

Interviewee: Annie Harrell Cox and Adrienne White

Interviewer: Dwana Leah Waugh

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Length: 1 disc, approximately 1 hour and 53 minutes

### **START OF DISC 1, TRACK 1**

DW: Okay, this Dwana Waugh and I am interviewing Annie Harrell Cox and Adrienne White on July sixteenth, 2006. Good afternoon.

AC: Good afternoon to you.

DW: Thank you. I think what I want to start with is just asking you if you could talk, Miss Cox, a little bit about your early experiences living in Charlotte and when you first moved to Piedmont Courts.

AC: Well, I remember as a child living on Davidson Street before we moved to Piedmont Court. That is before Earle Village was placed there. When we left from there, we moved to Piedmont Court and I believe I was either in the second or the third grade. Sometimes I can remember more as a kid, more so than I can of what happened yesterday. But I do remember moving to Piedmont Court and I also remember my parents saying that we were the first black family to move into Piedmont Courts. I remember going to Alexander Street School. That was before the highway was placed there, so we was having to walk all the way around Piedmont Courts to get over to Alexander Street. They didn't have the bridge that bridged Piedmont Courts to the Alexander Street School playground; the bridge was not there. It was

just a creek. So you had to go all the way around. Those were very good days, those were very good days.

DW: Yeah—

AC: I'll just keep going.

DW: If you want or I can ask another question.

AC: Please ask another question.

DW: What I think I'm really interested in hearing from you is, so you kind of came of age in the 60s and 70s?

AC: Yes, I was born in '56, so yeah, I came of age in the 60s and 70s, of course, in Piedmont Court. I'd like to definitely point out to anyone that's listening or reading this, when we moved into Piedmont Court, I remember my parents telling me that they had to show a marriage license. Back then, it was husband and wife and children, low-income families doing the very best with what they had; that's what it was. Later on, it turned into the welfare recipients, the young teenage women having kids and moving into the projects. That's what it turned into. It turned into the projects later on in life, but when we were there, it was a family home to a degree to us. It was a home, it was family. Everybody there was family. When we moved there, I remember growing up. When we first moved there, I remember my parents saying that a lot of the white people left, but I also remember, or what I grew up to remember, a lot of white people stayed. Some of the white kids I grew up with-- and we were friends. I remember going over to the church, Seigle Avenue Presbyterian Church. Rev. Bill Stewart was the minister at the church then. But back in those days, it was family-oriented; it was real family.

I didn't even know I was poor until I grew up. When I left Piedmont Court and heard other tales from other people and saw other things is when I realized that I was poor. As a kid, I didn't know that. We went on vacations. We went to the beach. Even if my father carried us to the beach and we had to turn around and come back that night, we went. My mother would fix a picnic basket, fried chicken and pies and cakes, and get a cooler, and we'd go and spend time at the beach, we'd go two, three times a summer. Like I said, I didn't know that I wasn't rich because we had much love; we had a lot of love. I know what it is to have had a father and a mother and a household. We were a very loving family. Then later on in life, my grandmother and my aunt moved from Philadelphia and moved into the Piedmont Court and so there was even more family there. Even along with your neighbors, everybody was family.

But I went to Seigle Avenue Church and I had a wonderful time there. My whole young experience was very good times in Piedmont Court and at Seigle Avenue. Seigle Avenue will always hold a special place in my life. Like I said, when I first started going there, the first minister there was Bill Stewart and later on, he left. I found out with Bill, when the black kids came across that street and starting coming to that church, I remember as a kid the church was full when I first started coming there. Then all of the people left, but I didn't know why. The white people left. The black kids came across that street, started coming there, so the white people just left and I didn't know why; I was a kid. You could sit on a whole pew by yourself. That's just how many people left. But Bill Stewart withstood all the controversy. He stayed there as a pastor. And I later on found out that he had to beg and borrow to keep the doors open, but he did.

There is where I met Miss Michie, Mary Carol Michie. Miss Michie is to me and will always be more than a friend. She's like my family, she's like an aunt. When I think of her, it

just about fills my heart when I do. But when I think of her, that spiritual song, "May the Work I've Done Speak for Me," that song reminds me of her. What brought her to that church is the words of Martin Luther King and she came there to try to make a difference, to bring whites and blacks together as close as she possibly could. God knows in heaven, she has definitely had a big impact on every child in Piedmont Courts that grew up over there. Back in the day, Piedmont Court was a wonderful place to be in. it really was.

DW: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about whether you felt there was a sense of community at Piedmont Courts and it seemed that there was definitely—

AC: Oh most definitely, yes, most definitely.

DW: Could you talk a little bit about why you think that was there was a sense of community then?

AC: I think because first of all—well, I think period, I think period, that that's the way life used to be. I think whether you were black or white, I think that's the way life used to be. There used to be a bond in the communities. Your neighbors used to could say things to the children when the kids were out of hand and chastise the kids. I think that is why it was such a community atmosphere in the communities back then more so than it is now. Nowadays, it's hard to say something to somebody's kid. I think that is why Piedmont Court or any other black community was, there was so much unity there, because they were not just neighbors; they were family. It was a bond there. Whether this was your sister, your cousin, or your neighbor, there was a bond there. Everybody was family. I remember on Sundays, the whole Piedmont Court just about went to Seigle Avenue Church and when we got out of church, we used to have this camp called Camp Stewart. And when we got out of church on Sundays, everybody would load up on the bus that didn't have vehicles and we'd go to Camp Stewart after church

and we'd have family dinner on Sundays, the whole entire church, just about everybody in Piedmont Courts. That is what you call unity and that's what made it a community.

DW: And were these dinners and going to Camp Stewart something that took place early—

AC: Yes.

DW: Or did this go on throughout the years?

AC: It went on throughout the years. Now when I first started there, like I said, a lot of white people left, but it went on out through the years. Later on, the Presbyterian Church didn't have the funds to keep the camp going on and they lost it, but it went on throughout the years.

DW: I was also really curious, I mean, you were talking about—well, there's two things that I was interested in from what you have said. But I guess I'll go back just for a second to this sense of community and you're talking about how there seemed to be a lack of community later.

AC: Yes.

DW: And why do you think that was or what do you think was the cause of people not being able to correct other people's children?

AC: Well, I think-- well, like I was just saying before you even cut the recorder on—

DW: The tape recorder.

AC: Yeah, adults used to be adults, children were children; everybody had a place. Nowadays, you got grown people that stand around and socialize as far as partying with younger kids nowadays. I think that's why the children do not respect older people now. It's because of people my age that, I mean, oh my goodness, I don't even know how to phrase it.

Because some things I see nowadays, it just totally blows my mind. I saw a lady yesterday evening and you might want to cut this off--. [Motions to turn off the recorder]

DW: See this is good. Can I--.

AC: Go ahead.

AW: I'm not going to say it, but let me just say this. If you are eighteen and the Charlotte Housing Authority considered you an adult because you were a legal adult, you can get housing.

AC: An apartment.

AW: But these are people that are not. They are either undereducated or not educated at all. So these are young girls that are having children who can only take care of themselves. They cannot maintain a household and they're children.

AC: Well first of all, just like you said, they're children having children. They haven't even been raised themselves.

AW: You cannot teach what you don't know.

AC: That's right.

AW: That's my two cents. (Laughs)

[Break in conversation—Recorder cut off]

AC: Now you got to ask the question.

AW: You're telling the interviewer how to interview.

DW: I was curious also about when you became an adult, so how long did you live in Piedmont Courts?

AC: I left Piedmont Courts, actually I never left because my parents and my cousins and my grandmother and all were still there, but I left home at seventeen. I left home—

AC: No, I didn't, shut up, Tiny. I left home at eighteen with my husband. My husband and I were together for thirty years. I just lost my husband a year and seven months ago.

DC: I'm sorry.

AC: Thank you so very much. I was there for years. Like I said, I grew up there and that was always home. But my parents were still there, the bulk of my family was still there, so I continued to go there.

DC: Well, part of the reason why I was asking you how long you stayed at Piedmont Courts is so when you became an adult—I guess I'm kind of shifting gears a little bit—I wanted to know in Charlotte in the 60s and the 70s what kind of environment and opportunities there were for affordable housing and for jobs, good jobs in Charlotte.

AC: It really wasn't, it really wasn't any. It may have been for--, Jesus Christ, it wasn't for blacks, put it like that. Because I remember my parents, because my father was a mechanic, I remember, and he had a car that he had purchased from his boss—man, daddy tinkered with that car until he got it running—but I remember my parents could not get welfare. They could not get surplus food because they had an automobile. So my mother used that automobile to take the wives in Piedmont Court that did not have transportation to go and pick up their food. She used that car to go and take them to pick up their food and that is how we got it. They would give her so much for taking them to pick up their food. She had a little schedule where she carried somebody Mondays, carried these two or three people Tuesdays, and that's how we got it. But my parents could not get welfare, the food, because my father had a car. So that's sad, that's very sad. For other—for whites, maybe they could have got, maybe they did get help; they probably did. It's always been that they get more than we could anyway. I saw what



my parents went through and I knew that for a fact, they could not get that because my father had a car.

DW: I was reading this article a few days ago. It's actually an older article, I think it was in *Creative Loafing* or maybe *The Observer*, and it was, I think, published in 2001 or 2002 before they even started, I guess, tearing down Piedmont Courts. They were mentioning within the article that they were going to start having these new regulations in Piedmont Courts to prevent a lot of things from happening. So if someone were doing drugs in the house, the person could be evicted, or if rent wasn't paid, they had a shortened rent time or a shortened time for the rent to be turned in. And a lot of these regulations were put into place, I guess, right before Piedmont Courts, they started tearing them down and revitalizing--.

AC: Well, they just started tearing Piedmont Court down here, yeah.

AW: It was delayed, it was delayed, and it started in April.

AC: Yeah, they just started about a month or so ago, a couple months ago.

AW: Yeah, about April, May.

AC: But I didn't know anything about that. Like we had discussed earlier, a lot of these people that lived in Piedmont Court at the very last of Piedmont Court were children, children having children, children that should not have even been having a place. I mean, they're just kids themselves, kids raising kids. Like we said earlier before you even turned your recorder on, a lot of black communities have really gone down because of these drugs of alcohol, especially the drugs.

AW: Okay, here's where I'm going to interject. And you have to understand, the basis of public housing is not to maintain the family. If you are a single woman with children, you can be housed, but if you are a married woman with a husband who is out of work or is



disabled, it is hard for you to get housing in Piedmont Court or any public housing facility. It is not to maintain the black community and that is the basis of the degradation of the black family, because they will not allow a man to stay in the home if there's any public assistance, if you're getting Medicaid, food stamps, any financial assistance. If there's a man there, then a woman and her children cannot get any public assistance. It is not to promote the family. Now there are other people that are non-black people that live in public housing. There's segregation in public housing. There are lots of public housing facilities around Charlotte. There are some in the nicer communities in Charlotte, but those are for people that are not black. There is just as many poor white people, poor Hispanic people, as there are black people.

AC: Amen.

AW: But they put black people in the inner-city public housing. Piedmont Courts, Dillehay Courts, places like that are predominately black.

AC: Boulevard Homes.

AW: Now there are other public housing facilities in Charlotte that are not predominately black and it is not to maintain--. Like you said, the regulations, if someone was on drugs or if someone was to be found to be participating in drug activity, they could be evicted. But what about instead of addressing the symptom, you address the problem? The problem is that she has a drug problem. Now what you're going to do is evict a family and put them out on the street when there are children that still need to be housed. So instead of addressing the problem that this person has a drug problem--. First of all, there's no father there. Second of all, the mother has substance abuse issues. But you're going to put her and her children on the streets instead of addressing the problem that she has a drug problem and what can we do to make sure her children and her are housed.

AC: And that she get help.

AW: So that is, I think, a lot of it. Nothing happens new. Piedmont Court, it was just not decided with the last five or ten years to tear down Piedmont Court. Piedmont Court is prime real estate here in Charlotte.

AC: Exactly.

AW: And that is the basis of it being torn down. Way back when, black folks lived out in the country areas, in the rural areas.

AC: That's what they call now the suburbs.

AW: The suburbs.

AC: That's it.

AW: But when it became popular for white people to live outside the city in the suburbs, then they moved all the black people into the—

AC: Inner-city.

AW: Inner-city, into Piedmont Courts, into Earle Village, into the public housing developments. But in recent years when it became more popular, this city-dwelling, this urban living, now Piedmont Court, Earle Village, places like that, they're the worst places in the city. It's propaganda. It is to make sure that everybody that is of voting age, everybody that has an opinion, that Piedmont Court will be a place that needs to be torn down. Now a lot of things that they write in the paper, if you lived in Piedmont Court, you would question yourself, "When did that happen? I didn't know that happened." And a lot of things that happened inside Piedmont Courts were not by people that lived there.

AC: Exactly.

AW: It was people from surrounding communities.

AC: Exactly.

AW: Inside Mecklenburg County, outside Mecklenburg County. A lot of those things that happened were not people that lived in Piedmont Courts. Now this is the Piedmont Court that I grew up in.

AC: The one that I was telling you about.

AW: The Piedmont Court of the mid-90s and the latter part of this year is not the Piedmont Court that they're tearing down.

AC: That we know.

AW: That's not the Piedmont Court we grew up in. And the people that started problems in Piedmont Court did not live there. So when you decide that I am going to revitalize this community, who are you revitalizing this community for? Because it does not benefit the people that live in there. When Earle Village was being torn down, supposedly the people that lived there were going to have the first opportunity to move back.

AC: That's right.

AW: Well, these were low-income people. How is a person that is just at the poverty line or operating below the poverty line, if you cannot afford a hundred thousand dollar unit when Piedmont, when Earle Village is rebuilt and these new apartments, how are you going to afford a hundred thousand dollars? You couldn't before. If you did, you wouldn't have lived in Piedmont Court or Earle Village. How is it possible that you can come back and have the opportunity to get a hundred thousand dollar mixed-income neighborhood? No, that just is not possible. It's prime real estate.

AC: And that's what it's all about.

AW: And there's certain segments of the community that you don't want to have mixed.

DW: Yeah, I did want to talk about that, the whole mixed-income communities, and what both of you thought about this mixed income. Because I've heard from some people that it's a very positive thing, because you have lower income people who are able to look up to middle class—

AW: But those lower income people are not there on a permanent basis. Now if I, as a person that owns my own home and I am paying anywhere from a hundred thousand dollars to two hundred thousand dollars to live here, I do not want people that are receiving public assistance living in my community. It's good on paper, but those people that live there that receive public assistance or those people that have jobs and it's based on their income, they have a time limit that they can live there.

AC: That's right. Isn't it five years?

AW: It's five years. It's a time limit. You are not there to stay. So if I was getting public assistance and I lived beside somebody that made a hundred thousand dollars, first of all, I would have to be able to earn what they earn to maintain and stay there, and that means I'd have to be educated.

AC: And actually, the whole program really doesn't make any sense.

AW: No, it's a contradiction of itself.

AC: If you don't reach that education and find a job—

AW: To be self-sufficient, you can't stay there.

AC: Within five years, you're going to have to definitely drop from what you was to something much more lower.

AW: What's going to happen is you're not going to be able to sustain that and you will be in public housing again.

DW: Well, there seems that—

AC: Well, they're doing away with public housing; that's what they're doing.

AW: Exactly, exactly, as it exists today.

AC: Yeah. Yeah. And making it, what do they call it?

AW: A mixed-income neighborhood.

DW: Yeah, I was going to say there's been a lot written about the end of public housing now and how especially in Charlotte with so many people coming into Charlotte now and into Mecklenburg County, that there's not a lot of affordable housing for people. Would do you think will be the fate of people who are low income that will be subject to this mixed-income—

AW: They'll live in substandard housing, because even with Piedmont Court and Dillehay Court and Earle Village, because it was maintained by the Charlotte Housing Authority, which is under the direction of HUD, Housing and Urban Development, you have to maintain a certain standard. These people could not live in houses that didn't have electricity that was safe and operable. They had to have a certain standard for heating. It couldn't be infested with any roaches or rats or anything like that. It had to meet a certain standard. But what's going to happen is there are going to be people that—what really is going to happen is we'll end up having places like in New York, the new big cities, Detroit, public—

AC: High rise apartments.

AW: High rises like that, substandard housing, people that own property that they won't maintain it, slum lords, people living in housing that's just not safe. That's what's going to happen.

AC: That's what's happening now.

AW: That's what's happening—

AC: With that Section Eight, that's exactly what's happening now. A lot of homeowners are willing to rent their property out just to get that money, that for sure income that's going to come in every month on the same date from the government.

AW: And they only have to get it reevaluated once a year.

AC: Once a year.

AW: And because we know people that have Section 8 housing, they may have a refrigerator that doesn't operate, a stove that's not operating properly, leaky roofs, infestation, roaches, rats, that sort of thing. That's what's going to happen when public housing doesn't exist the way that it exists today, because there's certain standards the Housing Authority has to maintain even to receive funding from the federal government. A lot of these private owners that are extending their property for Section 8, they don't have to meet the same standards.

AC: Actually, I think if they would have left government projects, I think it just needed to be revitalized, it needed to be managed differently. I think it still needs to exist.

AW: It still needs to exist.

AC: Yes.

AW: And you know what—

AC: But see, they're doing away with it. It still needs to exist, but it needs to be managed differently.

DW: What do you mean?

AC: I mean, from my understanding, from what I heard when Kerry was running against Bush, Kerry said, "If you would listen to what this man is saying, this man, if you elect



this man for president," he said, "Eventually it's not going to be middle class. You're either going to be dirt poor or filthy rich," and that is exactly what it's becoming. You're either filthy rich or dirt poor. All of this money going into Section 8, this is part of draining the government. This is part of wiping out the middle class and making more, it's more dirt poor people now since he's been in the seat than before he started.

AW: Now you know you're not just talking about people that are dirt poor. These people are not all unemployed.

AC: Yes.

AW: They're underemployed.

AC: Exactly.

AW: They just cannot maintain a living wage.

AC: Exactly.

AW: Remember when I was talking about Dr. Donna Beagle[Beagle directed a conference for White's job] and that's what she focused on, earning a living wage, a wage that you can be self-sufficient to sustain your household.

AC: Well listen, what I'm saying is as far as Section 8 is concerned—

AW: Oh absolutely, I don't disagree.

AC: How long can it last?

AW: Exactly.

AC: The government for instance, your mortgage, your rent is seven hundred dollars a month. Because you are a low income person and not making very much money—

AW: Your portion will be a hundred dollars.

AC: Your portion is hundred, yeah. The government got to pay six hundred dollars every month. How long is this going to last? When they should have left these government projects here and revitalized them, do something with the management; that's what should have been done.

AW: And the criteria for getting public housing.

AC: Exactly, revitalizing that.

AW: The criteria shouldn't be that I'm eighteen and I'm a single unwed mother, uneducated, undereducated. That shouldn't be enough for me to get housing; that should not be enough. There has to be certain things in place to make sure that if I can't properly manage my life, then how is it that I can properly manage a household?

DW: Well, what would you say would be some of the criteria if you were in charge of public housing, the housing situation in the US?

AW: That you would be more than eighteen years of age. That you were in a program that was going, you were going to do something within the next five to ten years that will make you self-sufficient, adequately self-sufficient, not the fact that I am in a Work First program that is teaching me how to be a low-level employee, not something that's training me to still live just below the poverty line. Because a lot of the programs, they're saying they're teaching you to be self-sufficient, but how can I sufficiently support me and two or three children making minimum wage? How can I adequately go out and obtain housing that is safe and not the point of whether the housing is safe, the environment is safe, because a lot of this housing is not in a safe environment.

AC: And it goes back to what she said earlier also. When you are working and doing the very best you can with what you got, it's hard, excuse the expression, it's hard as hell to get any

kind of government assistance, period; it is hard. When you have been self-sufficient all of your life and all of a sudden, down falls something happens, it is hard to get any kind of assistance from the government, period.

AW: Well, I personally, this system is not and has never been—when black people during the civil rights movement, you said what made Piedmont Courts a community, we were all working toward the same goal, we were all working toward the same goal that our children, well, when I was a child, to make sure I had everything that I needed to live; everybody was working toward the same goal. So if you, some older person saw me out and I wasn't doing what I needed to do at a certain hour of the day—

AC: That's right.

AW: If it was school hours and there were kids that were at home, then there was going to be some chastisement from some elderly person, some older person: "Why aren't you in school?" And if your parent didn't know you weren't in school, your parent was going to know by day's end that you weren't in school, was going to make sure that you were in school the next day. That's because we were all working toward the greater good of the community. I wasn't just based on my interests; my mother wasn't concerned about my own interests; my grandmother wasn't concerned about my own interests. They were concerned about the interests of the kids across the street

AC: That's right.

AW: Because that was going to be a kid that was going to be in our house eating dinner. So you were going to be able to tell a kid what to do when that child was nine times out of ten going to eat dinner at your house, or your kids were going to spend the night at their house, or their kids were going to spend the night at your house. So we were all working toward the same

thing. Now the downfall of public housing is the fact that now everybody's not working toward the same thing, but then you cannot teach what you don't know.

AC: Exactly.

AW: An eighteen-year-old mother can't tell the child across the street that you need to be in school.

AC: When she didn't go herself.

AW: When she didn't go herself.

AC: Exactly.

AW: So she doesn't even have that foundation. She doesn't have an understanding that education is important and you can't teach what you don't know.

AC: Exactly.

AW: And the worst part about not knowing is not knowing you don't know, because in your community, everybody is like you. But that's not the real world.

AC: That's right.

AW: But that's not the world we lived in in Piedmont Courts. We got in cars and we got in the church van and we went places.

AC: That's right.

AW: We went to the beach.

AC: We went to school.

AW: Our world was greater, our view was broader than Piedmont Court.

AC: That's it.

AW: We knew that there was a world operating outside of Piedmont Courts and that's what Seigle Avenue and the grandmothers, they prepared us to know that there was a world outside of Piedmont Court; this was not just the world. But that's not happening now.

DW: So do you feel that this change that is going on, so the Piedmont Courts in the mid-90s to 2006—

AW: Well, I would say the mid-80s and that's when crack became prevalent in the community. That's when there was a real change in Piedmont Courts. Now what was that year that they had that shoot-out in Piedmont Courts? Was it '84 or '85?

AC: That's when the change came.

AW: That's when the real change came and there was nothing done to change Piedmont Court. The decision was made that this has got to go.

AC: And that is when every time—

AW: And that's the basis of it.

AC: You heard something about Piedmont Court—

AW: That was reiterated over and over again.

AC: It was something negative, from that one shoot-out. And just like she said earlier, just like Adrienne said earlier, the people that came over there that caused confusion and caused drama did not live there.

DW: I wanted to know your take about the media and the role the media played in how they talked about Piedmont Courts.

AW: Let me tell you something about what I think about that, because I work near the courthouse right by Piedmont Courts and people that know me, know that that's where I was raised. So I was taking a girlfriend of mine, we were going past there one day for lunch. We

were going somewhere else, but I wanted her to go the route to go past Piedmont Court, so she knew where I used to live. There was across the street sitting on his car, was Mark Becker. He works for the local news. Was something happening in Piedmont Courts? No. He was sitting there with the possibility that he was going to have a story to report later on. It's just like swinging somebody to what you want them to believe. Now if you lived in south Charlotte, let me make a comparison to you about south Charlotte. I used to work in south Charlotte—

AC: Let me cut off one second. You were saying about Mark Becker, you knew about that. I remember later on in life during the 90s, I remember there used to be this police officer. They eventually took him out of Piedmont Court. He used to walk around with two handcuffs; he'd walk around. If he arrests somebody, he might have them all day long until he can get him somebody else. But he'd walk around as if I'm waiting. Okay, finish talking.

AW: When I lived in Piedmont Courts when I was a little girl, as I said, Seigle Avenue was the first place that I—I'll tell you what they did for me. They just introduced me to a world of people that cared about me.

AC: That's it.

AW: Seigle Avenue has supported Piedmont Courts for as long as I can remember.

AC: That's right.

AW: And when I say support Piedmont Courts, I don't mean financially. It gave a place for the kids to go after school.

AC: That's it.

AW: We did our homework, we played games, we had bible study, we had barbecues.

AC: Every day.

AW: We went to camp. In the summer, we were there every day in the summer—



AC: That's it, that's it.

AW: For daily activities. We ate lunch. And during all of that, we were taught about the world because we had people that were not like us showing us what kind of world we would possibly have. These are people that took us to their home. When I tell you there may have been thirty or forty little black kids in this white minister's home and we were at home, he didn't make us feel different. We weren't guests, we weren't visiting, we were his family.

AC: His name was Bob Morgan.

AW: Bob Morgan and Mary Carol Michie, we would always go to her house. She would bake and cook and we would play in her basement playroom. There was not a place in that house that we could not go.

AC: That's right.

AW: She never made us feel any different from her own children.

AC: And I'll tell you something else about—

AW: And that's the kind of life we lived. They were instrumental in me going to school, Seigle Avenue was.

AC: That's right, yes.

AW: I have never taken an SAT test, but I went to college at Montreat College because Seigle Avenue, the youth director, they had made sure that I went. That's the community that Piedmont Court was. These people walked around Piedmont Court.

AC: That's it.

AW: They knew your mother, they knew your grandmother.

AC: They knew every kid, that's it.

AW: Everybody, they knew every kid by name.

AC: That's it.

AW: They supported the community. And yes, there were people's rents that they paid. And yes, there were clothes that they bought for kids, but they supported the community because if you needed them, they were going to be there.

AC: That's right.

AW: And people appreciated that, they appreciated it. People now may not appreciate it as much as they did then, because people have the mindset that you owe me something. It's just different now, it's different now in Piedmont Court, and it's the increase in drug activity.

AC: It is. Miss Michie in her home, she has just as many pictures of black kids that she has helped reared up as she has of her own children. Black kids, her brother [Adrienne's] is on her refrigerator at her home. I mean, she is more than just a friend. She's like our family.

AW: You didn't meet her?

DW: No.

AW: You have got to meet her.

AC: You need to meet her. You've got to meet her.

AW: You have to got to meet her.

DW: I've heard nothing but positive things about her.

AC: That's all you're going to hear.

AW: Yeah, that is all you'll ever hear. You will never hear anything derogatory about Miss Michie.

AC: Nothing at all.

AW: And Miss Michie is a person that, she is the first white person I can remember meeting.

AC: Like I said, that song, "May the Work I've Done Speak for Me," that's her; that reminds--. That is when God calls her to heaven, that's what he's going, what's going to stand out for her. She has done it. She hasn't preached it, she did it.

AW: That's true too. She is not a minister, but that is her ministry.

AC: That's it.

AW: Oh, you have got to meet her.

DW: Yeah.

AW: You wouldn't have any history about Piedmont Court or Belmont if you didn't get to meet her.

AC: If you don't hear about Miss Michie, that's it.

AW: She's a sweetie. [Stopped to eat dinner]

**END OF TRACK 1, DISC 1**

## START OF TRACK 2, DISC 1

DW: Okay, this is the second part of the previous interview with Miss Annie Harrell Cox and—

AW: Adrienne.

DW: Adrienne White. This is July sixteenth, 2006. I think where we had left off was talking about Seigle Avenue and how important—the different things that Seigle Avenue did in your life. Could you just talk a little bit more about the impact Seigle Avenue had on Piedmont Courts and on your life and how it made a change in your life?

AC: Well, first of all, growing up, I never heard in my household from my parents' issues about white people; I never heard that. My parents were not racist people, and growing up, I was raised along with my grandparents, I knew them very well, and my great-grandparents, I knew them, and I never heard them say a racist, harmful word. Because of that, going to Seigle Avenue, I was raised to take people for face value and to love people for who they were, and going to Seigle Avenue was not a big adjustment in my life at all. I blended right on in and I blended right on it to their lives and they blended right on into mine. Because first of all as I said before, I didn't know anything about racism. All I knew is they were a lighter-complexioned people and that they were the sweetest people that I had almost ever met.

My family was a good family too, so I can't say the sweetest people I had met, but I can kind of put them in the category with my own family. But Seigle was definitely a big impact on my life. From home to going across the street to that church, it was all a good thing, every bit of it. Like I said before or earlier, my lifestyle in Piedmont Court, my living and growing up, my parents rearing me up in Piedmont Court was a good thing. Part of that was definitely, a big impact of that also was Seigle Avenue Presbyterian Church. I just thank God that I, I feel like I

was blessed, I was definitely blessed to be a part of it; there's no doubt. It has also helped me be the person that I am today and I consider myself a very decent person.

My family was a very close-knit family. My mother and my father, my grandparents, my great-grandparents are all gone and Seigle Avenue is not the Seigle Avenue that we knew, but because of the values that they instilled in our lives, my parents as well as the church, we have grown up to be the people that we are today. And my family is still a very close-knit family. You've seen some of that here today. Everybody wasn't here, everybody wasn't here, but I used to have a house full. That is the impact that Seigle Avenue put in my life and being raised up in Piedmont Courts.

Like I told you from the very beginning, when my parents came there, they had to show a marriage license. I don't know if it was because they really didn't want the blacks there or that was the policy, because it was the white people that were there, they were husbands and wives and children. Well, no, no, yes it was, all of them that I knew. But it was a blessing, God knows it was a blessing; it really was. I'm forty-nine years old now and I can remember a lot of those days more so than I can remember a lot of my days when I was older. I can tell you something about back then quicker than I can tell you what happened last week, because that was a good time in my life.

DW: Did a lot of Piedmont Court residents, were they members of Seigle Avenue?

AC: Yes, back in the day, yes, a lot of them were.

DW: Did you feel that the church still had a strong impact on the community when in this transitional time that was mentioned earlier, like the mid-80s to recently? Did you feel that the church had a major role in shaping Piedmont Court then?

AC: I certainly do. In every neighborhood, in every neighborhood, you're going to have bad ones, but I believe there was a lot of kids that came out of Piedmont Court that did a lot of positive things. The main reason why I believe this is because, like I've stated so many times and my cousin, Adrienne White, the same thing she was saying, there was something to do as a family. There was always something to do. We had the playgrounds where we had someone there to help us with all types of arts and crafts. Then we had the church. Every single day when we got out of church, we went there. When we got out of school, we went there. It was always something to do.

Now a lot of programs have been cut out and have been stopped. Where we had a place to go every single day to have a good time, to learn something positive, now the kids don't have any place to go. The only place they have now is to hang-out on the corners. All of the programs that we went to that were free of charge, all you had to do was come. They don't have that today. Every thing now has a price tag and nine times out of ten, the parent can't afford it, especially if you're a single parent; they can't afford it. Up until now, Seigle is not the Seigle Avenue that I grew up knowing. Now I really don't know how to tell it, how it is today; I really don't know. My girls are grown-up. They were in the church. They participated in a lot of things at the church. But the Seigle that is of today, this date right here, I really can't describe it. I don't what's really going on because I don't participate in things there anymore like I used to, I don't. My heart is just not there anymore. I don't feel it like I used to and like I said, I've been there since a kid.

I started at that church, I was nine years old. I was baptized at the age of twelve. Miss Michie's husband, he tells the story that this young man or this lady, her husband, Edith and Ray Gardner, their son, I can't think of his name right now, but he and I were baptized at the



same time. Here I am, this twelve-year-old black kid and here he was, this twelve-year-old white child, and we were baptized at the same exact time. Mr. George, Miss Michie husband, he's a white man also, Mr. George said when he saw that, he looked at that and he said, "Now the grounds are even." He tells the story like that and he said that just filled his heart to see that. Like I said, I was twelve years old when I was baptized at Seigle Avenue. When I started there, the minister was Bill Stewart, Rev. Bill Stewart. Then there was Bill Morgan, and then there was Charlie Summers. Those three ministers there were a big plus in my life. Now we have Rev—Jesus, I can't even think of her name—Floretta. I can't even think of her name right now.

DW: Well, I want to ask you, so when you were talking about Seigle Avenue, you not seeing race or racism, knowing racism when you got to the church--I guess I'm curious to find out how different was that for a black family, black families, or for you to attend a church in the community that was a mixed-race population or predominately white maybe at some point, versus some of the other churches in the neighborhood that were predominately black.

AC: Well, when I started going over there, like I said, I was just a kid. And I saw that there were a lot of white people there and I noticed as time went by, they weren't there anymore. But I didn't know that they were leaving because the blacks were coming in; I didn't know that. See I was just a kid myself, but later on I found out that is why they went. But then, it was so many white people that did stay and then it was so many white people that came to that church because of them hearing that that church was—it didn't matter what race you were and that's what made it such a plus.

I didn't really, I didn't see racism and I was raised in Piedmont Court, going to Seigle Avenue, a mixed church; I didn't see racism. I heard about it in school. It was taught a little bit to a degree, but I didn't see it until I was in school. I mainly saw it, well in elementary at

Elizabeth School, I remember this white girl, I can't think of her name, but I can see her face to today, I remember her calling me a nigger. It hurt because I knew that was a bad word then. She would not stop, but I went on. She just, "Nigger, nigger, nigger," and I went on. That was my incident of knowing what racism really was.

Then I remember in high school, I was going to school. This was during exams time. Well, I didn't have exams until about eleven o'clock that day. So I was catching the bus to go to school and I was standing at the bus stop and I remember seeing this little orange Volkswagen over across the street coming out of this neighborhood. Well, I saw it, but I didn't pay it any attention. Well, when he came out of the street, he turned left going up the street where I was standing at there at the bus stop. That white guy threw a brick out the window and hit me in the chest so hard I dropped my books and I lost my breath. He hit me so hard that as dark as I am, I had a red bruise for a week or two. Now that was the most devastating thing that had ever happened to me and that's when I saw racism for what it really was. That's when the impact of racism hit me because that young man, he didn't know me from Adam, they didn't; it was two of them. But because I was black, that's why they did it.

I was raised to take people for face value of who they were, not because of the color of their skin. And like I said, I knew my great-grandparents. My great-grandfather was over one hundred years old when he died. He knew what racism was, he knew what it was. My mother and them both, my mother and father came from Marshville, North Carolina, home of Randy Travis, the country. They knew what it was to see racism, there's no doubt about it, but I never heard my parents say a harsh word. I never heard them say anything about anybody because of the color of their skin.

DW: Well, since we're talking about Seigle Avenue, I was reading a book that was put out about Seigle Avenue and in it, I've noticed that your mother and some other mothers in Piedmont Courts helped to establish the Mothers' Club. What do you remember about the Mothers' Club and what kinds of activities they did?

AC: Oh boy. They used to get together and have baked sales and yard sales and raise money for programs at the church to help out with the programs at the church and to go on trips and do things for themselves also, mainly to do things for themselves. Because you have to think that most of these parents were low-income parents and they didn't get to do a lot of things; their money was limited. So they did a lot, I remember them going to Wilmington to see the big boat several times at the beach. As a matter of fact, I think I have a picture of my grandmother standing on a pier with a fishing pole from one of those trips. And that picture that I showed you earlier of my grandmother, that's them, the Mothers' Club having a dinner. They more or so less raised money for them to do things for themselves as parents, to get out of the house.

DW: Now when this group started and how long it started?

AC: It lasted for years. I remember when it started, but I just can't give you date or time, but it lasted for years. Margaret Bigger, she was a main focus on helping start the Mothers' Club. Margaret and my mother, Verla Harrell, and Miss Janie Douglas also was a big instrument in getting it started, getting that Mothers' Club going. What is her name? Oh boy, I can't think of the other lady's name, I can't think of her name. But it was a lot of the mothers from Piedmont Courts and some of the women from the church and that's how it all began.

DW: Now when you say it lasted for years, do you remember if it lasted into the 90s?

AC: Yes, maybe. I don't know. Yes, I believe it did, because even after Margaret left, well I think Margaret always stayed in it to a degree, but I remember Miss Janie Douglas being a very vital part of it. Oh yes, Miss Dolster, she was involved in it.

DW: Were you ever involved in any activities to kind of get the community motivated in Piedmont Courts?

AC: No, I guess not. I've always tried to carry myself as a positive image growing up in Piedmont Court, for one, and I did do Sunday School, my husband and I, later on in years there at the church. But no, I never tried to get any kind of programs or anything going in Piedmont Court. I guess when I got to that stage in my life, I had left from there. I moved on and started my own family. But no, I did not, but I participated in a lot of programs there, that's for sure.

DW: Do you remember a lot of the work that your mother did with the Mothers' Club and aside from the bake sales and the yard sales, the kinds of things that went into getting people to join or come to events?

AC: Oh gosh. I can't really think of anything right off hand. Now as soon as you cut this tape off or as soon as you leave, everything is going to start triggering and coming to mind. No, I can't just right off the top of my head. It was such a positive program. Every mother that was a mother knew about the program, the Mothers' Club, and wanted to be in it, everybody that had that positive-type attitude. I can't say that they did anything in particular that made people want to join. It was such a good thing that anybody that heard about it in that neighborhood that had that positive attitude was in there, was there; they were already in there.

DW: Now you had talked about how people, seeing this change that took place in Piedmont Courts. So when your family first moved in, you had to be married and there was a real closeness in the community, that everyone, even your neighbors felt like family, and that at

some point, that seemed to not happen because then a lot of a younger mothers came in. When you say that people with a positive attitude were part of the club, is it your sense that say around the 80s and the 90s, were there a lot of people with this positive attitude that were part of this Mothers' Club? Were there many members or many people that you would classify as having this positive attitude?

AC: Well later on, as Piedmont Court changed, so did everything else. The Mothers' Club wasn't what it used to be as far as the membership. I think it did start declining. And like I said, the changes that brought it on was the fact that these are young girls moving in the community now. Being in a Mothers' Club, no, that's not what they wanted. Like I also brought to your attention earlier, and my cousin also said the same, a lot of these girls that were moving into Piedmont Courts were kids their own selves, kids having children. And like she said, all you had to do was have babies and be of a certain age and you could get your own apartment, which should not have been. Of course, they weren't interested in anything like that.

DW: Do you remember if both men and women participated pretty equally in trying to put forth this positive image at Piedmont Courts?

AC: Well, no, I wouldn't say that. I've always felt like nine times out of a ten, a woman is the one up-front. Most women have that leadership ability, I think, or they just take it upon themselves to be that positive influence. I'm not saying anything bad about men, but men usually stay in the background. I do remember when we were going on our little fellowship outings after church, dinners and all of that, and my mother and them were participating in gatherings through the Mothers' Club, I remember my father being a part of it. I remember him being with my mother going to those places or being there with us eating, I remember that. Now not all the time, but I can remember him being there sometimes.



DW: Well, I think one of the things that I was curious to find out was about how you feel toward the Charlotte Housing Authority and if the decisions that they made were the same decisions that you would have made as a resident having seen what you've seen. What kind of qualifications would you have wanted for people to move into Piedmont Courts?

AC: Well, like I just stated or I said earlier, I think the government projects was a very good thing. The government projects were for low-income families doing the very best with what they had and I think that was a wonderful thing. That's all the more reason why I don't think it needs to stop, because there is no way that someone can live off of minimum wages nowadays and make it and keep a roof of their heads. There is no way that the government is going to continue to be able to fund the Section 8 program. That is all the more reason why I do believe in my heart that the government projects were a wonderful thing, but it needs to be reconstructed as far as management is concerned. If it's going to be a stepping stone to better things, then it needs to be a stepping stone to better things. I don't think it should be shut out, torn down, and people just placed in and everywhere they can be placed. That's not helping the situation; that's only hurting it. In the long run, they're going to see it. This Section 8 thing, I really believe it's going to be, I don't even know the words, I think it's just not the right thing to do. Like I said, I believe that the government projects, it can be a good thing, it can definitely be a good thing. It just needs to be reconstructed as far as management is concerned.

DW: Now did you have a sense that when you were living and your family was living in Piedmont Courts that this was temporary housing, that this was this stepping stone, that may have changed later?

AC: I believe, yes. Well, you know, I looked at Piedmont Court as if some rich white person or some not necessarily white, some rich person looked at their home, as home. That's



the way I looked at Piedmont Court. When they tore down my building in Piedmont Court, apartment 302, I felt it in my heart. When I went past Piedmont Courts yesterday and just about all of those projects are gone, I cried, sitting at the red light looking and I cried, because that was home. And like I've said more than once, Piedmont Court was for low-income families. The income that my father brought in, that was the best that he could do, that was the best that he could do, but we took care of it. We mopped every day. I mopped my mother's house every day. I got down on my hands and knees and waxed them floors. You could eat off our floors. We took care of it. That was home, that was home.

I knew with the income that my parents had, I knew that that was the best that they could do. I knew that if they were going to get out of Piedmont Courts, it was going to be left up to me or my sisters, because I knew that was the best that my daddy could do with what they had. I remember as a kid praying that the Lord would make me rich, that he would make me so rich that I'd have this big house and my parents could live with me in this big five, six, seven-bedroom house. My parents could live with me there in the house. If they didn't want to stay with me, there was a guest house out back and they could live there.

God did not give me that type of wealth, but he gave me enough. He gave me a roof over my head and a steady income and a room here. When my mother got sick, I brought my mother home with me and I took care of my mother until she died. So he gave me those riches. He didn't give them to me the way I envisioned them, but he gave it to me. I knew that if they ever got out of government projects that it would be up to me or my sisters. That's what I felt because my father didn't have very much education and my mother was very ill. My mother had been ill all her life. My mother had terrible seizures. So my father was one of the ones, I think it was either Nixon or Bush, that all those people that were on disability, they took them

off of disability and made them go back to work; my father was one of those ones. And my daddy didn't work three months after that and he had a series of strokes. He lived a little while after that and he eventually passed. It's just--.

DW: Did you feel that most of your neighbors felt the same way, that the kids were to do better than the parents?

AC: Yes, I think because when we moved, nine times out of ten, I don't know of--. I think I'm speaking for all of the blacks back in the day that came into Piedmont Court during the time when my parents moved there. Piedmont Court was a stepping stone. Piedmont Court was a plus for black people back then; that was a plus. Because I remember when we lived on Davidson Street, I remember my mother buying coal and wood and we had a fireplace. When we got to Piedmont Court, we had heat that we didn't have to do nothing but turn a knob, it came on. I remember my mother buying ice to put in the refrigerator when we stayed on Davidson Street. I'm telling you I was a kid, but I can remember these little things. In Piedmont Court, we had ice trays in the refrigerator. So Piedmont Court was a stepping stone for black people back then.

DW: What do you attribute that to, the sense that the kids will look back a generation and help them out? Do you feel that kids today have that same kind of mentality that you help your parents out?

AC: Well, I don't know about anybody else's kids, but I know mine. Mine, they thought that was the one--. Well, I didn't even give it a thought, a second thought. I told my husband that my mother was coming home with me and I said to him, I said, "You know, I haven't even asked you was it okay," and he said, "You didn't have to ask me was it okay." I said, "I know I didn't, but I think it's just the best thing to do as you are my husband." But there was no if,

ands, and butts about whether my mother was coming. Then my girls were very close to their grandmother. Like I said many times before, we are a very close-knit family. We have been blessed, we have been blessed. When my aunt and my grandmother moved back from Philadelphia and moved here, they moved to Piedmont Courts right up the street from us, that made us even closer, and Adrienne, we all grew up together. By the grace of God, we're still together.

DW: Well, I want to kind of go back to, I guess, the state and Charlotte city government and the role that they play with housing issues. Do you feel that politicians really consider the issues that low-income people feel?

AC: Oh, of course not, of course not. And I'm sure this is not the first time you've heard that. Low-income people, if you don't have any money, really you don't have a voice to a degree, I would say to a degree. Because I think if you don't have money, but if you come together as a group and express yourself where it needs to be expressed—I mean, violence, raising your voice, and using your words, that does not get anything across—but I believe if you come together as a voice and do positive things and go to the right source, especially the media, then I think you can be heard to a degree; but it's all just to a degree. Like Adrienne said, back in the day blacks were living out in the far skirts of Charlotte and the surrounding counties or on the outskirts of Charlotte. Then the rich wanted that and they pushed everybody into the city; the inner-city kids, that's what they call them. Now the inner-city is the place to be. Your jobs are here, housing is here, the gas prices are out of the roof, and now the inner-city is where to be. So now they're pushing people away.

DW: What did you think were the big pressing issues at Piedmont Courts? Well, I'll let you answer that first. What did you think were the major issues towards the end of Piedmont Court's existence as we know it now?

AC: Drugs, drugs, and again, young women with apartments. Young women, babies having babies, and babies having apartments without any adults, without any structure.

DW: Do you think that these issues—

AC: [Whispers] I've talked about this too much--.

DW: Well, do you think these issues changed over time from what you remember the major issues of say the Mothers' Club and the focus of the Mothers' Club or other groups that formed at Piedmont Courts? Do you feel that the issues then were different from the drugs and the young women having apartments?

AC: The issues that the Mothers' Club dealt with back then?

DW: Yeah, or any other organization that was at Piedmont Courts.

AC: There is no comparison to what Piedmont Court was and to what Piedmont Court was three or four months ago; there is no comparison, there is no comparison. I used to look at the kids down there and it'd break my heart, it'd make me cry. If only those kids could see what we saw when we were children in Piedmont Courts. I remember one Sunday at church, and on Wednesdays we had this thing called Wonderful Wednesday, that was bible study and fellowship. We'd had dinner at church and all of that good stuff. I remember one Sunday I came to church, I didn't go to Wonderful Wednesday that particular Sunday, and we had a meeting and I sit there and listen. It was a couple of the teachers ready to throw in the towel because of some issues that had happened on that Wonderful Wednesday. And I sit there and I

listen and it was blacks and whites in there at the meeting. I sit there and I listen and I listen and I listen.

Then at the end, I said, "I know I wasn't there Wednesday at Wonderful Wednesday," I said, "But I want to say something." I looked at everybody in the room and I said to them, I said, "When we were kids," I said, "The worst thing that we ever saw our parents do was maybe drink or smoke." I said, "That's the worst thing we ever saw our parents do." I said, "Some of these kids, this church, if it wasn't for this church, where in the world would they be?" I said, "Some of them come up here and we say 'baby, sweetheart, sit down. Come over here, pick that up. Now darling, that is not what you're supposed to say. You don't do it like that,' or whatever." I said, "Do you know some of that is the kindest things some of these kids ever hear? When they go home, it's 'if you don't sit your so-and-so, I'm going to so-and-so.'" I said, "That's what they're used to." I said, "By the grace of God, if we only touch one, two, three, four children, we've done a lot." I said, "We may not feel like we're doing anything. We may not feel like these kids are listening," I said, "But they are. I'm one of those kids. I'm a product of Piedmont Court." I said, "And because of the kindness that Miss Michie and Bill Stewart and Bob Morgan, because of the kindness that they showed me when I was a kid," I said, "I'm here today. I'm here today."

By that time, I had everybody was listening and I was telling them what we are doing here is a wonderful thing and we need to continue. Because like I said, when them kids leave out of that church and go back across that street, it was a whole entirely different world.

DW: Now did you work with any youth programs at the church?

AC: With my kids being there, I used to volunteer to do some things. I used to help out, yeah, I used to help out. But things just changed so.

DW: I wanted to ask you too, or I want to ask you and I'm going to ask you, did you feel that there was a stigma attached to being in public housing?

AC: Well, I guess it is, there's no doubt. Well, I'm sure, yes, of course. [In a low voice] I have to get my thoughts together-- Of course, it was. I mentioned to you earlier before you even cut your recording on, we was talking about Piedmont Court. This young man that I knew, matter of fact, he and my sister were married once and the guy mentioned his name, and I said I knew him. I said where I met him at the first time I met him. This was before my sister married him. I said it was in Piedmont Court and this young lady said, "Piedmont Courts?" I'm like, "Yes, what about it? I was raised in Piedmont Court." Yes it is, yes it is. I think yes, of course, it is, it is.

DW: In, I guess, talking about public housing or housing in general, especially with affordable housing and I think we talked before about whether housing in Charlotte, affordable housing options. I think what I wanted to ask is do you feel that—

[Break in conversation—Recorder cut off]

AW: Okay, come on before I go forget. Okay, go ahead, you ask your question and I'll answer.

DW: I'm going to shift now from asking about the housing thing, but I have a question to you, Miss White, about the civil rights movement. We were talking before about the civil rights movement and I asked the question to the effect of something like: were people all working toward the same goal? You had said something about there's a lack of concern about kids and this has started to change now. I guess I'm wondering what you think, what were the goals of the civil rights movement? Was it to be concerned about kids?



AW: Well, I don't know if that was the goal of the civil rights movement. What I think it was that we were as black people working for a common goal, make sure we have fair housing, make sure we have decent jobs, that the children were being taken care of. And that's what we had in Piedmont Court in the early 70s, the early 80s. But that stopped happening and I think it started to decline when crack became so prevalent in the communities. There was a breakdown in funding for programs that used to exist, particularly in Piedmont Courts with the Parks and Recreation programs here in Charlotte. So when those things decreased or were cut, then there was some substantial change in what happened in Piedmont Court. There were not summer programs for the kids to participate in. The after-school program, that was still maintained by the Seigle Avenue Presbyterian Church, but things just started to decline, particularly in the community. Parents weren't as involved in what their children were doing as they were prior to the cuts and prior to the increase in crack and cocaine in the community.

DW: Well, I think with that being said, do you feel that the civil rights movement then or the things that came out of the civil rights movement, like this common goal and everyone working together, that there was this breakdown in this 80s, do you feel that it changed a bit, changed the goals of the movement? Or do you think the movement died?

AW: I just think the movement died. I don't think the goals were changed. The movement died to the affect that people weren't trying to implement those things because they didn't think the civil rights movement had, the things that happened in the civil rights movement with the Voting Rights Act, Fair Housing Act, those things were not necessarily what they needed on a daily basis anymore, because there was fair housing, there were fair practices in housing, there was a right to vote. So when you get a lot, you forget what it took to get there. You just assume it was always there, when it wasn't. If you don't remember what that



struggle was, then you can't implement it into your daily life. You just don't remember what it was because you weren't personally involved.

DW: So do you feel that now there's going to be a need for, if the movement died then, is there a need now for a new movement or a similar type of movement that happened forty years ago?

AW: There's always the need. I don't know if there'll ever be a movement like the civil rights movement or will have an impact like that movement had, because so many people forget what that was about. And the kids now and some of the young adults that are having the children, they don't remember that because it didn't personally impact them. It didn't exist when they were coming of age. It was their mothers or their grandmothers or their great-grandmothers. It's not necessarily the people, the people that need that help doesn't understand the movement because they don't study that sort of thing in school. It's not part of their daily lives. They don't see that, they don't feel that. So I think it's been a digression in what has happened. We've kind of slid back into what needs to happen again. It's like it needs to happen all over again, but I doubt that will happen because I don't think we're dealing with the same kind of people with the same kind of integrity. Because I don't know about you, but a lot of the black leaders, I didn't vote to make them leader of me. I don't think they have my best interests at heart.

DW: What do you mean?

AW: I just don't. I think everybody has their own personal agendas. With the black leaders, I don't understand, the only person—I don't really feel that there are any black leaders. There are people that lobby for certain special interests don't really, are my interests. Do they affect me? Yes, but they're not in my particular interest.

DW: I guess kind of going off of this, do you feel that now there's a lot of division among blacks or even among different races?

AW: Yes, particularly those that were the beneficiaries of the civil rights movement. Now they feel removed from the struggle of the people, the poor people that exist today. You know a lot of people were offended by the things that Bill Cosby said when he said that the parents of today are not pulling their weight from what he and the people of his generation fought for. And to a degree, he is absolutely right, he is absolutely right. People are so caught up in the things to make their children feel and look more prosperous than they really are, but they are under-educated. They're dealing with things that we were never faced with. It's just a sad state that we're in. There are people that will spend two or three hundred dollars on PlayStation games and the children are failing in school. They don't have basic reading comprehension skills, but they look good.

DW: I guess I'm wanting to stick about this racial topic. Do you feel that different races—let me word this more correctly. Do you feel that whites and blacks and other minorities have equal facilities, equal resources?

AW: No.

DW: Given that, would you also include housing, that all races have an opportunity for equitable housing?

AW: No. Well, I think there's an opportunity. Will they get it? No. I remember a long time ago, Mr. Campbell used to be our youth director at Seigle Avenue. He said a long time ago that there were different practices and interest rates between black people and white people. Now he said this when I was a teenager and didn't understand what he was talking about, but now that I'm buying a home and I was reading in *USA Today*, well here in 2006, this financial

institution, this study is admitting that black people with the same income as whites, the same credit scores, the same-- to buy certain houses, are getting different interest rates. So what he told me some twenty years ago is true today, that's true. Now he told us a long time ago, but he said, "You will never know that because you will never see the books," but it's happening. That was car loans, the *USA* article was interest rates for houses.

DW: So I guess just to go back for a really quick second, when we were talking about this mixed-income community, I guess I'm interested to hear from both of you, do you feel that racial or economic integration in neighborhoods is an important thing?

AW: Now realistically, if I'm a certain income, it just stands to reason that I can't afford to live in a neighborhood where houses are two hundred and fifty thousand dollars and up, or starting at a hundred and fifty thousand dollars and up, unless I have a certain income level. That just stands to reason. Now people that are earning a living wage, some people that are making minimum wage or maybe ten dollars an hour, maybe ten fifty an hour, it's reasonable to understand that they're not going to live in a neighborhood where two hundred and fifty thousand dollar homes are being sold. So when you say mixed-income families, that's different from mixed-race families, because mixed-race is one thing. There are some non-whites, Hispanics, blacks, that do have that kind of income level and that doesn't have anything to do with race; that has to do with economics. Now the mixed-race communities they're promoting here in Charlotte, they're mixed-race but only for a limited amount of time, because the people on the low end of that scale are not going to be those people that are homeowners. They won't be the people that own those houses. They will be the people that share in that mixed-income community only for a limited amount of time and when that time is up—

AC: That's teasing them

AW: Yeah. And when that time is up, you're going to have to make a different arrangement. Hopefully, hopefully you will have been able to go to school, get a particular degree, some kind of job training that would allow you to move into a house that you can afford, but it will not be the ones that are being promoted here in Charlotte. You will not be able to afford those unless you finish school and you have a job where you're making at least ninety thousand dollars, a hundred thousand dollars, and that's just not going to happen. Is it possible? Yes. But is it going to happen within the four or five years that you have to move in and out of that mixed-income community? No.

DW: Well it seems, and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but what I'm hearing a little bit, kind of undertones, is that education is very important to making this shift or getting from being underemployed or unemployed or things like that. I'll just ask it this way: what do you think the role of the public schools in Charlotte is and how they—

AW: Well, the role of the public school?

DW: Well, let me rephrase that a little differently. What impact do you feel that the public schools make with regard to housing, and underemployed and unemployed people, and economic issues?

AW: I really don't know what the role of the public school would be here in Charlotte because the education of your child should never be left to the school system anyway. But when your children go to public school, you sometimes don't have the choice of what school they go to. Now with desegregation, children were bused to predominately white neighborhoods so that kids could participate in those school programs, but in public school, that should be equitable throughout the public school system regardless of where you live in the city, but that's not realistic.

There are certain schools that get more funding than some other schools. My son goes to one of the oldest schools here in Charlotte and I guarantee you the facilities that they have at their school are the same ones that existed when that school was desegregated in 1945. Then there are some schools that, they look like corporate multiplexes. They have swimming pools, Olympic-size pools, they have all the facilities that you could easily find on a college campus, and these are all within the public school system. So can you get a good education in public school? Absolutely, but the education of your children should never be left to the school system itself.

So there will be some kids that fall through the cracks because separate but equal is just not what this school system is operating on, because separate has never been equal. And there are schools in the Mecklenburg school system that just are not equitable with the funding. But you can get a good education, but it's up to the parents to ensure that their children are getting the same treatment, the same resources that the schools that are in Balentine, the schools that are in south Charlotte; that's up to the parent. But could my son be bused to those schools? No, because there are certain schools that in my district, my child has to attend. That further divides the education that kids are going to get in the school system. It separates the children from what education you could get and what education is available. But you have to make sure your child's getting the best education that's possible.

DW: Well, how much choice do you feel that people have in making housing decisions in Charlotte?

AW: It depends on how much money you make. When you have more money and more resources and more information about housing, then you have a broader basis to choose from. But if your income is limited, can you still get a decent house? And I'm saying limited to the

fact maybe you're making thirty-five, forty thousand. I don't make a lot of money, but I live in a decent neighborhood and it's decent, it's very nice. I don't see people hanging out at night. I don't have to be concerned that if my son is out there, that he's going to run into any trouble or any drug dealers. Fortunately, I'm glad about that, but there are people that I know that can't say the same thing. It's available, but can you obtain it is the question, and it has to do with economics.

Now I don't know any people right now that are not able to get into certain neighborhoods because of their race. If there are, I don't know about them, but I'm sure there is somewhere. But you can get a lot more things done with money. So if you have the money to buy certain houses in a certain part of Charlotte, I haven't read anything about anybody not being able to get that kind of housing. But that's based on economics. But the housing in mixed neighborhoods where Piedmont Court used to stand, where Earle Village used to stand, where Belmont still exists, those houses, those places will be places that will only exist in the memories of the people that used to live there. Those places will not be the communities that they used to know.

DW: Yeah, I was going to ask, what do you think is going to be the story of what will happen in Piedmont Courts and Belmont after all of these revitalizations are finished taking place?

AW: I don't know what the story will be. It'll just be what people can remember it used to be when it affected them. Because now there will be people—in those neighborhoods, we could always say, well we still had people that we knew that lived there and we could go visit them. They will begin to be parts of the city that we will have no reason to go past, because we won't know anybody that lives there anymore. We won't have old friends or old neighbors or



relatives of old friends that we knew that live there. We will have no reason to go there because we won't know anybody there.

DW: So you don't feel that—because the city is saying that they'll try to get as many Piedmont Court former residents to move back to the courts once they revitalize.

AW: And they probably will. They probably will get some people, but it will be for a limited amount of time and it won't be the people that are not in a program that they will be there for the duration of whatever program they're in. Once that's done, that will be done, the fact that they're there will be done, but they will not be people that can afford to purchase those units. Will they live there for a little while? Yes, but they won't be able to be homeowners. And I'll tell you the people that develop these properties, they have a basic understanding of what we are just now beginning to grasp. They have a basic understanding of property ownership, which is why slavery flourished for so long, because they understood the importance of owning property. So you can live somewhere, yes, but owning it is something else. And there are very few people that lived in Piedmont Courts recently that will be able to come back within the next two years and own part of that.

Then not only are they there for a limited amount of time, the restrictions that will be placed on them to make sure that they can be a part of that new mixed crowd will be so constricting that they may not want to live there as long as they could. So if I am being policed and watched and told that I can't sit on my porch, I can't do this, I can't do certain things, I may not want to live there as long as the program says that I can. Because there are certain restrictions: you can't have people there after a certain hour of the evening. Not just in Piedmont Court, but in the South, we like to sit out on porches. With those mixed communities and people that I know that have lived there, you can't sit out like that. You can't have people



parking their cars there after a certain hour of the night. Because if you think about it, if you are working there based on your income, pretty much under the same guidelines as section eight, you live there, and I am living across the courtyard or across the street or whatever, and I am paying for this unit and it's costing me two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, I have more leverage than you. I have more to go to the people that own and maintain this community to say, "I don't want that to happen. You need to make sure it doesn't." And I guarantee you it's not going to happen.

DW: That seems to go back that whole choice, what choice.

AW: You have a choice, but I'm not going to make what you choose very pleasurable for you. So what's going to happen is you'll get tired of being policed. You'll get tired of living under these restrictive covenants. Then you could possibly leave, which is what you really want to happen anyway. So it won't be said that you weren't allowed to come back, because you will be allowed to come back if you meet the certain criteria to come back. But will your stay there, your existence there be the same as somebody that is paying two hundred and fifty thousand dollars? Absolutely not, that's not realistic. But you have to do that to make sure that they continue to get the Hope 5 grant money. So you can't say, "Oh, they did live here for a certain period of time," so that federal money will still be used and maintained. And when that person leaves, they'll just put somebody else there.

[Break in conversation]

DW: Okay, well I want to thank y'all both for doing this interview.

AC: You are welcome.

DW: Thank you.

AW: Very much so.

DW: I guess the last thing I want to ask is if there's anything that you feel is important, an important story to be told, or something that I didn't ask that you think is important to be said, what that might be.

AW: You know what? I really think what's really important to me that people understand about Piedmont Courts is that everybody there, you can't place us all in a box. We weren't ignorant people, all single mothers. Well, we weren't raised with all single mothers, people with no direction. And we were a community like any other community.

AC: Exactly.

AW: We were people that had a common goal.

AC: And values.

AW: And had values and morals. But public housing is just what it is. It is a means to an end. Now did that goal, did that move from the goal before it started? Because Piedmont Court was not built for people to stay there generation after generation. It was actually built to house the war wives when the men were fighting in World War II. So Piedmont Court wasn't meant for what it ended up being. But when I lived in Piedmont Court, when we were raised there, it was not the Piedmont Courts that was leveled. The Piedmont Court that was leveled was not where we lived, it was not how we were raised.

AC: It was entirely different. There was no comparison.

AW: So that's what I want people to know.

AC: And I totally agree. There was no comparison to what the Piedmont Court that the kids today saw, compared to the Piedmont Court that we saw when we were children, no comparison.

DW: Well again, I just want to thank you both for the interview.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

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