoon. And the rest of the time they push, push, push.

It's so hot in there. It was so hot in there that everybody would be wet with sweat. And as a kid I used to go down there to visit and I don't think-- Well, they used to call it the American Tobacco Company. They used to call it the slave house because they really—the people had to work just like machines to keep up with the machines. And it was a very hot and humid in there. And mostly there were women.

And when I got a job down there years later-- In fact, I was always big and I was strong because I played sports and stuff. And my daddy got me a job. I must have been about thirteen, but I was big. And the place that we had to work it was doing what they called the tobacco season, which starts around, I guess about-- Well they start coming in from Georgia—tobacco starts coming in about, I guess, about June, maybe May—late May or June. And they work a season up to about Christmas. And you talking about hard work.

They didn't have motor lifts. And the tobacco that came in from Georgia it came on a boxcar, big trucks. And, you know, tobacco is perishable and you've got to rush to get it--a certain moisture you have to get out of it or it will rot—before you put it in them barrels. And we used to get that stuff, man, them sheets.

Oh, them sheets weighed three hundred pounds. And we used to stack them up to a twenty-foot ceiling. And because I was young, and strong and eager to work, the older guys—which blacks always do. A young guy comes in, they don't like sort of show him, you know, show him the ins and outs out a job. They'll try to break his back. And I didn't know it. You know, that two people were picking up the sheet. That if I pick this side and I pick up first, I just turned the wheel over there. And when you pick up you'll pick up the whole thing, I just guide it. And that's what they used to do to me. I worked down—my daddy worked down there forty-seven years. My sister worked down there forty-four years.

AR: Wow.

LR: I think I worked about four days. Yeah, I quit. It was just too hard for me. And the heat—your shoes would get full of water, you know. And they didn't know nothing. And the foreman—they stayed, they worked about an hour and another guy would come. He'd go back and change shirts and stuff and come back maybe another hour later. But they didn't stay in that building but one hour at a time. But the blacks, they stayed down there all day. And when the union came motor lifts—I think the thrashing machine came from England somewhere—way, way big. Manufactured them or invented them. They put about—in both factories () they put about three thousand women in the street who had been working there for years.

AR: Wow. You mean once the thrashing machines came in.

LR: Yeah.

AR: Yeah.

LR: Stemming machine, thrashing machine. There was—I remember in poor neighborhoods black women that had jobs at the American and at Liggett-Myers—they wore—they even had uniforms they used to wear. And I thought there were—. They used to wear these baby type bonnets. It was almost like a nurse's cap. They were starched, and ironed and stood up. And they wore—I forgot the color of the uniforms. I believe it was blue and white. But they were always starched and they stood up like they might have had crinoline slips or something under them—and big white aprons.

And everybody—I used to hear men talk. If you wanted a girlfriend, you had to get you one of those American Tobacco women or one of those Liggett-Myers women. That was the thing. And they were kind of—I think that was the first ever I saw women trying to be independent because they were making the same money as men were making, black men.

AR: What time period was this?

LR: This had to be forties, late thirties, early forties. Like, well, even up to the war because the union was just getting started and they were having problems. Like R. J. Reynolds, who was a leading tobacco person in what they called Tobacco Road. But he never had a union and still doesn't have one today. R. J. promised his people if they don't get a union he would give them as much or more that union people got and he did. R. J. Reynolds was good to his people like that. All those people are—they started the profit sharing and that type thing. He used to give nice bonuses that () because they sold more cigarettes than anybody else.

But, like my sister, she's got a hell of a success story. She didn't even finish high school because Alfonso came along. And she went down there to work. My daddy got

her a job downtown. And her job was, she cleaned up the white lady—you know they had different bathrooms. She cleaned up the white ladies' bathroom. That was her job. And she worked down there, I guess, a couple of years. And she started cleaning up the office.

See my father had been working there a long time when she came along. And he knew a lot of people and a lot of people respected my father because he never missed a day in forty-seven years. And he was a hard worker. He did what they told him and he did it right. And a lot of people knew him. And if he went down there and asked for you a job, you pretty well were going to get it. So because of my father () started cleaning up the office. But to make a long story short, she was the first black person to pack a cigarette.

AR: Really?

LR: To work as a packer. She was the first black person that they picked for a hostess. And later—they don't (). They give them nice uniforms. They give them a little money to get their hair fixed, buy shoes, stockings so they can look the part as a representative for the company. And they furnished them a nice little suit and they'd just take tours. They just keep their fingernails and their face clean. And they take tours through the factory. And, of course, they had to learn about the different () of the factories and all that.

AR: Boy, I bet she had a wealth of knowledge.

LR: And, then I think she got some more (), too, because the factory manager at that time—before the union came. See they used to let guys---they'd take guys and send them out to their houses to cut their grass or do different things for them.

AR: Outside of the factories and things, yeah.

LR: They'd come and punch in at the factory and they'd send them out to the house to work. Well, my sister—the manager—she cashed all of his checks, she got his car cleaned, she'd get his car clean, she went shopping with his wife, had the wife clean her house. Met his mother. His mother fell in love with her. And then they made him superintendent of the whole Durham operation.

Then the union came in. And his mother came to the factory one day. She just wanted to mosey around and see what--. I don't know whether she'd ever been inside to see them manufacture. But she came down and it was raining real hard. And my sister saw her and she got an umbrella, and went out to the car and got her. And his mother—they really hit it off after that. She used to call--she used to go out to his mother's house. So when they said that they're going to have to put black in management, his mother told him, said, "You'd better do something for Katherine." And she got bricks like that. And she was the first black foreman.

AR: Really?

LR: Umm-hmm. In the factory.

AR: So the first black foreman was a woman not a man.

LR: Umm-hmm, yeah.

AR: I was wondering about women's positions there versus—African American women's positions versus men.

LR: And you see what this () she became night manager of the whole factory.

AR: Wow.

LR: Black people in this town call her a slave driver.

AR: They called her a slave driver?

LR: They still do. But she had—she—not because she was my sister, but from experiences of being in the service and then being in the penitentiary and seeing how people run things, she was no nonsense. You know, when you punched the clock she said, “You’re on American Tobacco time. They pay you to work an hour. I expect you to work an hour.” And she had the reputation—on a shift I think each machine had to do fifty-eight thousand cartons per shift. She could get more than that out of her people.

And any time they had a big rush order they’d give it to her, you know, because she could get it done. And for that a lot of blacks said that she was an Oreo cookie. She thought she was white. She’s been brainwashed. But I wasn’t there and I don’t know how much of that is true.

But I know this. I know how she is today. And I’ve been knowing her all her life. She’s very reluctant to lie. My daddy would not lie. And she tries to pattern herself after my father. She won’t tell you no lie. If she tells you she’s going to do something, she will do it. You can put your Bible on it. But if she says, “No”, you can just forget about it. Now I know plenty of people who worked for her—even today and she’s been retired for some years—she still has people bring her cakes. This one lady makes her bourbon balls that they make for Christmas ever since I can remember. This lady still—and she’s got to be eighty some years old.

AR: And these are people that worked with her at American Tobacco?

LR: Mostly white people though. She’s got lots of white friends that have farms and things. They pick beans and corn and stuff like that. And all the time they just come and bring it to her. Her birthday meant cakes, pies, presents. So she couldn’t have

been all bad. [Laughter] But a lot of blacks have talked—not knowing her to be my sister—have said things about her in front of me.

AR: That's interesting. Ambivalent feelings, probably.

LR: Umm-hmm. And she's helped a lot of blacks because during this drug thing she was instrumental in () not firing people because they were addicts. They would send them away to Richmond or a place up there to some kind of drug rehabilitation. The company would pay for it and their jobs would be ready when they came back. And she saved quite a few fellows like that.

And then blacks have a tendency to believe that—because I know. I lost my first stripes in the Army trying to be a good guy, you know. I had a fellow that worked in my section. In fact, he was smarter than me. Because we had to break down our—we actually in garrison we got all of the rations for our platoon and then we had to break them down according to company, you know, how many men they had. And I used to have a little shellac calculator that I used. That it would take me, shoot, an hour and a half to two hours to do it on paper, to break the rations down according to how many men you have. And then when we'd go get it in there you could look and see what this company was supposed to get and what that company was supposed to get.

But this little kid, I saw him every morning and early at night. [Chair squeaking.] I'd be working () later. He'd look over my shoulder and he'd say, "Man why are you wasting all that time?" I said, "What? Can you do it better?" He said, "Yeah." I got up. He sat down. It must have done in twenty minutes the whole battalion. I checked with the () might be a half a pound or a pound.

AR: Is that something [chair squeaking] ().

LR: That's got to be out front.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

AR: You were saying about those slide calculations.

LR: You know like I try to be so precise. Like they had to have seventy-five pounds of potatoes. I would give them seventy-five pounds. But he would—if they came a hundred pounds in a bag, you know, if he had seventy-five, “Why don't we just give them a hundred pounds this time” and remember it. And the next time somebody else would get the little extra. It worked out real fine.

And he became my right hand man. He did all my paperwork for me. And really, I got real lazy down there. But I was getting all the food, all the fruit and everything. I got me a big twenty-gallon pot and we had all the ice and everything. I'd make big pots of lemonade. We had cold cuts over in our section. We would hardly eat in the mess hall. And I just sat down and got fat and a little bit on the lazy side because I wasn't--.

I had come from an airborne unit where we exercised and would run and stuff every day. And we called people—those jumpers, we called them legs. And this was a leg outfit. And the airborne thing, all the other outfits are lazy and we were.

And this guy, I got him promoted. I got him two stripes. And he really took care of my job. All I had to do was just check and see was it done. So I started going to town with him. We used to go to a little town, Hineville, Georgia, down in Savannah. Hineville was very, very prejudiced. And, in fact, () as it is today was () back then.

Our fence was right in that little town. So we cut a hole through the fence. And when you didn't have a pass you'd go through the hole. So me and this guy, him and I had met two sisters. They—we went to their house one night. We were over there

drinking, listening to music. About twelve thirty, I said, "Man, I'm going to go back to camp." I said, "Come on. Let's go." He said, "I'll be on. I'm going to come through the hole." So I said, "Okay, I'm going on back." So I came on back to camp and went to sleep. Next morning at reveille he wasn't there. So I knew he was over at this girl's house, or these girls' house. So it was my duty to report him.

AR: Oh, woah.

LR: But the Army has a way that you can report a man and he don't necessarily have to be there. You can say, "All present and accounted for." So I get slick and said, "All present and accounted for." I didn't know that being accounted for you had to be on the reservation.

AR: Oh.

LR: And he wasn't on the reservation, but I went on and reported him present. Then I had another guy that knew about the hole. I sent him through the hole. He knew where the house was. I said, "You go get Starr and tell him to get here." So he went and was gone about twenty minutes. And he came back and said, "He's over there, but he won't come." He was about drunk. So I said, "I'd better go get him." So I went through the hole, told the guys to cover for me. I got there. He wasn't there. They'd done got in a car and gone downtown to the () about thirty-five miles away.

AR: Wups.

LR: Now I go back to camp. I know he's going to come back to camp. But I said, "I'll just call for him today." He went downtown and got picked up by the MPs that morning. And the military police like everything else, they'd have him on the Army post and off the Army post that have any kind of contributions to the Army.

They got a little piece of paper that came down from headquarters--every outfit--called the "daily distribution." He gets picked up by the MPs. The MPs give it to headquarters that he was downtown without a pass early in the morning and working out. And it came down to our battalion commander at noon. It came down every noon, the daily distribution. He looks in there and here's a soldier from his outfit downtown. Now he checked the morning report.

AR: Oops.

LR: Everybody was present and accounted for. He called my commander. His name was Calhoun. He said, "Calhoun? All your people present?" He said, "Yes." He said, "One of your men's downtown. The MPs got him." "Oh, that's in Sargent Ridgle's section. Well let me check that, sir." Now he calls me. He was a good guy. He was airborne, too. We were sent down there to train these guys. So I told him exactly what happened—that buddy-buddy thing—which was a bad decision.

AR: [Laughs] Bad decision.

LR: He said, "But, I can understand it." He said, "But when you play, you've got to pay." So the () commander was an officer that was-- He was a reserve officer that's been called back on duty for about—they had a two year obligation. And he really didn't want to be there. And he tried to talk to the battalion commander. The battalion commander said, "No. I want his head."

So then he tried to cross the battalion commander. He said, "Man. That man wanted to give you a court martial." "We need to have a special court martial, which other than that, he said, you're going to be reduced, and probably fined. And if they reduce you low enough, you're going to get some hard labor." So he said, "Well—" he

was airborne, I was airborne. This guy's somebody from the street. He said, "I'm going to try to block it. I'm going to give you an Article 15." That's when the commander can punish you for something. So he gave me a seven-day restriction. And seven days to do extra detail. Any fellow that was on extra detail, I would have to supervise. But the battalion commander would not go for it. He said, "No." He rescinded that order, that Article 15. And stuck me up for a court martial.

AR: Oh my gosh.

LR: And that got stopped. It came in later that day. He wouldn't even speak to me. I saw him when he came in. He avoided me. So I went to his bed. I said, "Man, why didn't you come when I sent for you?" He said, "I don't know man. I was just drunk." He said, "To tell you the truth, I don't know why I didn't come." I said, "Boy you know you got me messed up. I was trying to protect you." I said, "I reported you present." () "You the fool." He said, "I could have been dead." He said, "You should have reported me out." And I should have.

You know it's a good thing to cover for your buddy, but you've got to cover yourself first. And I think that's the kind of thing they saw in my sister down there. She had a production to do. They expected certain things out of her. And sometimes those people, you know, the machines the way I understand it, you don't have to do nothing to them but just keep them loaded. And sometimes when they've malfunctioned, you can just move a little thing, you know, to, you know, get back on track. But if are talking up there to another machine--. So she made people stay on their machine, the ones with machines.

AR: Would she have been supervising both black and white workers?

LR: Black and white, yeah.

AR: The battalion you were in--. I know you were in an all black battalion when you were working as a paratrooper. Was this all black?

LR: Yeah. This was the 452. See they didn't integrate. They had--. In fact, I was one of the first ones selected to do what they call token integration. They sent five of us to different outfits, just one man per company. In fact, the 87th Airborne division was the first one that tried integration in 1951. They did token integration to see how it would work. They got some nasty reactions.

But in 1952 it was mandated by the president that all units in the armed forces would be at least fifteen percent black. And that's when they really started integration in 1952. And that was a horse of another color.

I've had white guys to tell me they weren't going to do what a nigger said. Yeah. They just weren't going to do it. Especially if there are two or three of them and you're by yourself where you ain't got no witness. They say some nasty things.

But I was a pretty good soldier. And I did some nasty things to them, too. When I caught one of them kind of guys, any time—we used to have. Excuse the expression. There are a whole lot of details that come up in the Army that's called shit details. Them kind of guys, when the shit detail came up, they were the shit all the time. I used to see them milling around after duty hours. And if either one of those nasty guys in one of those nasty groups, I'd find something for them to do. I'd make them police the area and pick up all the cigarette butts. I'm behind them looking hard with a magnifying glass trying to find anything that doesn't grow. If I find something, they've got to go back through. If I find something that time, they crawl through.

AR: So you're a pretty hard liner.

LR: I am. Yes. I was romping, stomping. And I felt, I felt that the Army just a little bit, I felt that the Army wasn't quite treating black non-commissioned officers right because one time in the communication section I had--.

When you go out--. We didn't have () what they call (). Radios was all they had. And they had these little sound () telephones. But you had to string wire for that. And when you did that, when you go out on maneuvers or practices and you carried that wire, you might string it far as from here to Duke hospital. And then when you get it up and bring it back down otherwise it had to be clean. It had to be oiled. It's got to be put on a big spool straight. And you do all this before anybody goes on pass. You can just forget about pass until we get our communications stuff cleaned up.

The guys would want to half do it—roll it up on the reel or either unroll it. And one guy—this is one of the guys who told me he wasn't going to do what no nigger sergeant said—I went to my commander and I told him. And I told him I wanted him court martialed. He told me to go think about it and come back. He said, "I'll see you in the morning. And if you still feel that way we'll see what we can do."

The next morning I was still smoking because he did it before my whole section. And if I let him get away with this, I can't run the section. So this is what I told the company commander the next morning. He said, "Well let me give him a reprimand." I said, "I don't want him to have no reprimand." I said, "I want him court martialed." And he wouldn't do it.

And then I started looking at him. And in his office he flew the rebel flag above the U. S. flag. And then I got to thinking all kinds of thoughts on some things that he had

done. I might have misread them. But I read them into he was a redneck. And the way I got the man court martialled, I went to the IG office, inspector general. And I saw a colonel and I told him what had happened. He drew up the court martial papers, and sent them down to the company and directed my company commander to serve them.

[Laughs]

AR: That's great. What year was that in?

LR: This had to be about '50 or '51.

AR: Wow. That's great.

LR: No. This was '51 because--no it might have been '52 because we had integration. And see what they did in black outfits--we had a nuclear of NCOs. And when they integrated they might send one NCO here and maybe fourteen privates.

AR: And what's an NCO?

LR: Non-commissioned.

AR: Non-commissioned, okay.

LR: And, actually, NCOs, believe it or not, run the service, not the general and if NCOs cannot get along then the NCOs are not being affected. And when we first went to those outfits--. Like they made me a section leader in a white outfit. Well, they already had a section leader but he had to go. Now they're mad at me because I took his job. I broke up their little nuclear. So you had that to work for--

AR: Man. So you really broke some boundaries there.

LR: Sure.

AR: Yeah. Sounds like both you and your sister really broke through.

LR: In a different way, yeah. And I was overseas and I thought, you know, we'll go to combat. And I tell black guys this. And sometimes I put a little shivy and put a little yeast in it. [Laughs] But—and I had come to the conclusion that whites weren't ever going to treat blacks right.

We were dying—and we were dying together. We stayed on alert. We were the only airborne outfit in the Far East. We had the original combat team over there. And we were gung ho because we were the only airborne unit in the Far East. And our jobs were like specialty jobs.

When they called an airborne attack there's something very bad and something needs to be done real quick. And I guess we kind of liked that title. You know, we can fix anything. We're behind enemy lines to its flanks. We can get there and be ready to do business in eighteen seconds. And I was kind of proud of that.

And we stayed on alert so therefore, in combat you watch my back, I'll watch your side. If you don't know what's on your left and your right at all times in combat, you've got a good chance you're going to get killed. And these guys knowing this and they still had that black and white thing over there.

Christmas of 1954 in a little town called Barpoo, Japan—they had one of the biggest race riots that they've had. And for the next five or six months a black couldn't go into town by himself. And if the blacks caught a white by himself, they would molly-wop him. So you had to go in groups. And I wrote to the inspection general in Washington, D. C. about the situation because it was escalating.

AR: Was this in the military?

LR: Yes, during the Korea War. And General Westmoreland had just come there and nothing. I wouldn't even go to headquarters with it because I never liked General Westmoreland. He used to be my battalion commander at Fort Bragg. We called him "Cold Ben Willy."

And so I wrote to Washington. But the inspector general to the Far East intercepted the letter. And I'm thinking I'm going to hear from Washington and I get--a couple, three weeks later, I think I'm going to hear from Washington any day. And one day I came in from lunch, the man told me to put on a Class A uniform and go to headquarters, which was General Westmoreland's office. I said, "Well, what is this?" Because sometimes they pick a guy and they want you to be an orderly or something. And behind him telling me to put on a Class A uniform, necktie and all that stuff, I said, "He must be going to pick me for an orderly or something."

But I found out when I got there it was a full colonel. I forget his name. He was from the inspector general's office in Tokyo. And he called me and told me who he was and why he was there. He said, "That letter that you sent to Washington, I intercepted it." He said, "I wish you would have directed it to me." He said, "Now if you want—if you just must send it to Washington, I will forward it." But, he said, "I wanted to talk to you first."

He said, "You know the army has just gotten integrated and we expected a lot of trouble." He said, "Washington's got their hands full of all kind of domestic and foreign things." He said, "And I'm over here to try and straighten out things like this and I wish you'd give me a shot at it." He said, "Now I want you to document all the complaints

that you've got." And all of the complaints that I gave him, which was a few, he straightened this out in my company.

AR: So he did follow through on his word then?

LR: Yes. They were skipping black guys for promotion. I mean doing obvious things. Black guys get beat up downtown and they don't even have any medical report of it. And they report every time you take an aspirin in the Army. And after that I said, "These guys just ain't going to treat you right."

And downtown, the girls, the Japanese people, they told them different-- I've had Japanese ask me, "Do all black women in the United States have hair like yours?" And I took out some pictures and showed them. And they said, "Ah. I see. Do all black people work in white people's houses in America—do domestic work?"

And the bar that the whites frequent-- Of course, they had country/western music in it and would not allow rhythm and blues there. And the cabarets and the things in Japan, the Japanese women as a whole, when you come in they'd be like hostesses. You'd sit down. They'd come right to your table. They'd sit down with you. They'd get drinks. Light your cigarette, keep your glass filled and do anything else you wanted them to do.

But in the bar that the whites frequented, the Japanese girl would come and take—she'd stand back with your glass and move back. You know, make you feel real uncomfortable. So they had some predominant black bars that had plenty of rhythm and blues and that type thing and the treatment was just the opposite. And that was because white guys had really told them that if they messed with black guys they weren't going to bother with them.

And a lot of those people wanted some tickets back to the United States. And white guys were married. Them young boys over there-- Their average age, I guess, was about twenty. They were going downtown marrying those girls. So the Army had to put out an order that they couldn't marry without the Army's approval. [Laughter] And if they did do it in a Japanese ceremony, they wouldn't get support from the Army.

AR: I'm going to have to flip this take real quick.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

LR: The first time when I went to Korea, they got something they called Gyraz. That's when they would put a whole division of men on one ship. They don't usually do that. And, in fact, they just started doing that in '53. And they had a basic training outfit who had went and had a what they call advance infantry training. And they sent them right overseas, the whole division. And most of those guys came to our outfit, to my outfit. And they were young. And some of them, I think, hadn't experienced women too much. And the Japanese women, they were—they'd make you think you were a god. How they wait on a man, adhere to every desire that he had. And those guys had never had treatment like that and they wanted to marry those girls. () they wanted to marry them. And the Army had to stop them. [Laughter]

AR: That's a good story. Well, this is great stuff. You know, I think, when Felicia comes to interview you I think she's going to want to talk more about the time in the military because I think there's a lot of rich material. I kind of-- And it, you know, again connects to this race relation stuff. I have a couple of other questions about picking up from last time. What is that when you were talking about Duke and Duke backing,

NC Mutual and a lot of other black institutions in Durham? Some people have said that, you know, Marquette and the support—that he was a successful enough businessman that he built the folks, you know, that he's working—

LR: Ed ()

AR: Yeah. Are the first, the first, very first—that he was—

LR: Well, it was three men: Merit, Moore and McDougal. They had some money but they didn't have that kind of money. They had to get some help even to get, I don't know what kind of license or bond or what you had to have to make an insurance company. But they couldn't have done it without some help. Yeah, they done it. But not knowing precisely the help could only have come from somebody like the Dukes.

The Dukes have helped the black community not—in stuff like education. That Warren Library down there, Duke had something to do with that. They had put out-- The Dukes have put out a lot of money to do things that were for general type things, you know. And people didn't see it directly coming to them. Like the library, which everybody should have a library-- But if you don't go to school, what are you building a library for? But it didn't benefit a lot of people like my father because he couldn't read nor write, you know. So they couldn't see those kind of benefits.

Central was a bunch of bull, wooden buildings. The Dukes intervened. And they do it quietly. I think they named a dormitory or some building, Annie B. Duke, or something like that. They've got two or three things down in Central that the Dukes allowed them to put. But old man Washington Duke, he didn't want to publicize that kind of stuff.

AR: So you're saying a lot of stuff went on but it wasn't out in the open or out front?

LR: No, no. And then a lot of people took credit. You had some blacks that took a lot of credit for things that they did. And I think—

AR: Interesting.

LR: North Carolina Mutual, even though those three guys started it, they couldn't even hardly sell no damn policies. Black folks weren't buying no policies from no black person. They couldn't see the money. And somebody had helped those people, you know. And I don't what it would take to get a bank, but I don't believe they could have gotten a bank by themselves. [Laughter]

AR: Right, right. It's kind of what I was expecting you might say, actually, as I was thinking about this. What about when we were talking about how—we were talking about Abe Shaw and that, you know, the hattery business and how he got moved to Tent City, I guess, you were saying and then never got relocated, which was pretty common. What about-- You said something about, "... but then they built that Heritage Square." What do you think about this Heritage Square that got built.

LR: Tokenism. It couldn't-- The whole Heritage Square couldn't accommodate one—I'd say one-fourth of the business the blacks had. And then they did that twenty-five years later, or thirty. And a lot of the people that they put out of business was dead. And—

AR: So kind of too little too late?

LR: Yeah.

AR: Yeah.

LR: I think they just through that up for, you know, we promised to do something so we're going to do this.

AR: Yeah, yeah. What do you know about that Haytie Development Corporation that was—I think they were behind that organization. You know behind the Heritage Square.

LR: It was in the paper this morning. There have been a lot of people—excuse me just a minute.

AR: Sure.

[Mr. Ridgle moves away from the microphone.]

AR: Can I go ahead and pause this?

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

LR: I read a lot about that Haytie. I've heard the name. I put it on the same--. And this is just me. I put it on the same plane with that Durham business and special team that they came up with years ago. It sounds good but they don't do nothing. And when you really look into it you find out that the people are lining their own pockets and things. There's affordable housing thing. It's in the news now. The city loaned them some money to—

AR: Is this the Rolling Hills thing?

LR: Yeah.

AR: Yeah, yeah.

LR: And they are eight hundred and some thousand dollars behind on their bill. They haven't built--. The buildings look like they haven't built half the buildings that

they were supposed to build. And if they were affordable from what I can hear from the people, they don't have any affordable prices.

AR: They seem pretty high, those prices for affordable housing.

LR: And I think developers, lawyers, even city councilmen and everybody, you know, everybody wet their beak. And I think that a lot of the things that they come up with like United Durham was supposed to have been a black organization to help black people. They ain't helped black people do nothing.

Those people have got the monies that they could get out of it initially and then (). You hear about it, but what are they doing? Like Mekisick, Florence Mekisick, he came out a champion for the blacks.

I used to truly admire that man. He was the first black lawyer that I saw in the courts and I've had some brushes in that court. He's the first black lawyer that I saw in the courtroom that acted like he knew his way around in the black room. They used to have black lawyers. It was just downtown. You'd tell a black lawyer, "Sit down." A lawyer couldn't plead a case. The very best that a black lawyer could do once one time--

We had a lawyer here. His name was Gates. He was one of the most—as far as law was concerned he might have been on the same page with Chamberlain down there. He really knew Constitutional law and what have you. But he couldn't do nothing in the courtroom. The judge used to disrespect him.

When I saw Florence Mekisick get up he was dressed the part. He looked like a lawyer. He acted like a lawyer. He talked like the courtroom was his. I said, "Boy, we got a champion () Florence Mekisick." And he won a lot of cases.

And then, like so many of our people, he got hooked up with this. He was going to build a () by Hennison and call it a--. I forgot. I'll come up with the name in a minute. But he was going to build a big, big housing area where--. In this housing area all the stores and things that they needed, cars wouldn't be able to come up in there, you know. It was going to be safe for children. It was a city, Soul City.

AR: Right.

LR: He was going to build. And he just did like everybody else. He got all those big grants and stuff and did some tokenism work out there and then it folded. And he lined his pockets with plenty of money.

AR: So—

LR: Ain't nobody for real. And if you watch most anything that they do, it might start off with a bang. But then you look at it and it ain't nothing.

AR: What do you attribute that to, I mean beyond greed because you've been talking about lining the pockets.

LR: Greed.

AR: Is there some other--. I mean why is it that the African American elite are failing the working class blacks?

LR: Well to put it mildly, we have an old saying that trying to outdo the Joneses, you know.

AR: Umm-hmm.

LR: Really getting more because it's there, getting more than they need. Why in the hell does a person need five automobiles when he can't drive but one? Everybody

got three and a-half cars, you might say, in Durham. Even the Spanish guys. They done come over here and picked up the same thing. Got plenty of cars, homes.

You know, here's a man and wife and he wants a four or five bedroom split level house. He ain't got no kids or nothing. Why do they want such a big house? I think people have done got caught up in things so much. And what made Durham great--and I know this to be a fact--was the blacks used to be together. And there's a lot of things that separated them. And the blacks are just as much at fault or more at fault than the white.

AR: Interesting.

LR: They are because they could have--. That man down there that had the printing shop that prints the *Carolina Times*, they didn't make him move. St. Joseph Church, they wouldn't move for that highway. They could have carried the highway out--and the highway doesn't serve that much. I mean it's a good thing and a lot of people use it. But Durham could have done without that expressway on 40. They could have had a ramp coming off somewhere. They've got ramps all up and down, you know, 40 keeps right on. And on that east/west expressway, they could have come down Austin Avenue.

AR: Yeah.

LR: They put all those people out of business. And a few people had homes. Look what they did for Fayetteville Street. I was on there yesterday and it's pitiful. Fayetteville Street is like a ghost town. That was the black people's Mecca, you know. When you went down Fayetteville Street, I don't care who you were, if you were black, you felt a little different, you know. The people that lived there, the blacks kind of

aspired to them, you know, kind of looked up to them. Now it's dope infested. All the people that lived there that could have made a difference, they've moved out.

AR: So they did their own version of white flight? They just—

LR: Sure. They moved to--. Some of them are living out here—what's this out--. Well some of them are living out in Hope Valley North they call it. A few are living in Crowsdale. Out here off Ritter Road I forgot what this—I forgot what they call that area.

But they had real expensive houses out there because me and my wife went out there and was trying to buy one. And this was quite a few years ago. And they were talking about a hundred and ten, a hundred and twenty thousand dollars then. And that wasn't even heard of in that day. And blacks () just moved out.

And I feel like that Durham--. Another thing that starved Durham like in the Army days, the esprit de corps. You want to compete, but you don't want to--. You want to do better, but you don't want to push this man down just so you can do better. They call that esprit de corps. You know, give a man a () but do your best to get what you want, you know, without hurting him. And Durham didn't do that.

The white I feel like when they came through with urban renewal they were going to do it. The worse thing that happened to Durham. No, the worst thing that happened to Durham was welfare. And nobody ain't going to tell me this thing wasn't thought out and aimed at you because when you help a person you want to know how long am I going to have to help him.

I ain't no genius and considered by some to be dumb. But if I'm going to help you I've got to know how long do I have to do this. How long am I willing to do this?

When they came out giving out those checks for the unwed mothers and food stamps they just stole a lot of money. Why? To help them or take care of them? Well why do you want to take care of somebody that's perfectly able and can take care of himself?

I came up with the idea that about three or four generations that we've had, we've had welfare. We've had—we've got a generation of people who have never done no more than wait for the welfare check. That's why they don't want to work now. They never seen their mother and father go to work.

That's why I love this community here. All the grown people in this community when I was a kid had a job. I don't care if it was dumping garbage. Every evening at four thirty, five o'clock you'd just sit on your porch and see Mrs. So and So. "There comes Mrs. So and So from work. There's Mrs. So and So coming from work." Everybody was coming from work. So children were inspired that work is a part of life.

But now we've got three or four generations of kids—their mother—they've never even seen their mother and daddy go to work. And I don't think that just happened. I don't believe that just happened.

Why would the government throw—give away so much money? And after getting so many complaints about the misuse of the money. But they still continue. Now they've got a bunch of fools out here that don't know anything about work, won't go to school.

And here comes the Spanish to the rescue. They don't need us no more. In another ten years they won't need blacks to do the type jobs that were set aside for () people. And blacks happen to be a majority in that category. Now here come the

Spanish. They're taking all the jobs, all the grass cutting jobs, construction type jobs, service jobs, restaurant and stuff. You can see that they're multiplying in it every day. And they're doing it with a smile and they're doing a good job. They come to work on time. They work hard. And, really, ().

AR: What was that last part?

LR: The establishment wants their work done. And the Spanish people, really, I truly believe within the next five or ten years, the majority of blacks under thirty years old are going to be in the penitentiary.

AR: Because--?

LR: A lot of things. It ain't the drugs per se because the drugs—it had its uses, too. First they made us, through welfare, I think they made us unemployable.

AR: I think you talked about dependency before.

LR: Sure. Well why should I work? I've had girls tell me this. "I ain't going to work no where and flip no hamburgers for four dollars an hour, five dollars an hour. The welfare give me four hundred dollars a month. And I don't have to get up every morning or listen to somebody tell me to do this and do that." I've heard girls say, "I'd rather have me another baby and get me another four hundred dollars." Because they had that form, but if they hadn't have given it to them, they'd have got up off their butt and got it some kind of way, you know.

And then to compound it they come up with a new drug called crack. That's the worst thing that ever happened in the black neighborhood. Cocaine has been around since Leonardo DaVinci, since Nero. But it was so expensive and they controlled it so well to the people who's names were ().

No you could get a little bit in a Coca-Cola. But blacks didn't know better. We liked the Pepsi and RC. [Laughter] I think that's the reason they kept the little bitty Coke because everybody thinks bigger is better. And () didn't drink that little bitty Coke.

I used to be working up at () right there on Main Street and I used to know certain ladies that worked in the office—worked up in the court house. I worked at city newsstand. They had all the newspapers and magazines. And they used to come in in the morning, "Can I have a Coke and a BC?" I said, "Them folks sure drink them Cokes and BCs." Now I find out that the Coke had a little cocaine in it. [Laughter] And I truly believe-- I heard Kruschev say one time in the United Nations—he said he was going to bury America and don't fire a shot.

AR: He said he was what?

LR: He was going to bury America and wasn't going to fire a shot. The Ayotollah Khomeni over there—they say the Shah left there with all the Iranian money and brought it here to the United States. And I know it was in the newspapers and television. And the Ayotollah told the United States to give them their money back. And right after that we got something they call China white heroin that was killing folks. And they said it came directly from Iran. I know that all these Iranians coming over here and they're buying up all these convenience stores. In Fayetteville they're buying up all the motels and what have you. Where do they get their money from? And we know right here in Durham, we don't have to go no further, there's been several Iranian stores that have been hooked up with trafficking drugs.

AR: Really?

LR: Sure.

AR: So is that what you're thinking--? When you talk about crack and how crack has been—

LR: Well, we had a drug scene, you know, in the—well it's a whole lot of things. See the government, the government is responsible for a lot of this shit. See World War II, the government started using LSD. And nobody knew nothing about no LSD. They were trying to make—they were trying to make a real live Rambo to do exactly what he's told to do. And they thought they might could do it through mind altering chemicals, which was LSD.

The government introduced LSD. And like any other drug or any other thing, it can get out of hand. Somebody sees making profit. I knew the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill back in the late sixties, mid-sixties, brother, there was plenty of that stuff you call LSD over there. And it's known--they've admitted that the government brought LSD out.

Why in the hell did they let it get out of hand and get it in the hands of these kids? Believe it or not, drugs came to this town through the school system, through-- Well, I don't know about Duke. Duke didn't have-- I don't-- I can't say that Duke had a whole lot of drugs. I know they probably did. But I know one time the University of North Carolina and Central—if I had had a daughter in the early sixties I wouldn't have sent her to Central for nothing in this world because there were plenty of drugs.

In fact, drugs were introduced in Durham through Central in the black community. And those kids up in Chapel Hill-- I mean I know, I know the rich family in Chapel Hill. I mean they are influential. In fact, I met the lady that she was something

like the president of the state Democratic auxilliary. Her name is Mrs. McKay, prominent family in Chapel Hill. I met her—she was a good friend of Terry Sanford and I worked over in the mansion of Terry Sanford. And she used to come and bring tools. And I know she was somebody because of the way the governor's wife, Mrs. Margaret Rose, the attention that they gave Mrs. McKay. You know, the people that knew her that worked in the mansion, they rolled out the red carpet when she came.

AR: Is this McKane?

LR: McKay.

AR: M-C-K-A-Y?

LR: Right. They're prominent people in Chapel Hill, very prominent people. And she had a daughter named Kathy. She was going away to buy drugs back in the early sixties. And she drove a—what was that she drove? It's expensive--a Jaguar. She's a little rich white girl coming over here buying drugs. And I got to know her.

I was in my company at that time and did a lot of things that kept her from getting beat and maybe something worse happening to her. So she and I got to be friends. And then she told me her name was Kathy McKay. And I knew she was Chapel Hill and I knew she was rich. And I asked her about her mother.

Her mother's a real tall woman. She said, "That's my mother." And she asked her mother—she told her mother about me. And her mother said, "Yes, I remember him working out there at the mansion."

But those kind of people getting affiliated in drugs. And I don't know if she could have gotten raped over her, a whole lot of things could have happened to her, you know. But she was running around in Durham in a Jaguar. In fact she'd been to my house

several times when I lived across town. But then you've got people with that status, you know, that's the way our country sells stuff by taking people of means and letting them advertise it.

AR: It's really an astute point, yeah.

LR: And I think she--. You know she had some friends whose names I don't know because they caught them up there. They've got a house somewhere on a hill. It's something like a summerhouse or something. And it come up in the paper that they caught them up there. They had a bunch of LSD and they were raising—had a lot of reefer plants and stuff. But they swept that kind of--. But you see people of means doing something then low-class think, "It must be something. They're doing it." And especially younger people. I think drugs—I was introduced to drugs in 1947. Didn't but a very few people know it. And nobody didn't know I was messing around.

AR: What was the first drug you were exposed to?

LR: Heroin. And I was in the Army and they didn't know because drugs were cheap. You could spend a hundred dollars and have enough to last you a month. Then when people got greedy. Blow is something they tell me you're supposed to throw away anyway. They put that outlandish price on it. Then they criminalized it. I can't understand why.

I know one time England did—they legalized it for a while. I can't understand why they've got legalized drug places all around there, these old methadone clinics. They're worse than heroin. Methadone associates, people that I've talked to in therapeutic communities, and hospitals and things—they say methadone is one hundred times stronger than heroin. But they give it to the kids up here every morning, you know.

Do they want us to be like that? Are they trying to create a segment of the people that will always know that they're available for nothing? I know the Bible tells () with you. Are they trying to ensure that we stay poor by messing up our names, messing up our records? You can't get a good job. You can't participate in a lot of things if you've got a court record. And if you've got a drug record, they're testing you now for everything that you do.

AR: So you're saying that that's another way in which people get shut out.

LR: Sure.

AR: Yeah.

LR: Them drugs didn't--. The people that use drugs in this town—and most people in America—it's not NATO that maybe that crack and that kind of stuff did. But you take what they call the hard drugs. And all of it's hard as far as I'm concerned. But the hard drugs what they called is the king is heroin. It's not made in this country.

AR: What they call the what?

LR: The king, the king, heroin. They got a song about it. James Brown made a song about king heroin. He says—it says something about—"I came to this country without a passport." And it goes down to say a lot of things that are real true. It says, "If you pick me up I'll make a raving beauty forget her looks and a school boy forget his books." There's a real message in that song. But—and it's true.

And I don't know no common people that's got an airplane or ships. They say this stuff comes from the Far East, comes from Turkey. More of the beautiful women are supposed to be over there by Vietnam. They showed his picture on television. He's got an army where he still raises the poppy plant and makes the heroin.

AR: What was that last part? I missed that about it.

LR: The poppy plant?

AR: Yeah. You were saying.

LR: This guy is in Thailand. Is in Thailand and he's way up in the mountains in the government, he's got his own army. And this has been documented on television. And they say he's providing like two-thirds of all of the stuff that's in the world. And they can go-- And I know where they'd be an international incident if they would send those same bombers that they got in Kosovo and bomb that place up there where he's at. [Laughter]

AR: Well it's interesting because I've heard people in the black community say before—folks that I know out in California that, you know, the white man figures drugs and shootings are going to kill off the African Americans. That the whites don't have to kill them off, the blacks will kill off themselves. I don't know if you agree with that.

LR: I agree with a lot of it. But the drugs are just the icing on the cake to be sure that it happens. But it happened long before that. It goes back to welfare, food stamps.

See if you give me something, if you give me enough, I won't try to get nothing. And if you give it to me long enough you take something that nature gave me: a natural instinct to survive. Now all I have to do is look at you and I'm going to get what I need or what I can get by with. So you take something from me. And the government—and maybe they did it innocently. I would like to think that. But for forty years?

AR: I have always assumed it had to do with guilt because it's not just—welfare isn't just for blacks. It's for whites.

LR: Well, of course. When I say black, when I say black, believe it or not, they've got some white people—as far as the economy and what goes on—that's just as black as I am. We both ().

AR: Shut out.

LR: Yeah.

AR: Yeah.

LR: And the sooner poor whites learn that they are in the same boat—because a lot of them don't think they are-- See because the keeps-- You know that donkey? They tied a banana on his neck, and put a stick out there and put that banana. He goes walking to it. The poor whites still got that banana in front of their face. They think they're going to catch up with that banana. And some of them do just like some blacks. They come out of the ghetto. They get out of the mainstream of blacks and get up.

AR: So some people make it through but that's the minority.

LR: Yeah, very few, very few.

AR: What do you think is the alternate and better for African Americans or for lower class whites? I mean, if it's not welfare.

LR: Forget their differences. They had a guy and he was considered by people in Durham that know him as a hoodlum. He was vicious, and he was white and he came from east Durham. His name is Clayburn McGee.

Ask any white person over forty-five, fifty years old and they'll tell you about Clayburn McGee. The police department was afraid of him. I've seen him whup people right in the court house yard. The police walk right down and won't even say anything to him. He used to go up and down the street when they had beer parlors and things on

Main Street. He'd go down in and drink his beer and do what he want to and walk right out. Nobody wouldn't ask him for no money. [Laughter]

And when I remember when black folks couldn't go to east Durham. The poor whites down there they were doing their thing and didn't want no black people in there. Even the Western Union boy couldn't even deliver telegrams. When Western Union used to deliver on bicycles, they had to have one white boy—and they never had but one—that worked there delivering those telegrams. They had telegrams from east Durham.

But Clayburn came from east Durham. And he came right out of --. He was in school one Sunday, brought a bunch of rag tail white boys with him and we played sand block football. And we did every Sunday. And through playing that football we established a relationship with those guys. Clayburn McGee gave them an ultimatum. He said, "If any white man hit another black man in east Durham without a just cause he was going to have to answer to me." They ain't fought no more. East Durham, the first part of Durham where blacks and whites started mingling sexually.

AR: Hmm, interesting.

LR: But that one man did that. The churches couldn't do it. The courts couldn't do it. But he done it. I'm a living witness. I saw it. It's going to have to be something--.

And one thing, we got to start caring for each other. I don't mean giving people something. But just plain ass caring and being concerned. Like when I hurt, it's got to hurt you a little bit. And quit saying, "I ain't mean. I ain't got nothing to do with it."

Our police department is shameful. People who don't get connected with it, they can't see it. And they print so much shit in the paper about every little thing that's done. Now crime is going down, but not according to the newspaper, not according to the media, publicizes everything. And people that don't break the law, they can see us as being real lawless.

AR: As being real--?

LR: Lawless. You don't care nothing about the law and there's a lot of people that don't. [Telephone rings]

AR: I'll go ahead and pause this.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

AR: Turn this back on.

LR: And highest chains. () down there you see Albright community. This community over here, believe it or not, was called the country before they extended the city limits. This area has always been in the city limits. But it didn't look like it. There weren't half the houses that's over here in the surrounding area. And the people that lived here, especially the older people, they were very good people. And the kids that grew up over here, with the exception of a few, went to school, were very respectable. They knew how to say, "yes, ma'am" and "no, ma'am".

That was the thing that was—it was the unwritten law. A kid couldn't walk down the street and pass a grown person and didn't speak because if you did he'd tell your mama or your daddy if he didn't grab you himself and shake you. And you would get a whupping. [Telephone rings.]

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

AR: Okay. I'll turn this back on. So how have things changed in the neighborhood since you've been here?

LR: This used to be a quiet neighborhood. People didn't even drive through here. You never saw a car speed through here. Between eight and ten o'clock at night the only noise you would hear would be kids used to form right out here when this street was dirt. All the kids used to meet up on this corner at night and they'd play hide and go seek, play games, boyfriends meet little girlfriends thing. That little corner out there, that's the only noise you would hear until about ten o'clock. And then everybody had to go home and go to bed. People were very—had a lot of people over here that were very, very poor. But most people () but everybody around here knew what everybody was doing. Everybody probably knew what you had for supper last night, you know. Nobody tried to out dress each other. We didn't have no Air Jordans, Tom Hilfiger and stuff like that. They're fighting all over. We would happy to have a nice decent pair of trousers with a crease in them to wear on Sunday or to wear to school, you know. And today—

AR: I'm going to just quickly pop in a new tape here because we're running out on the end here on this tape.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

AR: Continuing the interview with Sarge Ridgle, this is tape number 6—

LR: Being black and having experienced a whole lot of things—I used to think black people were the noisiest people in the world. And guys—because I'm a loud talker myself—and guys tell me, "Man, why are you talking so loud?" And my [sound of telephone beeping] reply, my reply was, "You know I'm African American. My

ancestors came from Africa. And Africa's a loud continent." [Laughter] We have animals hollering, birds and everything. And I just guess learned how to talk loud. But the Hispanics are louder than we are. [Laughter]

AR: I'm laughing because as you were saying that I was thinking the same thing because I came from a Latino family so, you know, we were pretty loud.

LR: In this particular community I figure in five years, no more than ten, at the rate that the Latinos are coming, this particular community blacks are going to be in a very small minority.

Down the next street in that direction they've got quite a few little streets down there. And most of it is Spanish people. They've got a whole big housing area right back down there. All of that. And any Friday night, Saturday night, Sunday night they turn up the loudest music.

I know a song one time. I knew the tune. I don't know it but I know it when I hear it. It's called "Caffatan". And they play that so loud.

And you think it's a—I've heard sounds like this in Vietnam on a fire fight. Sometimes they shoot and they've got a lot of Latinos stay on this side down that street. And they're creeping up the street slowly but surely. They're going to—and they have a lot of noise: cars. If you were over here around four thirty, five o'clock until about ten or eleven o'clock at night, maybe twelve, this is a raceway.

AR: Down Juniper Street?

LR: No, on Faith Street.

AR: Down Faith Street. Really?

LR: Juniper, Hyde Park—and they're—and like you said—somebody was telling me that the Latin woman has gotten here and learned how to drive.

AR: Right, yeah. We were talking about that.

LR: Well they drive every day up and down this street. Sometimes they're flying. And then they've done picked up the black thing. You know how the blacks will come around-- Well, they've done outlawed it in Chapel Hill and Raleigh, about playing loud music in cars.

AR: Oh. Uh-huh.

LR: The blacks, you hear them come by "dup, dup, dup, dup, dup" and "the so and so and the so and so." And now they've got some Latin music. They come by just as loud. Two and three cars right behind each other, same car might pass at least ten times, probably more. That's every night. Well, that bothers some of the older people in the community.

The shooting—and I guess they have a right to because blacks sure mistreated them by robbing them because they feel like they don't, you know, keep their money in the house. They don't put too much money in the bank. And, for instance, Durham had a rash of that, you know. For that part, I sympathize with them.

I hate that happened because I wanted, and I noticed, that the Latins are coming here. They're coming to a predominantly black area. And I would love to see blacks and Hispanics bond, to become friends, to be able to trust each other. But because of that era that they had where they were doing all that robbing—and some guys even raped the women and all that kind of stuff—that's sad. And I hope that that doesn't—which I think it will—but I hope it doesn't put up a permanent barrier between the two races.

I love them for what they are doing as far as the work force is concerned. I'm hoping that somehow young black people will see how they're doing, like we used to do. See because Spanish people can come here and stay three months and he might buy himself a new automobile. But we've got some black men who all their life they can't buy a bicycle, you know. So there's a lot—and I mean grass roots stuff—that blacks can learn from the Hispanics. Not that he doesn't know about it, but he done forgot it, you know. And I think they—and even the little vice that I see that they have.

AR: The little what?

LR: The vice.

AR: Their vice, yeah.

LR: The vice that I see () is drink beer. And even though () but it's a hell of a less of two or three evils. Once upon a time we used to drink a lot of white liquor, homemade, homebrewed and stuff like that. But we didn't get in as much trouble. I don't see them in no whole lot of trouble other than driving without a license. They're going to drive them cars now. And I welcome them to the community. They've got a few things like that noise that they make sometimes. It doesn't bother me that much. But it bothers a whole lot of other people.

And you hear people making wise cracks. You know just like they did about blacks. I'll never forget I heard a man the first time I went to jail. I heard some deputy was white. And they said he never saw—they said there were three things that they had never seen in their life: a woman's vagina, a junk yard—they just don't put them in the junk yard—and it was something else they said. And they said, "I never seen a nigger that didn't eat a ()." And blacks, they make certain remarks like that about the

Hispanics, you know. But when they do it in my presence, I don't necessarily come to their defense. But I tell them, I said, "Them people suffered the same things that we had suffered," you know.

[Telephone rings]

AR: I'm going to pause.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

AR: So you were saying about how when people make comments in your presence—

LR: I remind them.

AR: Yeah.

LR: See because I detest that. I really detest it. To say that I didn't have racial prejudice buried in me, I would be lying because living in the era that I did live in and saw and witnessed a lot of wrong things on both sides. But I kind of relied that by trying to be bitter about that or trying to do something real negative about it, it ain't going to help the situation. It ain't--.

And some of it, I think, won't ever go away. But—and we've got to learn, how can we live? What do we need for a peaceful medium? Because like it or not they're going to be here. Ain't no use talking about--.

I remember one time when Marcus Garby came here. When I first knew about Marcus Garby. He was telling blacks to go back—"What the hell am I going to Africa for? I've never been there. I don't know nobody. I don't speak no language. What am I going for?" He said, "We all need to go back to Africa." "No I don't. I need to stay

right here where I was born and raised, good or bad. From the countries I've been in this is the best damn place for a human being is America."

And we've got a lot of folks—and probably will always have some—but we still have to learn how to work through them. Just like in this community. I was so proud of this community. I've never done nothing wrong in this community. I've done a lot of wrong things, but not in this community because, I guess, it's how you were raised.

I was raised to respect this place. All the wrong things I did was across town. I was out of town or somewhere. And it was this place that's been kind of special to me. The noisy kind of things keep older--like the lady that lives next door to me, she's about, she's just a little older than me. But the lady that lives right across the street is my sister's mother-in-law. She's ninety-two and afraid to sit on her porch. And that used to be a thing. That's why we kept our porch to sit on the porch in the evening.

My daddy used to sit out there sometime with my mama. They'd start singing, just start singing. And they always sung spiritual songs. And it wasn't nothing for the yard to be full after a while.

And people, you know, when you do things together like that, it causes a bond. And it hurts me to hear the loud noise, which it don't bother me. Them shots sometime, I wonder which way the projectile is going. I wish they would stop that. They ride up and down the street in those cars. They throw beer cans, soda cups, they throw right in the middle of the street. The next car that comes I hear, scrunch, scrunch, scrunch. And they litter a lot.

But I think this community needs to invite them. The Albright community, they get—our church helped them a lot. Now we're going to have, in August, they're going to

have a great big cookout. I mean a big one for this whole area. They've been taking up money and having little raffles and things. Plus they've got three or four churches that contribute money for this—it's a two day festival. I'm hoping and I'm going to ask my pastor to maybe make out some, get some kind of leaflets and carry them down and give them to the Hispanic community and invite them to the, you know.

AR: A number of people have said that there needs to be more social interaction.

LR: Well sure.

AR: Yeah. You mentioned—speaking of churches, you mentioned that there had been a white church in the neighborhood when you were growing up. I thought you said something about a white church.

LR: The color white.

AR: What was that?

LR: The color of the church was a little white.

AR: Oh, I see, okay. Yeah. I was confused about that. How—what kind of role do you think the churches can play in some of this and in neighborhood—

LR: Well, you know, I feel that the Spanish people are Catholics primarily. I don't know what they would think about going to a Protestant church. But I think if somebody up there would offer the invitation. Whether they come or not I think an invitation should be offered.

Yeah. My sister, she's trustee up there at the church. And I had talked to her about that, you know. They're talking about doing work in the community. I said, "You know we've got some new people in the community." If they're going to be a part of the

community we should sure reach out to them. I don't know whether they want us to reach out to them or not. And it doesn't matter. If you make the effort, then you've done your part. And my sister, she said, "Oh but they're Catholic. They want to come to the Baptist." I don't know. Ask them and see if they'll come.

But to tell you the truth, personally, I like them in the community. But they are irking some people. Some of it is justified and some of it's not. Now you've got guys, "Well they're taking all the work. They're doing all the jobs." "That's because you wouldn't do it." "They've got all them cars sitting in their yard." "You'd have a couple if you could afford it." Those people work hard, and save their money and buy them an old car. Ain't nothing wrong with that.

AR: You said something last time that I haven't heard anyone else say, which is that you thought that Latinos belonged here.

LR: They do. From what I've read—and I ain't did no whole lot of reading—but I heard that that old girl, that old girl—that must be my wife (). But her name was Queen Isabella. She () that man Columbus couldn't get no support from anybody but Queen Isabella and she was Spanish. And they said this land all but—they say from Virginia north. The Quakers had Pennsylvania. The Dutch had New York and up towards the New England states. But see the rest of the land was Spanish.

They have Spanish names. Carolina is Spanish. And they tell me the Carolinas used to start from Virginia all the way down to Florida all the way out to the West Coast was the Carolinas. And this king or somebody over there started bequeathing and selling land to different people.

But then you look at all the states. All the states are with the Spanish. California, Nevada, Texas, they're Spanish. They have Spanish names. I don't know where I read that stuff about Jim Bowie and them down there. They were fighting the Spanish off at the Alamo. I don't know.

AR: That's kind of a full circle, huh. Yeah.

LR: And the men that you can get to speak--. At a place we go to eat there's a guy who busses the dishes. But he, I don't know, he just took after--. Me and my friend have been up there to eat several times. And he notices. He always has something to say, got a big smile. My friend, he speaks a little Spanish.

AR: What restaurant is this?

LR: Panpan. And I've noticed that when the man first came here he had a lot of black waiters and—well, waitresses. I think he had one black waiter. But all the people in the back, their cook is black. Now the cook is Spanish, most of the servers are Spanish and one or two of the waitresses are Spanish. All the bus boys are Spanish.

AR: That says something right there. You said a little while ago and we can close out with this if you like that the African Americans had a lot to learn from the Latinos. What about vice versa? What can the Latinos learn from the African Americans?

LR: A lot. One thing they all learn--. I see the young Spanish boys. They come by here every evening. There's a parade of them: these little girls and little boys. One thing that they've learned—their dress, which I don't like. I don't like the big baggy pants hanging off your butt. And the great big shirt. But I see a lot of the little Spanish boys on their bicycles and things. They're dressing just that. [Laughter]

AR: That's funny.

LR: We were talking about it yesterday. They're picking that up. I don't know. I think blacks, especially young blacks that go to school—and if the Spanish go to school with them, I think they're going to be able to help athletically, you know.

I looked at the parks. We've got a park right over here on Austin Avenue. I don't see no, no Latins hardly ever go. Every evening there'll be kids out there playing baseball and that little league thing going on over there. But I haven't seen the—I ain't seen no Latin mixed up with that. And I went down there to what they call Juniper Square. That's right behind that store up there. I went by there yesterday evening and I saw them out there. They were out in the field playing soccer.

AR: Yeah. I was going to say that there's a new soccer, some soccer leagues forming, yeah.

LR: And since these kids have been riding their bicycles I saw one black boy. He be riding with them all the time, you know.

AR: I see that in my neighborhood some. I see some cross over, yeah.

LR: And I like that because both people—well all people—got a lot of good in them. And we've got a lot of hell in us, too. And they're going to have to experience both of them, you know, before they get to know each other. I see the Spanish women and I just feel it more than know it. I think the Spanish men are telling Spanish women in no uncertain way to stay away from black men. I believe it. Because of the way they act real shy. They won't look you straight in the eye. And I've seen that all of my life. I worked up town—

[Telephone rings]

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

AR: I just wanted to ask one last question here. And that's the number of people out in California where, you know. Of course, Latinos moved predominantly there before they moved here—have talked about how Latinos and African Americans actually if they could build alliances between them, you know, in some ways, if some people have said, not—I don't know. I don't want to say common enemy. But they have—they're fighting a lot of the same fights for rights in the white community as African Americans are and vice versa. What do you think about that, about alliances?

LR: Not only the Latinos, but the poor whites.

AR: That's a really good point.

LR: They've got to come together and realize, you know, that the struggle is against all of us. And there is strength in numbers, you know. And I believe if enough minorities get together they might be the majority. And I don't mean just to dominate whites but just to get what's our God given rights, you know. Fair practice in labor, freedom to—really free to go where you want to go, you know.

I don't never—I ain't never had the idea that I'll go sit up in the country club. But I believe there's going to come a day if I want to and I had the means--. Because there's always going to be something that ain't nothing but a monetary thing that might keep you separated. But that would be the only thing. Just a fair share, you know.

Like the Latins now, they don't really--. And you can talk about people being, you know, fair and just. But where a race of people is concerned, you need a representative. Our government said that, you know. I remember what Patrick Henry

said about the tea party: "No taxation without representation." And if I pay taxes, I should have a representative. Somebody that--.

See I can feel for a white person because we're human. But to feel what he has experienced? There ain't no way in the world I can do that, you know. And it's going to take a representative, a really by my peers, you know, to actually represent me when something comes up. He knows how I feel. He knows what I've been through. He knows what I'm subject to. And he might can be my voice. And without that--.

That's what made Durham a little better. See one time we had a black mayor. We had a black police chief. We had a black fire chief. We had black men on the bench. Black people on the bench, women and men. And, of course, all of it is, in a sense, a charade. But you do get better treatment with that representation. And the Latins by them coming late, they don't have any Latin policemen. They need to put some of them on. The people that qualify. And I think they should--. In a few years they should be on the city council. They should be in the mainstream.

AR: That's good. That's good. Anything more you'd like to add that we haven't covered—about your neighborhood or the Latinos.

LR: Other than I welcome Latinos to—and especially in this community. But in a sense, I know everything must change. Change has to come. And what I really desire in my heart I know can't never be anymore because just sheer numbers stops that.

AR: What do you desire in your heart?

LR: For this place to be like it was when we first moved over here. It was a lot of trees. And when we moved in our house the people came, especially the people the next two or three doors, that welcomed us to the community. They didn't have anything

to give that much, but everybody gave a little something. If it wasn't nothing but some collard greens out of their garden. "You can come over here. I've got a garden over here. You can come over here and pick you some corn when you get ready." That kind of thing.

AR: Kind of neighborliness.

LR: We don't have that no more and I don't know if that will ever come back. But in my heart that's what I long for. I just can't—I can't put it into words what it really meant, you know. And believe it or not this area—people kind of looked at us like country boys. See I had cows and things when we moved here. And they used to call me the cowboy. I don't mean like the one out in Texas. [Laughter]

AR: When you talk about your neighborhood are you meaning like Faith Street specifically? Or how—what are the distinguishing streets for your neighborhood.

LR: Over on—if you went down Juniper like you're going to Hyde Park, when you go up that hill, the top of that hill, that area all the way across and all the way back here.

AR: So over to Austin and back over like up as far as—what street, would you say?

LR: Miami Boulevard.

AR: Miami Boulevard.

LR: Yeah.

AR: Yeah, okay. And then how about extending down—

LR: To Hyde Park?

AR: Yeah.

LR: Then you have to get on Juniper and go--. See because blacks didn't live on Hyde Park. They lived on Hyde Park right there by the church. But you went up in the next block it turned white again.

AR: White again.

LR: Then all back down Juniper going this way on that side of the street was white. Miami Boulevard down there where they've got the little houses. Soldiers moved into those houses. They built those houses for officers. After the war more whites moved in. And then they sold them to blacks. Now I think there's still a few whites down there ().

AR: How many people on this street own their own homes? Do you know? Are y'all unusual?

LR: Let's see. There's one, two, three, four, five houses on this side of the street that's not home owned.

AR: That is not a homeowner?

LR: The rest of the houses on that side of the street, people own their homes. On this side of the street I have one, two, three, four, five—about six or seven houses on this side of the street that's not home owned. Most people over here own their homes.

AR: Yeah. And that's a definite improvement from when y'all lived here it was like two people.

LR: Sure.

AR: So there's been progress because some people have, you know, have talked about the importance of home ownership. You also mentioned briefly last time—and we don't need to go into this in detail. But you said that the churches aren't doing as

much as they used to. And how do you think that would change the neighborhood if the churches were more actively involved in the community? Not just the Latino/black issue, but just generally.

LR: Churches don't take an active role in the community per se no more, no churches. You have people in most churches that's from way across town. The immediate area of the church—like in this community. Once upon a time, everybody () belonged to that church up there.

AR: St. Paul?

LR: Yeah.

AR: Yeah.

LR: But a lot of people have changed their membership because of hanky panky and stuff going on in the church. Ministers today have gone too commercial. Money in the church today is in a sense taking the place of God.

AR: Boy that's a deep comment.

LR: Because they're more interested in monies and things that the church does that costs money. And ministers I'm hoping that they—no I ain't even going to hope for that. They do little things in churches under the disguise that it's a good thing for the church. But openly, it doesn't help the church.

AR: Because you said before in the earlier interview that the government stepped in with welfare doing stuff that the church used to do.

LR: Sure.

AR: Yeah.

LR: And at our church—as much money as our church takes in, they don't do anything now. A person get () around here you see social service.

AR: A person what?

LR: A person gets hungry, kids ain't got nothing to eat, the daddy done messed up the money, the church used to step in and buy those people some groceries. But today the pastor says, "Go to social service." And that in itself has broken the church down, broken its role down.

AR: Interesting, interesting.

LR: And the church, especially with blacks, the church was a sacred place. And from my own feeling, I could pass the church—and like I was when I was in service—when I saw the American flag, I used to get goose bumps. I hear "America the Beautiful", oh man, you can just feel your inner—you can feel it in your inner soul. And when I used to pass the church there was something about the church. And if we were talking loud, the noise would go down, you know. You wouldn't dare curse in front of the church. But now () ain't nothing but a building. It doesn't have that significance anymore. And because of what they do in church. We've had ministers to fornicate in the church, if they call it that. He steals money, misappropriates money. And that's not only my church. All the churches in this neighborhood, all of them are having problems. And it's about money.

AR: Boy.

LR: The role of the church was to help of their own volition. They tell you to tithe. There's a verse in the Bible called Malachi, Malachi 3:10. It says bring all your tithes to the church, to the storehouse, so there will be plenty of meat for the widows and

orphans and the downtrodden. That's the churches big role, but they do not do that anymore. Preachers get a hundred thousand dollar yearly salary and buy big cars, invest in all kinds of businesses with the church's money. And people have begun—like my church is—

AR: What would you think would be the way that communities could get back some more of what you're talking about? And I think we should wrap with that. Or if there's some other way in which you think communities could rebuild.

LR: Ain't but two ways that they can build. Through the church. The church is first. And especially with black people. See all my life—like when we were () being oppressed by the whites on every side, my mama used to tell me to pray for them. Don't be angry with them, pray for them. And you've got some young rebels who say we're still on our knees too much.

But the church asks us to forgive, you know. Things like, don't let the sun go down and come up until you try to reconcile with your adversary. Wait until the cool of the evening. Wait for a cooling off period then go back to them. And this is the kind of thing the church used to teach.

There's not enough—the youth programs today in the church ain't what they used to be. When I was a kid we used to have a little group called the BYP. I forgot what those initials stand for, but it was something about the young people, some Bible group for young people or something. It was a must that you had to go to every Sunday.

And the church () but doing the right thing, you know. And they don't do a lot of that now. They try to out dress each other with beautiful gowns and robes. And they're

going to go to Niagra Falls. They want to go to Disneyworld. A whole lot of trips and things like that. And the community is dying. And they're going on excursions.

The pastor doesn't even know half of the people that live over there. Hasn't even seen them. I've been—and my sister is a trustee up there. I went up to see him and he said, "Where do you live?" I said, "Right down there in that old house down there. I've been there since 1935. You haven't been down there?" Ministers used to visit and get to know the people in the community. They don't do that now. They're too busy sitting up in church all day.

He goes in his office at eight thirty or nine o'clock. I don't know if he's there until four. He's supposed to be. What is he doing? He should be out in the community talking to people, () to people, giving good advice.

My pastor, he talks just like a slick guy. The first time he spoke to me that was the first thing I told my sister. I said, "He sound like somebody in the streets." She was talking about how he was trying to identify with the guys in the street. I said, "He doesn't need to identify with them. He needs to set an example for them."

AR: So the church is one way, you were saying. What's the other way?

LR: Our courts.

AR: So the political system?

LR: They've failed us. They let us see too much. Even our presidents, even our statesmen and stuff, their hands get caught too much in the cookie jar. I wish they'd have never had a Watergate. Then we learned how sorry the government is. And people in high places that allow themselves to be caught doing things that aren't conducive to

their job, people say, "Well they ain't nothing." If our mother and father go one way and see they drink liquor. () I drink liquor, too.

AR: So examples get set.

LR: Right.

AR: Yeah.

LR: The trendsetters, the people who are supposed to set the trends, they ain't nothing. You've got police departments that got these young kids. And I know when a man commits a crime they need to be punished, you know. But he should be punished with dignity.

AR: Wow. Well, we never even got into your experiences in prison. That's a whole 'nother topic.

LR: And that's another thing that causes a community to break up. Police officers are insensitive. They act just like a bunch of hoodlums.

AR: Black as well as white.

LR: Yeah. Black most of them because they're trying to prove a point. That I'm not going to give that guy a break because he's black. I'm going to do my job as far as he's concerned.

AR: Well I'm worried that I'm keeping you kind of late. Is there anything more you want to add that we haven't covered?

LR: No.

AR: Do you think we've—I think we've covered a lot of ground.

LR: Oh, yeah. There's so much more we need a month. [Laughter]

AR: Well, I thank you for taking the time today.

LR: I've enjoyed it. I've enjoyed it because, believe it or not, it takes me down memory lane. And sometimes we need to look back.

AR: Yeah. I think that's true.

LR: We need to look back. I heard somebody say, "If you don't know where you've come from, how the hell do you know where you're going?"

AR: That's good. Maybe we should close off on that.

LR: Okay.

AR: This is the end of the interview with Sarge Ridgle here on Faith Street in Durham. This is my tape number 6999SR.2 continuing from tape number 69, I'm sorry. Yeah, 6999SR.1. This is the end of the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW