

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

LAWRENCE RIDGLE
JUNE 3, 1999

ALICIA ROUVEROL: This is Alicia Rouverol of the Southern Oral History Program. And today I'll be interviewing Lawrence Ridgle, known as Sarge in the community. The interview is taking place in northeast central Durham. It's part of the New Immigrants project, which is part of the Listening for a Change project at the Southern Oral History Program. Today's date is June 3rd 1999. And this is my tape number 6399SR.1.

Okay. I think we've got the recorder on here. Do you want to go ahead and start with when and where you were born here and coming up here in the community? What the community was like at that point.

LAWRENCE RIDGLE: Okay. You want name and age and whatever.

AR: Sure, yeah, yeah. I might actually. You know, Mr. Ridgles, I might move this telephone because sometimes hand-held telephones do weird things to the computer, ah the—

LR: They do weird things period.

AR: That's true. Yeah. Great. Okay, go ahead.

LR: My name is Lawrence Ridgle, Jr. I was born 1931. I was born in Durham. Lived in Durham all of my life. I was born about a block from Main Street in an area they call Peach Tree Alley. I stayed there until, I guess, I might have been three or four years old. And it there was kind of ghetto type place. And my father being the man that he was he moved us over to where I live right now and been there since 1935.

This was like a rural area when we first moved back here in the thirties. It—I don't guess there was more than nine or ten houses on the whole street. We thought it was the country. Right across in front of me where I live now there was a big wooded area. I guess two hundred, three hundred yards over there we had—that's where our hog bins were. Everybody over here had hogs. We had cows. So, I guess, this was the country in that sense.

When I moved over here it was real quiet. People were real closely knit neighbors. For instance, it was a taboo in this neighborhood to walk the street and see a neighbor and didn't speak, a child—boy, you'd get a whooping for that because that neighbor would call your mother—well, we didn't have telephones. But they'd come by one evening, the neighbors. And you would see them coming and you knew she was going to tell something on you. Tell you, "You know that little ol boy passed right by my house and he didn't even speak."

As a kid I thought this neighborhood stunk because the neighbors were just meddlesome. They'd get everybody to know what everybody was doing. Everybody was concerned for each other. The people over here were very, very poor and they did a lot of sharing: borrow a cup of sugar, or a piece of meat, go in the garden and get some beans and some corn or whatever they had. And I just remember my mother, she was real—I guess she was considered to be—for lack of a better word, a patron saint, because my mother would--.

They were doing it right after the Hoover days when times were hard and a lot of men didn't have work. They just didn't have no work for people because--. I don't know. Nobody over here that you could classify as we do today as welfare recipients

or--. They didn't—lazy. I don't think we had any people like that in this neighborhood because everybody tried.

Right beside my house here there were some men--one of them was my godfather. And several men in this community, they had children, but they couldn't find jobs. They went looking for jobs everyday. And they didn't find jobs but they would find something to do. Now these men, I've thought about it afterward—the neighbor () because they made ends meet out of nothing. They didn't get no food stamps and they didn't get no welfare but their family survived.

These factories around here like the American Tobacco Company, Liggett & Myers, at that time they used a little thing called a band that you put around () to keep it from opening once you put the tobacco in it. And it didn't have metal bands back then. You had to make wooden bands.

And these men I'm talking about they used to go down in the woods. And there's a certain type tree. I think it's an elm. Whatever it is, it's the type tree that you can bend. You can—they take long strips out of it and they could make hoops out of them. This is what they fastened the barrels with. And these men used to go in the woods with a cross cut saw and an axe. And they made them some little tables out here. And they had made some homemade knives that they shaved and planed down because they had to be smooth. I used to see them sitting out there when I was a kid not knowing that they were trying to support their family. But they couldn't get jobs so they--. And it was real hard work and they got fifteen cents for-

AR: And they were doing this for the companies?

LR: For the companies.

AR: Working at home.

LR: Yes. Anybody could do it. You know, like, well, the tobacco industry was blooming in that day. And they needed—without those bands they couldn't house the tobacco. And the tobacco that they raised—like this year, they might not use it for ten years. They have to store it. And they had to have those hoop-type things to fasten the barrel. And some of the men did it, too. That was the only way they could make money. And it was hard work. And they had almost primitive tools. You know, an axe, a mole, and these little knives that they made. And they used to sit on the benches and they'd just have shavings and shavings. And then they would even save the shavings and they'd put them in baskets and they'd sell them to the butcher shop, butcher man. And this is how they improvised.

And I think about how we are today and I kind of hate the government for intervening for people because back then people didn't have nothing, but we made it. And that's why I praise this neighborhood because thanks to Uncle Sam and my way of living my life, I've been a lot of places. But when I really looked at how things are or how things were, this was a beautiful place to live. And I guess the most things that we had was the love of the community.

We had a little white church down there, which is one of the biggest churches in Durham now. But that church served as—I don't know. It was something sacred to the community. The church was where we went to—for help when people got real down and couldn't make it. They had a lot of children. They'd stick () with the church. You look to the church for what the government tried to do and they made it work.

I used to think grown people were too nosey because they would watch you like a hawk in this neighborhood. And if you got out of line, like, disrespect, curse, or something like that, somebody's was going to tell your people. I think it was for the best. There wasn't anybody in competition with anybody like I see today. I think it was two automobiles on the street, three. And people weren't jealous or trying to outdo. I don't think at that time, we didn't have but about maybe two homeowners on this street that owned their home. And people weren't, you know, like today everybody's trying to build a big house, have the most cars. It wasn't like that. Even the people that we thought were well off, we looked up to them because they owned their house and they had bathtubs in their house, which was unheard of. They had electric lights. We had lamps and oil. We kind of looked up to those people. But they were lucky to have—but I've learnt since then that in some of the word they living worse than we were.

And it's one thing about this house—and somebody said—I heard somebody say something about my mother—my brother-in-law said he heard somebody say something about my mother on the radio. My mother helped a lot of people, people who couldn't make it: wayward women. People used to call my mother crazy. "You've got those people coming to your house. You don't even know who they are." And "Where did they come from?"

I remember a kid coming by one time. () He wanted to go to college. And I don't know how he found his way over here. But he wound up at our door. I don't think he could pay tuition or something or he couldn't stay on the campus or something. My mother let him stay here. She used to give him a little money. It wasn't much, twenty-five, thirty cents, but back then I guess that was something. But he stayed here

throughout the school year. He was from Ohio. My mama didn't know him from Adam's house cat. But he finished Central. And as long as my mother lived he sent her gifts on her birthday, Mother's day.

And now one kid, he used to be a busy-body in the community. Like a wayward woman. My mama helped so many of them, brought them in the house. My daddy said, "You ()." My mama said, "I'm going to help clean them up and make them get jobs." And my mama just was an angel. Of course they had a lot of them over here in other ways.

And dividing stuff. That was real important. You didn't have to ask for something. We ate a whole lot of beans and greens. Stuff like chicken or maybe stew beef or roast. But chicken, we got that on the weekends. That was Sunday dinner. But sometime, for whatever reason, we might have something like that through the week. And as long as I can remember, my daddy insisted at supper meal that everybody had to be at the table. We used to have a big long dining room with a big long table in there. We'd all get around the table about five o'clock in the evening. My mother would be in here () in this kitchen, smelling good. My mama always cooked something sweet because my daddy said you didn't have a meal if you didn't have something sweet. So my mother used to cook all those beans and greens and neck bones and pig tails and pig ears but she always made some kind of pie or cake or something because my daddy demanded that.

We'd come in, and my mama would be cooking and I'd say, "When are you going to—how long's it going to be?" She just said, "Run on boy, I'll call you in here." And

(). She'd been in here fixing a plate, making the meat on the plate and so forth. I said, "What time are we going to eat?" She said, "Soon as you daddy gets here." "Daddy's here. He's outside." "Well, you set the table." She's still fixing the plate. "So who's that plate for?" She'd wrap it up.

We didn't have wax paper or tin foil. We used to keep all of the laundry paper. It was brown paper. The laundry paper, paper that came from a store. They used to do a lot of wrapping in that white paper. Mama used to keep all of that. That's what she wrapped this plate in.

She said, "Carry that down to Mrs. Numar." Mrs. Numar didn't ask for it. Mrs. Numar's cooking her own supper. [Laughter] But she wanted her to have some of—she had some pork chops on Wednesday. She wanted Mrs. Numar to have some of hers. And that's what people did around here.

We had fistfights. Of course, over here we were more sports orientated. Right up the street here we had some prominent family. Everybody in that family went to college and graduated. It was about—let's see: Tom, James, Jessie and Libby, Joe, Clara. And, I guess, about eight of them, every one of them finished college. And do you know they were some of the raggediest kids in the neighborhood.

AR: Was this right up the block here?

LR: Yes. And, in fact, the middle girl—well, they got a home place up the street because they finally bought the house, too. But one of the daughters built her little brick house right in front of the house and she lives up there now.

But rag-tag. And especially the boys. Hand me downs. Well, everybody over here had school clothes. You had a pair of pants and something you wore to school.

I remember we used to wear a pair of pants, a shirt, maybe a sweater. You had you a jacket, a pair of shoes. And when you'd come home in the evening that was the first thing that you'd do. Take your clothes off, and hang them up on the rack and get a pair of overalls or a pair of those old patched pants.

But them guys—we used to tease them and say they had every kind of patch on their pants but a potato patch. And they did. But they were—. Now that I look back in retrospect, they were a pillar of strength in the community as far as going to school. I think it was four or five of them had perfect attendance all the way through school.

AR: Now what did their family do? What did their mom and dad do?

LR: Worked at that same little place you're talking about, the Golden Belt.

AR: Okay.

LR: But his mother, his mother—we had about three ladies over here. I imagine they must have had something like a sixth or seventh grade education. But the Allens, their mother and father stressed school to them. And it sure must have soaked in because all of the guys that lived in this whole block around here that finished school, they can attribute—if you can call it a success to get a high school diploma—to the Adams because they were leaders in the community in sports.

They knew all about them. All of them were good. And they never got into any kind of trouble. And that's where you went up to play. When you wanted to play ball you go to the Adams' house. And all of them were good at track, football, softball or something. And they didn't use bad language. And all of them went to college. They walked from here to Central every day and stayed at home. I know the first boy that

went, the oldest boy, James. I think he had two pair of pants, a () coat and a trench coat. That was his wardrobe for college.

And on Friday, the clothes that you wore to school—we used to have a little laundry down on Holloway Street that was owned by some white people that lived on this street—but they lived down there near the fairgrounds. Their name was Dowd. And they were very sympathetic to our cause. So all of the kids would take their school clothes on Friday to the laundry. It was the laundry/dry cleaner.

In fact, my mother used to do some—I don't know what kind of ironing you call that—but stuff like ruffles, pleats. My mother was an expert at that. So she used to do things like that for the laundry.

And I think the people in this neighborhood that () that situation about the school clothes. So they used to—well one-day service wasn't even heard of then. But you could put your school kids, they put their clothes in on Friday evening and pick them up on Saturday evening. And that's what we did.

And I thought we were poor because some people over here their kids got a lot of toys and stuff like that. I never got that. My dad told us point blank, "Ain't no Santa Claus—()—your sister needs a coat and some shoes and you need this and you need that. And that's all the money I got. I'll buy you some nuts and candy and stuff for Christmas and some clothes and that's your Santa Claus." And we used to sit in here and wouldn't go out because we didn't have a toy. And look at the kids the next day. So I thought they were better off than we were.

But now when I talk to my sister. We talk about this often. In a sense we were the richest family in this community. We damned sure—my mama and daddy damn sure

helped more people than anybody has over here. We had plenty of food because my daddy planted a garden, my mother canned stuff. It wasn't nothing. We had two closets in there. She kept it full of corn, tomatoes, string beans, butter beans that we would get out of our garden.

And if we didn't have it somebody else would come by—some farmer used to come by on the weekend selling bushels of peaches, apples, pears. And my mother used to preserve all that kind of stuff. And we just didn't have to go to the store. And then she knew how to make meals. You know, we didn't have to go to the store for too many things. And I think that was one of the black successes is getting by. Like today you've got to go to the store for everything. That stuff right there—a loaf of bread in this house, maybe at somebody's birthday or something.

AR: You mean a store bought loaf of bread.

LR: Yeah. My mother made biscuits, good cornbread every meal. And everybody else did around here. Today I think—well. In 1930—I believe it was about '39 or '40, Roosevelt—I mean Mr. Roosevelt's daughter, Miss Eleanor—. We used to see newsreels of her going down in black communities, kissing little black babies and stuff like that. And that wasn't heard of then. And right after that here come welfare. But not the type of welfare—the modern type welfare.

They had a little place over on Elm Street and you had to qualify. I forgot what the qualification was. But you went over there—I think it was two days a week. They would give out welfare. They'd give out all kinds of canned goods, meat canned goods, beans, corn, tomatoes. They'd give out plenty of cheese. They used to give a lot of fruit

like oranges and sometimes apples. But, butter, oatmeal, corn meal, flour. That's what you got off the welfare. You got something to eat.

AR: And what time period do you remember that in?

LR: This had to be just before—it must have been about '38, '39, maybe '40 because I remember we'd go to school and it was a common thing. Like people used to make fun of people that qualified for welfare. And a whole lot of people did and tried to hide it. But they would go get that stuff. And they used to make a song of it that said, "Don't look at me with you eyes all bloody. I know you eating' that welfare butter." There was a song in school that kids used to pick with each other, you know. But, it really helped. It really helped.

There was one other reason why I really liked Franklin Delano Roosevelt because he started work programs to make people work to live like the CC camp, the WPA. They didn't give out—the only thing they gave out was some food. And I didn't know of any meat they gave out but that canned meat. But they gave you some stuff to live off of, you know. And then they made you—they created jobs.

They went around and cleaned up all the ditches, a whole lot of things that they should have done. Mosquitoes used to be here thicker than thieves, but after they cleaned up all those little ditches and things around there the mosquitoes kind of went away. And I think I had diphtheria as a kid. And there was a whole lot of old chicken pox, whooping cough. Used to have signs—signs hanging up on your door, you know, your house was quarantined. They didn't want anybody to come and visit you. And I think stagnated water—that's why they told me I had diphtheria. I'd been playing in some stagnated water somewhere because we used to go swimming down here in these places.

And thanks to Roosevelt—I truly believe him coming in with the WPA men doing a whole lot of work that should have been done by the city—and then he started that CC camp for young men. And they paid them some. They wasn't paying that much but, of course, you didn't need that much money then. But it was paying some and people were working.

AR: So work based welfare and welfare that was food, you know, food provided versus cash is—you felt was beneficial.

LR: It was beneficial in the fact that they gave you something nutritious that your body needed and you didn't have no selection. And because you didn't have nothing else you got pretty good food to eat.

But today with them giving food stamps and food stamp recipients, they're not going to buy stuff for the long haul, something that will last. Like when they made welfare and they gave away food they gave you butter, lard. They gave you milk and flour and you made your bread. Today they go out there--. They got some lazy girls that don't even know how to cook that receives—and I'm not. And, you know, I'm () they don't know how to buy. And you give somebody some food stamps and some money they don't go buy groceries. And they might go to Hardee's. And I see a lot of the kids they go get a Happy Meal for the kids, you know. They get a bunch of hamburgers and things for one or two days instead of getting them some stuff that they can make some meals off of.

AR: Some real food stores.

LR: Sure.

AR: Yeah, yeah. Did your family ever get welfare support?

LR: We've got that cheese and butter.

AR: As you were a child?

LR: Yeah. We got that periodically because nobody in my house ever worked but my daddy and my mama sometimes when they had hard pieces to iron. My mother really could iron like pleats.

AR: And she was doing that for pay out of the house? Yeah, yeah. What kind of work did your dad do?

LR: He worked at that tobacco company forty-seven years.

AR: Was he at American Tobacco?

LR: Umm-hmm.

AR: Wow. No kidding.

LR: And missed no day in forty-seven years. And never made a hundred dollars a week in his life. Of course he retired in 1950.

AR: What kind of jobs was he doing over there?

LR: Storage houses where they had those big from eight to twelve hundred pound (). And see those () have to be stored. You can't have any heat in those buildings. And they didn't have no (). And the ceiling up there I think is about sixteen feet. And they used to have to load those () up and then roll them on top of each other and then one on top of that. I think they went four high. And they didn't have motor lifts. They used to skid them up.

The building they worked in was always cold. It couldn't happen on fire. The only time they would get warm they wore a lot of clothes and stuff like that. But they had one little place where they ate their lunch and that was the only heat in the whole

area. Those sheds are still down there in east Durham. And I used to go down there sometime and carry him lunch and it'd be so cold down there.

And sometimes he used to whip me for not doing my chores or something like that or being smart in school. He said, "Boy I go out and work in the cold every day for you so that you don't have to do this." And I used to think he was crazy because I didn't know.

But those men used bulls. A twelve hundred pound barrel rolling to you and you got a little stick. They called it a cut stick. And they'd throw it off the truck and they'd be rolling down the aisle I guess pretty fast. And here's a man standing there with a stick and you put the stick up under and it rolls up on the stick and was crooked like this. And you'd roll up on it and he'd turn it and it'd go another direction. But if he missed, it's going to run over him. It was kind of dangerous work, I thought.

AR: Hard work, yeah.

LR: And strong—they used to have to open those () sometime for men to come and get samples, prospective buyers or—they wanted to see the tobacco. There's a certain moisture content that they have to have. And they can take a thing like a little laboratory and tell how much moisture is in it. So they used to have to take tests and they used to have to set the barrel up on—they'd be down where it's rolled down to set it up on its head and open it up. And it wasn't nothing for one of those men to get it and set it up like that.

AR: Gee, he must have been really strong.

LR: Oh yeah. And I think about it now because back then we really didn't know, you know, how hard they worked. My father, he was one of those staunch ()

Christians. He believed in hard work and the church. My father wasn't ambitious. He didn't want--. He wanted a roof over his head. He wanted his house clean and some food and a few clothes on your back. That was his success.

AR: That was his success.

LR: Yeah. And my father wanted that. My father was very, very proud. And he didn't compete. He didn't even try to compete. I thought he was just whipped out because he tried to buy a house one time when he first came here on Fayetteville Street down there with the (). And my father caught t. b. early in life. They didn't have the cure then. The only cure they had they had was to send you out west to a high elevation. And his company had been—

AR: His company had been what?

LR: Helped him to go out there. But we didn't have no money (). And the same North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance while he was sick they foreclosed and took the house.

AR: No.

LR: He never tried to buy another one.

AR: Wow.

LR: And he tells the story—North Carolina Mutual, I guess, along that time was just beginning. And people wouldn't buy, black people wouldn't buy insurance from a black company because they didn't have a reputation. And a lot of these company insurances like Durham Life and a whole lot of them () that's out of business now, which was company insurance. But it wasn't mutual insurance, which we didn't know the difference at that time. They had all kinds of little fine clauses in there people

couldn't read and they wouldn't pay off claims. And people were afraid especially most people were ignorant. They couldn't read and write.

AR: So even though it was black owned—

LR: And it just began they didn't have a reputation. And then somebody died and they had a big pot--. My daddy swears that they sold that house that he was buying for them to pay off that first bill.

AR: For them to pay off that first building?

LR: First big insurance policy.

AR: Their first big insurance policy. Wow.

LR: He swears that they did that. He used to rub shoulders with McDougald, Ed Merrick, Moore, the old Spaulding, Doc Donnell. Those were the pillars—those were the millionaires when I was a kid here. And I think they, other than McDougald--.

McDougald had a lot of tenement houses over there in what they called the Hayti section. Little run down—worse than these shacks we had here. And he—when he died the black people had a parade. They were glad he was dead. But Ed Merrick and Moore, they more or less did things, civic minded things for the—

AR: So they were more civic minded than McDougald.

LR: Yeah.

AR: Wow.

LR: Until that second generation came along that's up there now. You know they wouldn't hire any whites for--. I think they've got a few whites working for North Carolina Mutual now. I once went down there with my wife. And then the blacks that they hired were hand-picked, not for his ability but he had to have a certain type of

background. And that's how they sold us out. They didn't help the masses. Then they started helping themselves. And I think they stopped black growth. I don't think the white man stopped black growth in Durham. I think what we call our founding father, Ed Merrick, McDougald and Moore. They were the beginning. And the off springs of that crippled the black, not the whites.

AR: What are some of the ways you would say they crippled?

LR: First of all, like these people are doing the Spanish now, had these old raggedy ass tenement houses that they collect the rent off of for fifty years. Didn't do anything to them. They were substandard. I know some houses that lived in much better places than blacks did. And the same things are happening to these Spanish people here. Now it's a black company that--.

All these little houses you see down there are cinder block. I remember when they built them. And the company was—the daughter. You might hear something about her now, Lavonia Allison. She's over this Negro Affair thing. She's the president of that now. I could—if I saw her on fire, I'd throw some high octane gas on her because she's just like her mother. Her mother built all those little cinder block houses.

AR: So you're saying that some of the slumlords—

LR: Yes, yes.

AR: And that they were helping their own class but now—

LR: Right.

AR: Okay.

LR: It did. And to be real frank, I've always thought Duke--. On several occasions I know Duke was real prejudiced at one time. But, Duke, the Duke family—

and a lot of blacks know this—they have done more for this city for black people and the black cause than anybody I know.

AR: More than the African American community?

LR: Sure. If it wasn't for Duke, there wouldn't be no Central. There wouldn't have been no North Carolina College. There wouldn't have been no Minton Hospital. I don't think there would have been no North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company if it hadn't been for Duke. Duke had a lot of—old man Washington Duke had a lot of black children. Now I can't prove this but this has been a part of Durham ever since I can remember.

AR: So in some ways he was helping his own is what you're saying?

LR: Umm. But he helped the black.

AR: Right. Exactly. His own being, you know, if he had kids in the African American community, yeah. Interesting. It's like we were talking before about urban renewal how it's most often blamed on whites more than blacks, you know.

LR: Well, in a sense, like the planning committee, I've learned since I've been grown over the last, say, twenty years, that people in city hall they have plans ten, twenty years up. But the masses don't know anything about it.

Like the Hayti section over there. They knew that highway was coming--that expressway was coming through there. They knew it was coming. The top crust—and I, when I say top crust, I call them North Carolina Mutual blacks. They knew it was coming. Urban renewal was hooked up with it. They knew the whole picture.

But they took people, like my wife, she used to live over on a little street called Henry Street that doesn't even exist any more. She stayed in one of those tenement

houses that was owned by Doc Donnell. And they didn't tell us a highway was coming through. They said urban renewal was trying to upgrade—this was their schpeel—trying to upgrade the black community with those tenement houses. If you moved over to this direction or that direction in one of those projects they would pay for your move, give you a little piece of money and pay your rent for six months.

Alston Avenue down back of College there's a lot of blacks that own their homes over there. Alston Avenue is just a little small two-lane highway. But they knew they were going to widen it. They knew there was some land needed there for Central. They came in—those houses weren't worth much anyhow. But those same people bought up some of those people's houses, gave them what they thought was owed—more than what the market value was. But they got paid beautifully when they widened the street and sold all that land to Central.

And you'll find out if you go back through the history you'll find out that people like Miss Shaw, which is—one of our state senators. The Logans, the Swifts, the Spauldings, Kennedys, Donnell—those kind of people had access to that. And they took—and it seemed like they were giving you something. "What? You're going to pay my rent for six months?"

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AR: So you're saying that they didn't impart that information. That they didn't—

LR: No.

AR: Yeah. And—

LR: I got this () that we're going to put you in a better place.

AR: What were they gaining out of this?

LR: Money. Do you know what kind of money they got for the expressway?

Look today where the jail is, Scarborough Funeral Home is, that big car lot over there right beside that. Of course the Durham Bulls, the park. Look how many blacks they've put out of business.

See, it used to be neighborhood stores that was owned by black people. There was a store up on this corner. It was our neighborhood store, and you could get credit there and people would work with you. They had one over on Canal Street. All the way down Pettigrew and Fayetteville Street it was all black businesses.

But I think the big picture was kind of like a—and I surmised this from when the gas war went on. See we were never short of gas. But there were so many little gas companies coming up so they put them out of business. Now you look at the gas companies we've got now. Nothing but BP, Braxco, big gas companies. We had so many little jump up name gas stations coming up. And I really do believe that those gas companies were losing control of the gas and they put them out of business. And just the same thing that happened to blacks, really.

AR: Wow. That's a really powerful statement. So—

LR: It's a true statement.

AR: Yeah. So what you're saying is that they really cut-- Well, I mean the irony is that they cut their own throats or they cut the black community's throat in the process. But you're saying that they—

LR: They knew.

AR: That they knew.

LR: They knew.

AR: That there was a consolidation.

LR: We don't have a black drug store in Durham now. We used to have three.

No, we had four.

AR: And where were they mostly located?

LR: We had one on Bost Street over here that was owned by the Holloways.

Dr. Garrett, he just died a few weeks ago. And it had a whole page in the paper about him.

He had a very—no drug store no where in town was no—he had marble top tables in, you know, hard mahogany wood, all this cabinets and stuff around. He had a big soda thing where they made that old fashioned milk shake. And he had a top stock of all kind of pharmacist, pharmaceuticals. And the place was immaculate. In fact, he had him a marble and maroon mahogany furniture in there. A real beautiful place.

And we had restaurants, Five and Ten Cents store. We had one of the best hatters in the country. But he had a small place. He made some of the best hats that's made in America. In fact, people like the Scarborough, and those same old men—Darnell, the Logans—he made their hats. And back then those hats cost a hundred dollars.

AR: That's a lot of money back then.

LR: But now—his name was Abe Shaw—had a little bitty place—he made hats and he made hats. Had they bagged him he might have been a John B. Stetson by now.

AR: Sure.

LR: He could have been a Velour. That was the only place blacks could get formal wear was from him. He could have had one of those big shops downtown. With the government giving up money for small businesses was coming. They knew this too. But if they put him out of business, they wouldn't be able to apply. And they promised to build those people that stuff back but they put up Heritage Square.

AR: So what happened to his shop?

LR: They () paid him out. Then they stuck him in a little hole way over here in what they call North Durham Five Points. It was Magnum Street over there. He had a little bitty little place over there. And they were supposed to build them back. But they kept them living in a place they called Tin City. They did move some of the businesses with the stipulation that they were going to rebuild. Twenty-five years later they still haven't done it. So people like Abe have got no--.

His son has gotten into the dope scene, which if he'd had a big business—if they'd have stayed behind him and helped him. I don't know what his business is now because the man, he loved hats. Like I said, he was the only place a black could get a formal—a tuxedo, you had to go see him.

And then blacks started getting into different little clubs and they had their own little society. I could see it now. And I'm sure that the blacks should have been able to see it. They were smart men. They'd been to college. They were rich. If they'd got behind Abe, I don't know what he'd have been. And he used to tell me this story himself, you know, how they sold him out.

AR: Were there other black businessmen that felt that same way?

LR: Sure. We had furniture companies here—the Boykins. He's dead but his wife has got a nice place right out here on 85, right off 85. She's out there by herself. She's got a nice, big plot of land out there, a big lake, nice big house.

But after the husband died—he was in the furniture business. But he couldn't sell furniture like the downtown stores could because he couldn't get it for that. He was a small business. He couldn't sell stuff like Heilig-Meyers or some of the oldest furniture stores. They bought in big lumps and they could get it cheaper. But a lot of blacks patronized him because they had good furniture but it was a little bit higher.

We had our own dry cleaner, dentist office. In fact, Doc Donnell was the dentist. He was in cahoots. I remember my little boy—I used to see him laying in the Fountainbleu in Miami, him and Sugar Ray Robinson, the boxer. Used to see them in that () magazine. Doc Donnell laying up on Miami beach. And he owned—Doc Donnell owned a whole block on 51st Street. He owned the Biltmore Hotel, which we was the only hotel—Durham had the only black hotel in the Piedmont area.

AR: Boy.

LR: All the entertainers that came to North Carolina, black entertainers, that's where they stayed, at the Biltmore. You could go down to Biltmore and sit around outside and see all the stars. And the—we had a real nice restaurant called the Donut Shop. It was owned by Doc Donnell. He sold all that stuff out for urban renewal.

We had one black man who refused to sell. And I thought he was stupid because I didn't know. But he knew. We had our own little publishing company at the Carolina Times. Mr. Austin gave me my first job selling papers and blacks wouldn't buy them. But he stayed there until they burned him out just a few years ago.

AR: Until they burned him out when the fire happened?

LR: It was an old hosiery mill building. And I think it went out of business before I was born. But the old building was still there and he took a portion of it to put up his print shop. He died and his wife still wouldn't sell it. That was the only building—

AR: Isn't that wild?

LR: That was the only building left on Pettigrew Street—

AR: What was the story on that fire again? When you say they burned him out.

LR: They don't know how it happened. But she had stopped publishing and all the other—they used to have a theatre there called the Booker T. Theatre. They left. But he was in one corner of this big factory. And he refused to leave for his lifetime. And his wife, after he died, she wouldn't leave. So years later mysteriously it got burned out. They had people there making shoes. We had shoe shops. Well, of course, we had--
[Telephone rings]

AR: I've got to pause this.

[Recorder is turned off and back on.]

AR: So what happened to the community when these businesses went out?

LR: Well, the way that I see it—

[Telephone rings]

AR: I'll pause again.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

AR: So what happened to the community when those businesses went out? A number of people have talked about—

LR: They appeased us in a way, I believe, this is just my thought—when they moved us—. See, all of Hayti and in that area over there from Roxboro Street over to Alston Avenue, Pettigrew Street, that section, that was all black.

There were many houses—. I looked at that area and I don't know how in the world did all those houses get there. But they tore all that stuff down. They widened both of the streets for the expressway to come in. They moved people. In neighborhoods like this they put up the cinder block shacks and things they got down there. And believe it or not people had—a lot of people over there in the wintertime didn't have window glasses. Their roof leaked, holes in the floor, and they put them in a sound house. So they felt better. Then they started building projects. And I think they built McDougald's in the fifties. And people hadn't had tile floors, a bathroom, heat on the wall, you know. And really they thought they were really getting something, you know. Urban renewal was good, they thought. Then they put up Fayetteville Street, Cornwallis.

And what they did, they concentrated all in a little area. And one of the things that they destroyed by that was they put them so far apart from each other. And now you are centrally located. And like today they're putting fences around these places.

They took our—I think they destroyed Esprit de Corps. You know, I want to fix my house like I want and then let everybody have the same type house. They know exactly where you are. They tore up your businesses.

So Hayti and Fayetteville Street was a common denominator. If you wanted a hair cut, you wanted your nails done, wanted your hair fixed, you want to go to the movies, you need to go to the drug store, you want to go to the liquor store, you had to go to Hayti for lots of reasons. While you were there if you wanted something from the

Five and Dime—we had Five and Dimes then and a clothing store, a furniture store, dry cleaner, hospital, doctors' offices. Had all that down there. But now urban renewal comes up and the doctors move over here in this area and they moved over here in that area.

And now in Durham once upon a time blacks were so closely knitted because of the way they had things you could go to Hayti if you didn't know where a person lived you'd go to Hayti and there's a possibility you're going to see them. Now people stay here and I saw some people this week. A lady died that was a friend of mine that lived in Charlotte. But I went over there yesterday () they had a little get together eating and whatever. And I saw some people that I hadn't seen in fifteen years and they tell me they're living in Durham. But they live way out in Oxford Manor somewhere.

AR: So communities became more isolated and separate? Yeah, yeah.

LR: Then they made them—they put shopping centers, stores--. Like right here in this community. We had to go to Wellons Village if you want to go to a store. It's no more community thing. It ain't no--. And the people that live over on this side, they got a shopping center. They don't have to come to this shopping center. So really we don't have nothing to make our paths cross. Our paths don't ever have to cross. And I think this was done by design. Maybe not.

AR: So it keeps city African American communities more separate and more—

LR: Right. Divide and conquer.

AR: Yeah. Yeah.

LR: They make you more dependent.

AR: Some people talked about community networks really got, you know, dissolved because of that. There used to be people, family members would all be, you know, on a couple, on one block or within range.

LR: Sure.

AR: And that that got completely dislocated.

LR: And credit. That was another destruction for the black community. That dollar down, dollar a week thing. And whatever it has escalated to now. But it started off, dollar down, dollar a week. It made people () things to have that they didn't have. If they didn't have that they would have been satisfied.

UNKNOWN MALE VOICE: Oh, Joe.

LR: Yes.

UM: Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know where you were at. How are you doing?

LR: That's my nephew.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

AR: We're going to go ahead and stop our interview right now and kind of wrap up for today. This is the end of the interview with Lawrence Ridgle, Jr., who is known as Sarge in the neighborhood. And we'll be picking up from this next week. Great. Thanks, Mr. Ridgle.

END OF INTERVIEW