

I N T R O D U C T I O N

This project is a study of the changes in Bridgeport neighborhoods from the viewpoint of selected Black residents during the historical periods of World War I, the Depression, World War II, and the 1960's.

By means of interviews, we have investigated the social and economic effects of each period on Black Bridgeporters. All persons interviewed have resided in Bridgeport during at least three of the targeted periods. We attempted to explore how their families, friends, and neighbors were affected during those turbulent times. We discovered the changes that occurred on their jobs, in their neighborhoods and in the city as a whole.

This kit contains a transcript and a tape recording of the interview along with suggested activities that are best suited for grades 5-8 and adaptable for high school students.

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PERSONAL DATA

Dewey Lee Amos

871 Chopsy Hill Road

Born: May 25, 1908 - Winston-Salem, North Carolina,
to Samuel and Elazabeth Amos

Spouse: Edna M. Amos

Children: Joyce Elaine Amos Pritchett

Education: High School - Tailoring

Profession: Tailor

Travel: None

Church: Messiah Baptist

Organizations: Doric Lodge #4
Le Grande Hommes

"A Study of Bridgeport Neighborhoods:
A Black Perspective, 1900 -- Present"

Interview by: James Johnson
Interview with: Dewey Amos
Date: October 20, 1983

JOHNSON: Mr. Amos, would you tell me something about your birthplace and your immediate family?

DA: I was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on May 25, 1908. The name of the street that I was born on was named Dewey Street, after my name. We lived in Winston-Salem until I was about ten years old. Then, due to the fact that we couldn't get a proper education in the South where we were living at the time, my mother decided that she wanted her children to have a better education than she had when she was there. So she insisted on my father bringing us to a place where we could get a better education. In the meantime, World War I hadn't been too long over -- 1917 when it ended. An uncle of mine came up to Connecticut on a job because there were fellows coming in to the South looking for workers to come north to work in the plants here. So my uncle came up here in 1921. After being here for a short while, he wrote my mother and asked if she could let my older brother come up here to get a job. A year after my brother worked here with my uncle, he came home for vacation and he brought two of my sisters to Connecticut just for summer vacation. They stayed during the whole summer. Before it was time for them to go home, an aunt of mine that was here put my sisters in school. So, after they got in school here -- and I think they went to Waltersville -- they began to write my mother and tell how nice it was and how good the teachers were here and that they would like to live here. My mother told my father when he came home at night -- she said, I would like for you to ask your boss if he can transfer you up north where your children could get a better education. The place where we were living, you only got

about four months schooling a year. So my father made arrangements with his company that he was working with there, the R. G. Reynolds Tobacco Company, to be transferred to Akron, Ohio. My father asked for the transfer and it was granted. But in the meantime my mother says "Let's come into Bridgeport first, where my children -- the two girls -- are and take them with us when we go to Akron." When we came to Bridgeport, my brother who was here with my uncle -- they furnished off a seven-room house on Clarence and Kossuth Street where they had arranged for us to come and live unbeknowing to the family. They had also got a job for my father to work in Salt Textile,-- the place where they make fabric on Kossuth Street, about one block from where the house was.

So, when my father came in, they showed him the house and showed him they had furnished the house so lavishly for us -- seven rooms. It was nine of us came here from North Carolina at the time we moved here. The two girls was here already made eleven, but nine came from down home.

JJ: What year was this?

DA: This was 1922 we got to Bridgeport. So, my uncle and my brother had got my father a job at Salt Textile, as I was saying. My mother stated to my father, now that the children went so far as to do this much for us to get us established, why don't we stay here for awhile and you notify the people in Akron that you'll come out at a later date. My father stated that since they have did this for us, I will try working here for awhile. Everything was going along fine here in Bridgeport for us. At that time money was pretty good because after the war was over, they needed

workers so bad that the wages were pretty high. There was two of the rooms that we didn't use too much because we didn't need but five of them good, in fact. Because my uncle had another part of the house. They had four rooms and some of us children would stay with them.

So, there was two fellows who wanted to live with us -- they came here, too, and they didn't have any place to stay. They wanted to live here, and my mother would fix them lunches and take care of their laundry and they would pay her handsomely to help out. So, these two other rooms that we didn't need, we rented them out to these two fellows. They stayed with us about two years or more.

Salt Textiles began to get a little slow. Business began to drop off. And further than that --

When we first came to Bridgeport -- I got a little ahead of my story -- things weren't like they are today. People that were here were mostly foreigners and the elderly people couldn't speak English. It was mostly Italians in the neighborhood in which I lived. Italians and Polish. We children used to go to each family's house and eat and they'd come to my house. Everything was just like down home, even better. We were glad because down home all the blacks had to stick together, but up here white boys come into my house and I go into their house. My mother fixes for them and their mother fixes for us. Only the children speak good English.

In later years, when other people began to migrate here from jobs in the South, a lot of white people migrated here, too. As we grew up a little older, things seemed to change. The friendly

atmosphere that we had prior to emigration of other people here -- the children began to get a little reluctant. We didn't go to each other's house so much. They didn't come to mine and didn't even invite me to theirs.

When we got up to graduating grade school -- elementary school, it got so we were sort of far apart. It wasn't like it was when we first got here. And it seemed it kept getting worse. We didn't have the same transportation that we have here now. We had small jitney buses -- I guess about ten people could ride on a little small jitney bus. There was quite a number of them. The streets weren't paved. They were mostly cobblestone.

We had a lot of recreation. We had ball games. Bridgeport had a baseball team called the Bridgeport Bears. That's some of the things that I am trying to recall that we did.

Then, the water used come in tides -- sometime the water would be so high here in Bridgeport that it would come way up Broad Street, almost near Fairfield Avenue. The water used to flood until they started putting up borders and things down by the Sound to hold the water back.

Also at the time we came here, Barnum and Bailey had a circus right down on Norman and Railroad Avenue. There's a big lot there. Part of that land now belongs to Bassick High School, I think. They have a play lot over there for fellows to go practice football and what have you.

JJ: Went Field.

DA: Yes, that's where they played baseball. That was always families on Sunday. The families all from around Bridgeport used to go

down there for outings and recreation. After we'd leave Seaside Park we'd come over there and watch them bring the horses out -- especially when Barnum and Bailey getting ready to get on the road again. They'd bring their horses out and be practicing training with them over here. Not too many of the animals were here because most of them went to a warmer climate. But the horses in particular --

Then they had a building where they used to keep the wagons. They'd paint them and make them decorated. It was right on Norman Street -- a big building on Norman and Railroad Avenue is where they had these wagons.

But other than that -- when we came here otherwise -- there weren't too many Black families here. After the business began to fall off, the people who came here -- only about eight Black families were on the East Side where I lived. The East End is on across the bridge -- over by Beardsley Street -- normally, that was East End. We were on the East Side -- around Kossuth and Clarence Street -- in that section. Well, after business began to fall off bad -- and a lot of the people who came here is transportation -- that were brought here to work just for a period of time in the shops, when the shops began to get slow -- those people went back. That is the stabilized families in Bridgeport were no more than about eight families in the East Side. The East End -- there were more because they were some people here who used to work in private families. While they were here, they bought property on Beardsley Street, Newfield Avenue and that section. So, the biggest number of Blacks were here lived in that section -- Newfield Avenue and Beardsley Street -- in that section

of town. On my side of town there was about eight families. In fact, Bridgeport didn't have too many Black people when we came here.

As the younger fellows first grew up, it wasn't as -- I mentioned the discrimination among us -- it wasn't as bad. It was very good. We used to have affairs -- we used to have block dances near the firehouse. In the summer they used to have a band out there and everybody come and dance in the street and dancing near the firehouse. It used to be beautiful. But since that time, it just showed that things did change. The temper of the people seemed to be in need -- it looked like that when people close together. When people begin to get a little more, that's when everybody began to divide. If somebody bought a better house, especially the white people living in a neighborhood where they were mixed -- the whites, the first thing to do they get out of there as quick as they could. It seemed that the atmosphere had changed. Some of them had got a little better education and some of them had probably married a person that didn't like Black people and they wanted to get out and separate from the others. And a lot of people -- they were Italians -- they didn't want to marry another Italian. They wanted to marry an Irishman, a Jewish person or anybody else -- they didn't want another Italian. And after they did get in a position where they could better themselves, they didn't even want another Italian living near him. So they discriminate even against each other.

JJ: Do you know why that was?

DA: It seemed like they were ashamed of their own people. That's what

I could never understand.

There was a story I heard of one of the fellows that was working with me when I began to work a little bit -- I haven't got through high school yet. His brother bought a house. They had built and he didn't like the house where he was living so he sold the house to another Italian fellow. So the Italian fellow who bought the house wasn't happy because he bought the house beside another Italian. He figure that was like you're making me feel cheap because you couldn't be beside another Italian person. Now first he didn't take into consideration that he didn't have to buy that house.

Now I will go back to after leaving elementary school. I was working, I always did a little something.

JJ: Where were you in elementary school?

DA: I was in the Waltersville School. I live on Kossuth Street at the time. While I was going to elementary school, I had a little job. A tailor saw me one day playing in the street with the kids playing ball and he asked me if I would like to work in the store. And I says I would like to work for you but you have to ask my mother. He says if you would like to work for me I will pay you six dollars a week if you come in after school. I'll give your mother the five dollars and let you have the one dollar when you come to the store on a Sunday morning to make sure you put out the barrels which got to be taken on Monday morning. I says, well, I can't accept the job. My mother's there on the stoop, you see she's down there sewing. But if you go down there and ask her maybe she'll let me work for you. So, we went over and he made the agreement with my mother. Sure enough,

I went to work for him. After school I'd come up to the store. He had an apartment building in the back of the store on East Main Street. When I'd come from school, he had me change my clothes. I'd got out and take care of the apartment building because the people lived back there used to throw trash in the barrels and sometimes miss the barrels. I'd straighten out the barrels and everything. Then he had a big basement. He made sure that I kept the cellar cleaned. I began to dislike the job because I was always down the cellar with dirty work, you know? One day he says when you get things sort of straightened up down there I'll take you up in the store. I was glad to hear that because up in the store was nice. So after I got going pretty good and he finally took me upstairs to his tailor shop and he says, now you clean up up here. Afterwards, we get everything going good and I'm going to teach you how to sew.

The first time he gave me the lesson, he said now, here's what you do. He just gave me a piece of cloth and a needle and a thread and he showed me what he wanted me to do. Well, I tried to sew but I'd never sewed with a thimble. So he said you won't be able to sew until you learn how to use a thimble. He put the thimble on my finger and told me now you've got to sew with a thimble, otherwise you'll never be able to sew. Little by little, I got so I was pretty by hand sewing. Then he showed me how to make collars, showed me how to do vests and pants. I got along pretty good.

In the meantime, he had a son that was going to Yale University. Now, I was getting ready almost to graduate grade school. I was getting ready for Harding High. He said now

you're going to go to school. You ought to have nice clothes. I'd like for you to look nice, he says, anyway, he says, you'll be like an ad for my business when you start going to high school. So everytime he'd make a suit for his son who was going to Yale -- his son was going to be an engineer from Yale -- he'd put a suit in to be made up for me.

When I graduated Waltersville School and started high school, I had seven tailor-made suits.

JJ: About what year was this that you started?

DA: This was 1926. I am [from] the original graduating [class] from Harding High School. We went in in '26 and came out in '30.

Everytime he'd make a suit for himself, we'd put one in to work for me. I had seven tailor-made suits. I was classified when I graduated Harding -- the called me "the glass of fashion in molded form." [laughs] So, all the teachers liked me. I had the best characteristics -- best-liked, best-dressed and most accommodating -- those were some of the categories they gave me. That I was proud of best.

But what I was more interested in when I was with the tailor -- I was supposed to become a dentist. That was my ambition -- to become a dentist. But during the course of time, things got a little tough for my father and being a big family, it was tough for my father to carry the load, you know? For me to go to school -- we had a little money, but if I had went for dentistry I would have to be obligated to the rest of my family until they got out of school. So I took that under consideration and I told pa, I said, "Now, you don't have enough money to send me to school." I had an application in to go to dental school in Washington. If I

could have got one year -- the first year -- I would have a chance when I become a sophomore to work. But they wouldn't let you work as a freshman -- you had to make a mark for yourself first. Since that fell through -- and working along with the tailor like I was, when I graduated I went back to work with the tailor. I never did stop in fact. I worked for the tailor practically full-time. I was learning to make practically the whole suit. But I didn't take it to heart like I wanted because recently I wanted to be a dentist. I could have learned much more of the trade than I did if I had known I had to be a tailor. But I thought I was going to be a dentist.

After that fell out, I says, well -- I'll work for the tailor but my heart wasn't in it. I still thought I could become a dentist.

Then, things got a little bad. My father had just bought a house and he needed help. I was working. The tailor who I was working with -- as soon as I got much better, improving myself -- he was an elderly man. He had lost his wife and he was living with his daughter up in the North End -- up on Savoy Street. The daughter got married and went to live in Pennsylvania. He had fell down the stairs one day. I came from the work and I got in touch with the people in the store down underneath of him which used to be a grocery store. They got in touch with his daughter in Pennsylvania and she came up here and took him back home with her. He was an elderly man and never did open the store anymore again. Then they sold everything out.

I didn't have arrangements with him before he left. But what he did for me, he made arrangements for another tailor --

Wilson Rusling, who used to be on Cannon Street -- the biggest tailor shop in Bridgeport. He made arrangements with them to give me a little job over there. I went to work for Wilson Rusling. I was making more money than my father. At that time, things hadn't fell off so much. I was getting \$35 a week and going to high school. I hadn't finished high school as yet.

JJ: This was during the Depression time?

DA: Not up to the Depression yet. This was in the '20's -- late, late '20's, '28.

When Wilson Rusling -- the father -- died, the son took over the business. The son didn't take care of the business, so it went to pot. Business went so bad that it had to close. And in both these -- that company, you were paying \$225 for a suit there. Now you know that was a lot of money back then. Things were getting a little tight too.

If you come on up in the '20's, up around '29 -- that was my last year in high school. I was living still on Kossuth Street. My father had bought the house on High Street. I didn't want to leave Harding. Mr. Hedges -- at that time, he was the principal. Now the rule was when you leave one district, you've got to go to a different school. So I went and I told Mr. Hedges, I said, "Now if I've got to transfer to Central because I am on that side, I'd rather quit school. I'm so familiar with my teachers and with my classes. This is my last year coming up." So he says, "Well, we won't bother with that. So, you stay on and graduate here." That's what I did. I stayed and graduated from Harding.

After I graduated Harding and Wilson and Rusling had closed, -- all the time while I was in school, I never had no time off.

With a big family -- things that other boys can do, I couldn't do. I belonged to the track team at Harding and I belonged to the inter-rooms basketball. That's all I could do. The coach got mad at me because I wouldn't play football because I could run fast. He'd seen me on the track and he would like for me to be an end or something like the other fellows. But I couldn't afford to play like those other fellows. I says, "I come from a big family and I have to help my father, too." He told me a couple times that he thought I was sort of scared. But it wasn't I was afraid of anything, it was because I couldn't afford to play and lose the help I was giving my parents.

Later on in later years, when enough money wasn't coming in my father's house for me to go to college, I stopped and then I began to court. This was when I met my wife.

JJ: Where?

DL: Right here in Bridgeport. When I first came to Bridgeport is a key -- and I will come up to that now. Young boy, I was eleven years old, I went to Messiah Baptist Church, and I saw this little girl there. I kept my eye on that little girl all through, that's the God's truth. She got in the high school -- she graduated high school ahead of me. Then one time I wanted to go to a dance. We had a fellow that was staying at our house and he wanted my mother to let me go to a dance with him one night. I wanted to go bad because I knowed this girl was going to be there. There was this big YWCA on Beach Street. My mother said, "No, I don't want him going out dancing. Well, if you be careful and you supervise him, you chaperone him and I'll let him go." I was glad because that girl was there. Her mother was there.

JJ: Where did she live? How far --

DA: She lived on Highland Avenue. We had moved on High Street. We went to the dance that night and her mother came with her. Her mother was a strict-looking woman. This fellow who lived at our house -- he went and asked her to dance. He was dancing with her and everything. I got mad.

JJ: Yes. [Laughs]

DA: When he came back, he says, "Aren't you going to dance?" I says, "I don't know how to dance." He says, "You don't know how to dance? What did you come to the dance for?" I said, "I came because she was going to be here." And I tried to talk to her and her mother. Everytime her mother look at me, I'd [laughs] -- be scared to go over there. Finally, I got my nerve madeup and I went and asked her to dance. We started dancing and I was ashamed. I was stepping all over the girl's feet [laughs] and everything.

Later years, after we began to see each other a little oftener -- I used to go over when she was at the Y, I used to go and walk her home. The Y used to give dances and when the Y gave dances, I would go and all the other girls at the Y see me coming, they'd move and she'd still be there. Finally, she stayed until I learned how to dance pretty good. Then later on, when I knew how to dance, she says, "Why don't you dance with some of those girls over there?" You see, years ago when we came here there was a lot of people worked in private family. You had Sunday off -- every Thursday off and every other Sunday off. They used to run dances -- have basketball games -- and dances on those two nights. Like a New York team used to come up here and

play the Bridgeport team. They played even around the state here too. The big nights was when the New York team was coming in to play, because they'd bring busloads of people up.

A lot of these girls who worked in service, they'd come to these dances. They'd sit around -- they don't know nobody. My girlfriend used to say, "Those girls come all dressed up for the dance and nobody's dancing with them. Why don't you dance with them?" Of course, I didn't have to worry about her -- all the boys would dance with her. She had all the dances she wanted. So she'd say, "Dance with those girls." I started to go around. I said, start dancing on this end and I'm going to meet all you girls. And not only did meet them, but made the girls have a good time. I enjoyed it. So, it went on like that until eventually I decided that I'd like to get married.

I got married April 20, 1931. I had just been out of high school about a year. But I had been working all through high school, saved a little money, but it wasn't enough to do what I needed to do. She was working. She was an elevator operator in one of the department stores downtown.

JJ: Which one?

DA: Neig's Department Store. It was on Main and Fairfield Avenue. Even after I got married, she wanted me to try to get back into school and she'd help me. But she wasn't making any money. By the time she'd dress herself, the little money that the girls would making in those days wasn't hardly anything. So, she says, "I will help you." I says, "No, we won't try to do that now."

Anyway, as I said before, I always tried to work to have a little something. After we got married, my father and his brother

-- they had an offer from my father's aunt who lived in Virginia.

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She had married a white man. They had a lot of land --

pretty well-off. But it was a hush-hush, she was a very bright Indian, like they call half-breeds. Eventually,

after I didn't go to school, he had died quite a while [ago] --

her husband had. Then she got sick and she wanted to make out

her will. She included my father and his brother -- the only

two children my grandmother had on my father's side. They had

quite a bit of wealth, but the people down there -- they took

a lot from her. They made it the way they wanted it since she

was half-breed. And gave my father and his brother quite a good

sum of money. That's when my father was able to send five of

my sisters through college and one brother. One of my sisters

went to three colleges. She graduated magna cum laude -- what

do you call it? She became a doctor of physics and she worked

for the Library of Congress. The rest of my sisters, after

graduating school around here -- they went for nursing, they

even had training here -- when graduation came and they became

registered -- R.N. nurses -- they couldn't get a job. They

walked in the hospital. Nobody hired them. We had a couple of

relatives -- I got involved in the N.A.A.C.P. Joseph Alsop

and John Lancaster and all of us -- we used to have meetings.

A lot of deacons from our church, Jeanette and quite a number

-- I can't name them all --

JJ: This was about what year?

DA: This was in the '20's -- no, this was in '35 and '36, around that

time. We had nobody around Bridgeport -- Black people -- worked

in the factories around here. G.E. didn't have nobody -- just the men who clean toilets, or janitors, or something like that. But none of those paying jobs. Mediocre jobs, they had. Singer Sewing Machine wouldn't hire anybody -- wouldn't hire Blacks. G.E., Remington Arms -- all these big plants had no Blacks. Black people who had jobs after the war -- let's say after there was a little business after World War I. But after that wore off and the white people began to take over again, most of the Blacks who came here after that [unclear] came with barges that unload lumber and stuff that comes around these waterfronts -- floaters, like -- that's the kind of jobs they had.

Now, the jobs that Black people had around here were foundry jobs, like pouring metal and shifting weights and all that stuff. That was tough on people. My father, he could do a little of everything. But when he came here, he never worked like that. My father worked as a carpenter, he worked as a automobile tire man, he worked in tobacco factories, things like that. He had all these nice jobs while we took care of the farm. That's why we came up here. We wanted a farm with my grandfather and his family -- we took care of the farm. My father did all the work to clothe the children. We had pigs, we had cows, we had chickens, we had our own food from the farm. So, when we came up here after this war and the jobs got sort of -- well, we didn't control them. The manager didn't have no place on his agenda for hiring Blacks, that's what it was.

My sisters graduated and they couldn't get a job. Then, one day we called up for an audience with some of the personnel at G.E. -- John Lancaster and about twenty of us went as a group to talk

to talk to some of the personnel at G.E. about hiring Black people. We went over there. Even myself, I was sort of interested in getting a better job because tailoring wasn't so good. A man buy a suit -- he didn't buy a suit every year to keep us with the style. A suit would last a man. They'd put it on only Sunday and every other time they were working. So, I was interested in getting a job myself. We went over to G.E. and asked the man why is it that you don't hire colored people -- Blacks? They said we'd never thought about it. And John spoke up and said, "Don't you think it's about time you started doing something about it?" We began to come in here and those who came here during and after the war -- they're not leaving. They have established their families here. They have children going to school here. Some of them are graduating school and some of them are getting old enough for jobs. We'd like for the children to have jobs.

Nothing came of it. Nothing came of it even when I was in high school. I tried to get a job in Singer Sewing Machine. I was taking up a special course just because they said if you take up this course, during the summers you can get jobs. Mr. Balentine was a teacher at that time at Harding -- commercial law class. Lot of the fellows in there -- it's like tricky little law questions. This fellow I worked for as a tailor -- his son was smart and I used to ask him questions from the book that I was learning. I got so I picked it up pretty good and I was able to make pretty good recitation in class. My marks was about tops in Mr. Balentine's class. Time came around near summer time when jobs were being passed out. He was the one who got the

jobs for the fellow in school. And he asked me, he says, you're a senior now. All the seniors had the privilege at that time, you could go in the study there and smoke a cigarette. He says, "You can go down the men's room and have your smoke and pick your books up later after the class bell rings. There's something I want to do here. I'd rather not do it while you're in class." I was wondering what it was. When I came back to pick up my books to go to my next class, he says, "Dewey, I'm sorry, I couldn't give out some jobs with you being here and there was nothing listed for you. But I understand you work for the tailor and what they did have here I feel that I would be insulting you by asking you to take it." He says, "Like the job for janitor, I know you wouldn't want that." I told him I appreciate it very much. But, the fellows that got the jobs -- I had helped them pass their grades and everything, and he knew it.

One of the fellows named Harold Perry -- he's a trouble-shooter for G.E. now, one of the big shots -- I meet him every once in awhile. He was going over, he got one of the jobs. He says, aw hell, come on and go with me. Maybe there are open jobs, more jobs. So I went over there. There were about twelve or fourteen high school boys in there. The guy in the employment office looked up and saw me. He said, "Nothing for you." I looked around. All the rest of them looking around. He said, "You colored boy, nothing for you." I started on out. Harold said to me, "Heck, I don't want to work here either." "Listen," I said, "You go ahead, I got a job. You go ahead, they give you a job, you take it." I went on back to Wilson

Rusling's. At that time, they were doing good. After that, I says, "I'm going to be more strict on trying to get jobs for people in the N.A.A.C.P." John Lancaster was very good in those days. Being a lawyer, too, he knew the ropes.

We did pretty good. We went to the Y.M.C.A. You couldn't even get in the Y.M.C.A. We went down to the Y.M.C.A. and demanded that we have a colored works department there, because we're taxpayers and everything -- we entitled to that. The time we went down there was Mr. Haig. He was running it, in charge there.

JJ: This was the latter '30's?

DA: Yes, that's right, the '30's. Mr. Haig was in charge and he stated that the only way we would have a chance of getting into the N.A.A.C.P. would be to make it a colored works department and we would have to decorate the hogshhead; that is, put some money in before we would be accepted. That we had to make some contributions. What we did to contribute -- we asked a lot of people who we knew would like for some children to go to the Y.M. or they'd go themselves to raise some funds. How we did it, we had our lottery. We all met at the Y that night and put a number -- I think it was up to 25 -- you bid on the number, how much you bid on this number and so forth. The biggest bid was on number thirteen. MacDonald Isaac had bidden on it and this electrician that lives out there, Nebane -- I think his name was Nebane -- they bidden on it. That was the highest one. My number was number four. I had to pay twenty-five dollars a year for some kid that I could sponsor. Those fellows that could do more -- some of them sponsored two children. Some fellow who won on number thirteen

I think he sponsored four children. Four boys -- that's a hundred dollars a year. Haig said we twenty-five dollars for each kid we could get to come.

After we got the door open, it was just like anything else. Once you fight hard for something -- It's not that we want to be here. We just want to know that we could go there.

JJ: If you want to --

DA: Yes. We put the money up. We had a few kids went a few times and then quit. It's just this -- all we want to know is the door'll be open. That's how things started opening up around here. Then the theatres -- we used to go to the theatres here. You didn't sit downstairs. You went up in the balcony. You didn't sit downstairs.

Now, Dr. MacCalla and his wife broke that. Because he was a member of the N.A.A.C.P.

JJ: When was this?

DA: This was in, I'd say '38. Before the World War II. Mr. and Mrs. MacCalla went to Poli Theatre. She was very light complexion. She went in and he had the tickets. When he went to go in, he couldn't go in. She wanted to know why and they brought it to court. That opened the door for no more sitting in the crow's nest no more. You could sit anyplace you wanted. They passed that decision here.

There were a lot of little things that happened here -- with questions weren't asked why. Now here's somebody who come right off the boat and come over here and get a good job. Here we been here all this time and we can do the same mediocre job as you gave this fellow -- but we didn't get it. So, that was the biggest

problem we had during the early part, after World War I -- migrating. After we got here for a while, things began to look a little better. As I said before, they look a little better, but people are not as close as they used to be.

JJ: Were living conditions pretty good for you during the Depression time, Mr. Amos?

DA: Here's what happened during the Depression. Work is a mean thing around here in this state, around the city, around Connecticut. During the Depression, they had -- 1933, that's when it was tough. The Depression came in 1929, that's when the Wall Street failed and people killing themselves because they lost. Then from '29 up to '33, it was -- new president was going to come in, Roosevelt was going to come in to office in '33. But from '29 to '33, things were very bad.

JJ: Here in Bridgeport?

DA: Yes, Bridgeport was bad. People were in the city. Then they had a bread basket where you work for the city, you sweep the street -- the man sweeps the street and do little mediocre stuff -- and get \$5.60 a week for meat and the city used to give him a basket of food -- stale beans and cocoa and stuff like that. Then they'd give them, most of them, they'd paid their rent, half of their rent or something like that. According to what you had coming in -- they were subsidized to pay the rent. But they'd give you \$5.60 for the meat. That \$5.60 supposed to last the family for the meat.

But my family, thank God, we were always fortunate. We worked. My father was good enough to have a job. I was good enough to have a job. I worked for nineteen cents an hour during slow times doing more work than I ever did in my life. My working

day started at seven o'clock in the morning and I would go home at twelve o'clock at night for nineteen cents an hour. Then Roosevelt came in in 1933. The next thing -- he closed all the banks. Closed all the banks around here. They were issuing script money. You didn't have money -- same as a piece of paper or same as a check.

JJ: How would you use it?

DA: You'd take it to the store and they had to accept it as money.

Because when the banks opened up again, that would be their money, they'd deposit it just like money. But I never had to use that script money. Because my wife was working and she worked in a hotel. They got paid. My money was just held. I didn't want to take no script. We were pretty little miser-like. We always wanted a house, my wife and I. We sort of scrimped and saved a little bit. When the time came for the pay out a little bit, we had the necessary means. That nineteen cents an hour -- they offered me script money, but I didn't want it. Then, I am coming past my time , that was 1940, 1933 when Roosevelt made the W.F.A. work force where all the boys could get jobs. W.F.A. The kids used to go up and plant trees in the forest and all that kind of work they did. But it opened up where the young kids didn't have no idle time on their hands. Come summer vacation, these kids were working. Then Roosevelt made N.R.A. That's when the minimum wage went up from what I was making -- nineteen cents an hour -- my wages went up to a dollar something an hour.

JJ: That's quite an increase.

DA: Yes. Over a dollar an hour anyway. Instead of all them long hours, forty hour a week. And, boy, I used to work a half a day

Sunday when I was making that nineteen cents an hour. But when he cut it down I had people knocking on the door wanting to get a job where I was working. [laughs] The bosses were having a fit because they had to pay that money to the people. The same people I was working for for nineteen cents --

JJ: You were a tailor, working at the tailor shop?

DA: I was working with the tailor in manufactures now. We're not a tailor shop anymore because the tailoring has sort of died down because men didn't have a suit every two weeks or every month or every time styles change. I went into the ladies' line. The ladies' cloaks and suits we made. So that was in manufacturing. In this manufacture, they started paying \$1.17 an hour, that's what it was, \$1.17. I began to save pretty good then. Then I got married in 1931. My wife got sick in 1933. When Roosevelt was president, she got sick. We didn't have but one doctor in Bridgeport at that time. His name was Dr. Bradley. He was attending my wife. He was a very good baby doctor. She was not improving -- just good and bad. Every day, he'd come three times a day. At that time it was three dollars a visit. Three times a day, he'd look for his money every time he came. Nine dollars a day and then he'd leave prescriptions practically every time he come. That's medicine plus going to the drug store and getting medicine. My wife wasn't getting any better. One day my older brother, he came by and he says -- He was working for Lock, Steel and Chain -- that's a big place on Connecticut Avenue. He was a chauffeur there and his wife was a housemaid. They loved my brother. He came by and he says, "Dewey, your wife don't look good. I'm going to call my boss's doctor and have him

look at her, see if he'll come, Dr. Buckmiller. He says, "Ain't going to cost you nothing." I says, "She seem to be be all right." He says, "No, let's get another doctor to look at her." So, he called Dr. Buckmiller and Dr. Bradley told me keep the house -- it was wintertime -- keep it nice and warm. Keep it nice and hot so she'll be all right. Dr. Buckmiller, he came in and said, "Whew, it's hot in here." He took his overcoat off and he said to me "What's the matter with you?" I said, "I'm feeling bad, my wife's very sick." He said, "Well, we'll see what we cando about that." He went in the bedroom where she was, open up all the windows, took the covers and pulled them off of her, and gave her a thorough examination. He came out, got in the kitchen and he says to me and my brother, "This boy is sicker than his wife." He opened his bag and he pulled out a bottle of gin and he poured a big glass of gin and he says, "Drink that down." I took a shot of the gin. He went on back in to my wife and he came back and he said, "Well, now, I have examined your wife and you don't need all this heat in there. Just put the covers on her and leave the windows open. That'll give plenty of fresh air for awhile. When the house gets cooler, you can close the windows so it will be comfortable in here. It got too hot." He says, "Here's a prescription." It was going to be Christmas, about ten days before Christmas. That was in 1933, '34. So, he says, "You take this prescription and you go to the drug store. By the time New Year's Day, your wife will be up and having a big dinner with you. Now tell her to take the whole bottle of medicine." I'll never forget it, a red bottle of medicine. After she started taking the medicine, sure enough,

New Year's Day -- there was a fellow lived in the house downstairs and his wife, he came up to wish us a Happy New Year, and I had a lot of these here cashew nuts and things on a dish. He and I sat there and started cracking nuts. Fast as we could crack them, my wife was eating them. I said, "Well, doc said you'd be up eating supper with us."

Bridgeport has been sort of a long learning station for me in a way.

JJ: How's that?

DA: Where you say, you tell me you can't do this, you tell me you can't do that, I'm going to learn, I'm going to watch, and I am going to learn something about it. Why he say I can't do it. Now, there are a lot of little things that even in school, even a job, any job I ever had did, even the tailor, in the garment business -- I used to bring work in that I want to do -- going to fix it there myself. They'd rather take it from me and do it. They'd do it for me. I say why can't I? They'd say, "You can't do that." I went and bought me a machine and anything I saw done over that shop, I could do it too, because I know how to sew. But what it was, they were afraid that the Blacks would break in on the trade and they'd be out of a job. Because you see, once we learn to do something, we do it better than them. I'm a professional. When you get to be so that you can -- once you learn how to do something, then you learn to do it well, you frighten some people. Now, in the union, the union put me a head of the shop where I was working. They put me in head of all of the shaping and of all of the shipping department and they made me an executive board

member of the union. I attended all union meetings and went as a delegate to conventions. I went to Atlantic City. I went up in Peekskill, in the Catskills, up in Pennsylvania where we had the big union house up there, I.L.G.W.U., and all the hotels. My wife and I go even now. I have a staff meeting, a vacation each year. I spend three days up there, weekends up at [unclear] House, up in Pennsylvania. We'd been up to [unclear] Lodge, the place where we'd meet -- I'd have invitations to go up there to union meetings. Christmas, I'm invited to come in to the big union parties in New York, even with the work that I do with the union.

So those are some things that when they say, now you can't do this, I made a lot of them ashamed. I can set the machine up here now where I work a little part-time in Ray Pacific and I sit down and do some of the work on the machine. "Well, I didn't know you sew." "I didn't tell you and you didn't ask me. But," I say, "you see I can sew." Those are the things that make you think that you thought I was inferior to you. I don't like to be inferior to nobody. We shouldn't feel that way either. That's what I do -- I am on this side.

From that, I went to managing the whole Parisian garment. They made me a professional presser. I belonged to Local #35 in New York and I belonged to Local #31 here. I get two pension checks, one for the Local #141 and one from Local #35 in New York, because I was paying two union dues.

JJ: This is interesting.

DA: So, those are my sisters. These two sisters here are nurses. These are the sisters we fought to try to get them jobs before

they went down to Washington, D.C., and they worked in the hospital in Washington. There was mediocre pay at the time down there. Then the war started and these two girls joined the service. These two girls are passed. This is a nurse and regular -- and she had degrees. These sisters got degrees in nursing. This sister's an X-ray technician. She has a degree in that. These two passed away. This one's living. They were both colonels -- this one's a colonel and she's a colonel -- full colonels. This one, she was sick not too long ago -- not her, but her husband was sick and then she got sick from waiting on him because he weighed almost three hundred pounds. He had a slight stroke and she went down handling him, trying to take care of him. She couldn't leave him and it sort of got on her mind and now -- I had to go down to -- She was in Valley Forge Hospital.

JJ: In Pennsylvania?

DA: Yes, in Pennsylvania. Then she was in the other one up there -- Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. They took her there the last time. I had to go down there and take over her affairs. They own property and everything there. They made me power of attorney for her. Since her husband is incapacitated and he can't get about. At the time, they said she began to lose her [mind] -- she couldn't think because she got so tired from waiting on him that she'd start cooking dinner and forget about it. She got smoke in the house and they were afraid that she would probably set the house on fire and they both would get burnt up. So one of the nurses that she worked with sent for me to come down there and straighten things out. I went down there to

straighten it out. She was in the hospital then. I had a talk with the doctors. They said that it would be better for her own good if we put her in a nursing home for a while until she straighten up.

[end of tape one, side two]

JJ: And you were saying --

DA: My sister in Maryland, she had become ill from taking care of her husband. Therefore, I had to go down and see about her affairs. While I was there, they said that they thought she should be in a nursing home. But the nursing homes down there cost a lot of money. The distance where she was going to be located -- after I got to Maryland, I would have to hire a cab or hire somebody to take me out to the nursing home where she is. So the cheapest one that they offered me was \$50 a day plus incidentals. If she needed a toothbrush or anything, a hair braid or something, that would be added on to the bill. Now, transportation from Maryland over to this nursing home and my transportation from Bridgeport down to there was running into quite a bit of money. To pay for a nurse to be at home with the husband while she's in the nursing home there -- She got to have a nurse around the clock. He has to because he has to be taken care of. I went down and I went to Veterans Administration and asked if something couldn't be done. They both had been service connected. Not only had they retired from the service but I was told that if you're service-active -- if they were like reserves or something -- I could get them what I'm requesting. But I was advised by a lawyer, says, "Since you've been given power of attorney, they have quite a good income. They have \$4300 a month

coming in. Now they will eat all that up. Even [though] the house's paid for, eventually you'd probably have to sell the two cars to take care of the sick expenses." He says, "Let's go and talk to some visiting nurses." He got a list of visiting nurses to meet me. They talked one at a time -- have them come in one at a time so I could interview them. Come to find out, I got a nurse, a retired nurse. She's active and she knows her stuff. She's willing to stay in the home with them. This will be her home and supervise and take care of things.

That I didn't do right away at the time I was told. But I left my sister stay in the hospital and I had a nurse stay and take care of her husband. Then I went back to the hospital and I says, "Now, something can be done here. We shouldn't have to pay all this money since I found out what to do." The doctor told me, "No. What we're trying to protect your sister and her husband because if the lapse of memory that she had -- if they kept dwelling on it, they could set the house on fire." She could set the house on fire not intentionally, but it wouldn't be good. Then I brought up what I had learned. I said, "I have interviewed some nurses. I can get a nurse to come there and stay in the house with them and pay her and let her use the house as her home. She'd take care of both of them." Their eyes opened up wide. I think they were going to get something out of this other deal.

Money is a funny thing with people. They know that they had a pretty good income. They probably get a little cut from this nursing home and probably a little from the nurses in the

house, too. Because they sent them. After I told them that this was what I was going to do, he said, "That's a good idea. But do you think it's sound?" I says, "Sound as gold."

I said, "Now I have a doctor who came there and recommended this woman to take care of them. Since they aren't Army connected as you say, why are you going to be so in earnest about it now?"

I told the doctor and he saw that I could see through the whole scheme.

Now, my sister's doing good. She came out of that. Come to find out -- my sister had had epileptic seizures. That's what made her lose her mind, not lose her mind but her memory so much. The medication that he was giving her brought her right out. Now she's eighty-eight. A-O.K.

She call me every other day. I call her to see how things are. The nurse is there. The nurse is happy.

She's got a great big house. She's got seven rooms there. They've got a downstairs and upstairs. The nurse has her own apartment upstairs. She's tickled to death. She's glad at the wages, she get free food. All the money she makes, she's saving. She drives them around. Now the husband can walk a little bit with a little aid.

Now I got another brother-in-law coming up here on Sundays and nice days. This woman drives them around. My sister can drive, but they don't want her to drive because if anything happen she'd lose everything she got. This nurse drive them around. They've got a brand-new Oldsmobile. They just had bought it before he had this stroke. Now the nurse drives them around and they like hunky-dory now. I'm glad of that.

Now I still have the power of attorney for their affairs, just in case. I check with the lawyer down there. He lets me know. I gave him the bills has got to be paid. He has those. The nurse takes care of little weekly things like that. But so far as insurance and all that, my lawyer takes care to make sure they're paid on time. Then part of her money goes right to the bank. One's in the savings and one's in the checking. They have four checks. Two from him and two from her. They got retired and then they got service checks. It's over \$4300 a month. Now that's pretty good money for retired people. Their house is paid for and everything. It's too bad that they have to be sick. They had money before this.

I don't understand why, it seems like -- Well, I shouldn't say that. It seems sort of -- I don't know, maybe some people aren't thankful enough to God for what He do. They were living so good, had everything -- and neither one of them went to church. My wife and I talk about that a lot of times. Sometime things will go bad for us, but still we know we'll call God to help us. She wasn't doing so good --

JJ: Yes. Spiritual help.

DA: Now she's running and I'm down in the garden and everything. She was sick about three months. It's just those things. Sometimes things happen that way.

JJ: What were you doing during World War II?

DA: World War II, I was with the same firm. Parisian Garment. I was in the garment business. I went in there in 1931, '32. I worked there for forty-two years. One firm. I retired from there on June 11, 1972. I've been retired now eleven years.

In my retirement, I am always busy. See a lot of them tailors knew we was old tailors years ago. They knew when I retired that I wouldn't have the chance to do the housework and get things straight here because they'd want me to come over and help them someplace. Like Harry Nyden up there -- his father when we first came to Bridgeport, his father came to my house. He was a peddler.

JJ: Who was that?

DA: Harry Nyden. Nyden's Department Store.

JJ: Yes. Used to be on Madison Avenue. Yes, Nyden's.

DA: When we came to Bridgeport, Mr. Nyden, the old man -- a peddler -- came to my mother's house to sell clothes for the kids -- you know, we were children. My mother, this old man gave my mother credit from right off the bat, gave my mother credit without any sayso at all. That's why I worked for Harry at least forty-two years. Harry knowed my family from his father. When he knew I was working for this company, he'd say, come Eastertime and Christmastime -- people used to dress good around here -- he'd say could I come up and give him a hand near the holiday season. He used to call me. I used to go up on Saturdays. Sometimes I'd leave my shop at night and go up there and work a little overtime for him.

When I retired, I didn't let him know that I was retired because I know just as soon as he found out I wasn't doing anything he'd want me to help him then. And there were certain things I wanted to straighten out. For about a year, I wanted about a year's rest and then I would probably look for something to do.

JJ: How were the living conditions during World War II? Were there many Blacks in Bridgeport during that time?

DA: During World War II, now that's another where emigration began. People used to migrate from New York and Pennsylvania to work here in these defense shops. There was plenty work. Plenty work during the war. Only thing, there was shortage in foods. See you had money, but the money didn't hardly mean anything because you were paying exorbitant prices for whatever you got. A pack of cigarettes -- someplaces you'd pay two dollars for it if you wanted it bad enough. Then you had everybody trying to get whatever they could under the counter sales. A pound of butter was sometimes three dollars. When you're passing up the street, you'd see a line formed in front of the store. Everybody had money so you'd just jump right in line. You don't know what you're going to get when you get there. Sometimes they're were selling stockings, sometimes they're selling sugar, sometimes coffee, sometimes booze. You don't know what you're going to get but just get in line and when it gets up to your turn, they'd give you what they got. Sometimes time you get up there, done sold out. That's why everybody jump in the line. Sometimes you'd see three or four lines. If you'd walk up Main Street, you'd probably see three or four lines. If you can't get what you want in this line, jump in the next line. Sometimes you shop all day like that. That is if you had time off.

JJ: How did it affect your family during that time?

DA: We got along fine. It didn't bother us at all. I was working good. World War II, practically all my family went into the service. I would have been the eighth one if I had of went in the Army. I had one, two, three, four -- four sisters and three brothers in the service. Then they called me. But why I didn't

go in the service, we were making Russian uniforms for nurses for Russia. Russia was our ally at the time. They gave me seventy-five percent more production, sense of work, war work. After a period of time, I got another letter from the War Board Induction Center to come for a test. I had to go for induction into the service. I went for the examination up in New Haven. They asked me what service I wanted to go into. I says I want to go into the Army. He says, "Why do you want to go in the Army?" I said, "Well, I don't want to be odd. I have four sisters and three brothers -- four brothers and three sisters already in the Army. I don't want to be different." He tried to put me in the Navy. He says to give me three reasons why I want to go in the Army. I told him, I said, I can give you a million more than that. I have seven of my family in the service already and they're all in the Army. I don't want to be an oddball. He said that's a good excuse. If you went into the Navy though it's a nice clean place. You won't be wallowing in the mud and so forth.

My sisters and brothers that went into the service -- all of them are dead. They got some sickness from wallowing in the mud over there in them old swamps. After the war was over in Europe, they sent them down in other places -- where they had that other mess was going on down there. It wasn't Vietnam. What was that other one when they left Europe and they went down the Phillipines, out that way -- anyway, they didn't come home. They left the European Warfare and went down the --

JJ: Was it Asian?

DA: Asian Warfare. When they went out there, they came home. Two

of them, three of them -- they all came home. But after they got home, the sickness hit them and they didn't live long. They had heart condition and T.B. and all that kind of stuff. Well, the wives prospered from it, but they're dead. While they were overseas, they didn't have children. One of the brothers had children. Two of them had children. They were well taken of.

So, out of thirteen children, there's only two of us living now. That's this one, the one -- the light-complexioned one up there, and myself. That's the one I'm taking care of now myself. That's the one I am taking care of down in Maryland.

JJ: I see. How about the neighborhoods? Did they have many Black neighborhoods, or were they still mixed during the war? During World War II?

DA: What happened during World War II, a lot of people came in and got into Black neighborhoods. Lot of it was shack-ups because of jobs. They'd meet a girl on the job and they'd get an apartment or they'd get a room.

JJ: Sharing?

DA: Yes, sharing. A lot of Black people got here for that purpose. But they didn't come here like to help Bridgeport, to me. They came here for what they could get out of Bridgeport, but not to put anything in so much. Then the families that are here now are families who were originally here when I actually came to Bridgeport. Their children grew up and they knew Bridgeport and have their roots here. They most likely got married and then they led their families here. But so far, it's new people coming here to Bridgeport -- It's like teachers came here. Not

many migrating workers in shops didn't come here to live. People who have jobs in Bridgeport in these factories now are mostly well-established families from way back. There aren't too very many Black people in these shops anyway now. But they're mostly people who were here -- that we fought for in the N.A.A.C.P. to get in these shops, and when Roosevelt say no contract, no Black hired, no contract. When Roosevelt said, "No discrimination." Otherwise they'd lose all them contracts. That's why we got jobs as we got them now.

Then a lot of people don't live here. They commute to work in Bridgeport. They come from out of state. Some from as far away as Pennsylvania. Come up here and some of them stay in hotels and go back weekends or every other weekend. But New York -- just as many New Yorkers work here as Bridgeport Black people.

JJ: What do you think about the '60's, Mr. Amos? How did it influence you any? Or how did it influence Bridgeport? Martin Luther King, Jackson, the demonstrations, Andrew Young?

DA: We were away from here, my wife and I, it was 1954. My wife and daughter had never been in the South. My wife had never been any farther south than Washington, D.C. That's where she was born -- in Washington, D.C. She came here about the same age I did. She came here when she was eleven years old. They had never seen the South and nothing about it. My daughter, in 1953, she started college.

JJ: When did you have your first one? Do you have one child?

DA: Yes, one child.

JJ: When was she born?

DA: April 15, 1935.

JJ: I see.

DA: Well, she had finished high school. She went to Central and finished school and everything. In 1954, I told her -- She started college in 1953.

JJ: Where did she go?

DA: UCONN. In Storrs. I said, "You do good and you work. You've never been south and your mother's never been south." I say, "Come my vacation time, I'll take you south and show you where I was born and everything." My father and all of them say oh, you wouldn't even know how to get around down there, because I hadn't been back home after I left there. My grandmother was my heart and when I left there and hadn't been up here hardly any time, my grandmother passed away. I wasn't told about it until later. After I found out Grandma was dead, I didn't care to go. There was nothing down there I wanted to see.

So, I said since I haven't been home in so long, my family was saying that you wouldn't know, they built up so much down there. They made some changes, but the main thoroughfares were still there, I remember those. We got in the car and I drove down. We stopped in Washington to spend a little day with my sister there or so. Then we went to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I took them to where I was born. I took them to where we lived, took them where we had the farm and drove all around to where families used to live. They're not there -- they like we did. They done moved out too. I told them how people used to live in certain places while I was there and then we came all the way back to Bridgeport.

At that time, we were in Greensboro, North Carolina. That's

my wife's father's home. Now he's from the British West Indies, but he was a doctor -- surgeon -- at Richardson's Hospital there in Greensboro. But he had passed away at the time. We went to visit -- In fact, we stayed at the house. We had a home there, because he willed her a house. Nice place where he lived. We stayed in this house. There was a nurse, a schoolteacher there that had been in college -- she was staying in the house to keep the vandals away from it while we were deciding what we were going to do with it. We spent some time there and while we were there this 1954 decision about civil rights was moved. That segregation in the schools had to be broken up and so forth and so on. We left Greensboro to take some people up to Winston-Salem where I used to live. Them crackers was riding up and down the roads and you were scared to be out. Because the decision was made and -- what, how crazy can you be? The decisions are made in Washington and here these people down here they just riding up and down the street all raising -- Black people was scared to go out. In fact, we got up to Winston, we stayed overnight. We wouldn't come back in the night. We stayed overnight and come back the next day because at night them crackers was running down the road drinking and carrying on, I guess. So you'd probably get hurt.

Down there, I could see that it wasn't going to be easy for us to get the rights that belonged to us. What I could never understand is this -- You make a constitution of this United States and in that Constitution, when they made it they must didn't think we were around. They must of thought we was a worm on the ground. But we were here. When they made that Constitution,

we should have been included. Why should we have to fight for everything that's in that Constitution before we can get waited upon? And it costs us, it keeps us poor, fighting for to get our rights. Every time we get a little piece of the right, somebody come and knock it down a notebook. You got to fight to get it back up to a certain level again. And fighting, fighting, fighting. That's why it's -- put them up in the front line, they're good fighters, because we do fight for what we think is right.

That's one reason why I say it was a good move. When Martin Luther King started his non-violence march, if anybody got a heart, if you got the heart, you don't hit a man and kick a man when he's down on the floor. Those people armed with rifles and guns and sticks and here I haven't got nothing -- kicking them in the head and everything, even blind people, throwing them around. And that fellow singer -- you might know him, a nice fellow singer -- he's blind. He was in one of the demonstrations and they were throwing --

JJ: Ray Charles?

DA: No, not Ray Charles.

JJ: Stevie Wonder.

DA: No, not him. He'll come in a minute. Anyway, when you see people take advantage of people like that -- when they had that march, when they were marching from Selma to the courthouse or to the statehouse, and you see them stormtroopers beating them people with their sticks. They were just like they were animals. How could a nation like this -- supposed to be intelligent people -- when you're making up your Constitution,

these here people were slaves. You knowed they were here. When you made that Constitution, you didn't -- You had Lincoln free the slaves and all that. Now where do we come in there? That's what I still can't understand. You could down [to] the poorest cracker in the south, and you got a Cadillac and a beautiful house and everything -- own land -- and some of them working for you. He thinks he's better than you.

JJ: Did you notice any changes here in Bridgeport?

DA: Well, I'll tell you. Bridgeport didn't change too much. So far as getting good jobs?

JJ: Yes.

DA: Bridgeport didn't change too much. Now, what good jobs you get now you've got to fight for. You've got to qualify more than the other guy. You've got to know somebody. Otherwise, those jobs -- That's why my sister and them left here. We were raised -- got their education here. They left here to go to Washington and get jobs there with mediocre pay when good pay was being made here. So from that mediocre pay, they joined the Army. That's where they could get a substantial pay. They got promotions. Now here, if they gave you something to do here in a shop -- let's say running a staple machine -- you'd be running a staple machine ninety-nine years if you could work that long. Some other people come out of the street -- three weeks and they're get promotions to another job. First thing you know, they're your boss and so forth.

So now those are the things that still exist. That's why we need a lot -- That's another reason, too -- why they're trying to bust the unions. See if it wasn't for the unions,

a lot of the good jobs that Negroes have right now, they wouldn't have them. See? The unions say it's like that. That's what the International Ladies Garment Workers Union says.

When a storm starts on the hill and it start washing stones down a hill, it don't stop to separate the black stones from the white stones. All the stones roll together. And that's the way the International Garment Union stands -- stick to the union or you get broke, get separated. So therefore if it wasn't for the unions, Black people wouldn't have some of the jobs they have today. We have some pretty good Negroes around Bridgeport and they have some pretty good jobs. Most of them didn't live here. A lot of them migrated, but they were dependable. And they came here with something up here too, and that helps.

Now that's one thing I like. If I am going to do a job, like I say I knowed how to do something and that other guy know how to do something -- test me. Don't look at my skin and say, "No, I don't need you." Test me against him. May the best man get the job. Now that's what has come down -- and now they put that I.Q. deal in there. We got to have such a high I.Q. If you got two hands, there are certain things that you can do. Your I.Q. is not required there. Certain things that you can do with your hands that you don't need to [think] -- it's automatic. Your hands work. But a lot of people say, "Oh, he don't have enough to be this and that." I.Q. don't always do it. It's common sense -- it's ninety percent of our life. Just plain old common sense. A lot of people don't have that.

JJ: What do you think about the future of Blacks in Bridgeport?

If they have improved, do you think they will continue to improve or what do you think that's needed?

DA: Well, I'll tell you what we've got to do. We've got to learn to be more clannish like other ethnic groups. Now I learned this from my wife's people from the West Indies. We went down there when her father was living -- to meet him.

JJ: Which place in the West Indies?

DA: Edna, what part of the West Indies are your people from?

Jamaica, yeah. We went down there to go out. You know, you have go out and everything. He was at his brother's house. He was staying there. Edna and my daughter went down. Of course they went down during the week and I went down on a weekend. On a Friday night, I left here and went down. We went out. Every place we went we fraternized with West Indians. His sister-in-law wanted me to go out and get her a loaf of bread. She gave me the name of a store about three blocks away. Right in the same building, you go downstairs -- there's an Italian store. There's a store I could of bought a loaf of bread. But she designated a store for me to go to -- named it -- two blocks away, I had to go down there. That's how clannish they are.

Now a lot of Black businesses years ago tried to start a business here. We'd walk right by.

[end of tape two, side one]

[there is a lapse in the tape here -- speaker is interrupted]

... open a drug store in New Haven. In fact business was good at first, you know, fine. He took an apartment with him. So they figured they'd have two drug stores. They opened a store on Grand Avenue and they're already on Congress Avenue

they have a store. So they went to Grand Street. The negroes that were patronizing before says, "How'd the Negroes get so rich?" My son-in-law and his father used to do things for them when they needed a prescription or something and wait for their money. Then they, rather than pay him, they go around the corner and buy from the white man. Saying they take the prescription and go over there.

JJ: Why do you think we don't have that kind of unity among ourselves?

DA: I'll tell you. That man years ago -- slavery time. He died in Concord. You see, he figured if I keep you and me from communicating we might have something in common and we might work out something and he'd lose control over us. So he would tell you, "You're better than him and he's better than you." Now we're looking on each other -- down on each other. He tell this group and even the whole neighborhood if a new family moves in there, some of the creditors will tell you, "Don't bother with them." And tell them same people don't bother with you. They'd be living there five years and never even say hello to you. If they do, just look at you like you're under them and I look at them like they are under me. That has a lot to do with it.

Now, the States, even the States. I remember moving to North Carolina. People migrated from South Carolina. They were just over the bridge. They would tell us in North Carolina, "You're better than them. They'd work for twenty-five cents. They want to come up here and work for your fifty cents. They'll come up here and take your fifty cents away because they'll work for twenty-five cents." But the fear -- you know, the fire

in you. It's hard from us to get out from that division stuff. We've got to learn that we're Black and we're not white. If a man said, if you're not Black, if you're not white, you're Black or something else -- you're not white. So therefore, be what you are.

I have looked it it many way, myself. You'll see some people. Really, they don't have anything and some of them don't even have a good name because you can't depend on them. Still they think they're so hot stuff, you know. They don't know anything. Some of them don't even have a decent job, but they want to be put up on a pedestal like "I am the greatest." That's one thing that we've got to get out of our mind. We've got to get out that we're one. We've got to be one people. Just like the Italians. See how they come over here and get together. Look at Puerto Ricans. In ten years from now, they'll be better off than we are. One thing that they have to their advantage. They came from a country that's organized. We were great with joining things, but we don't get organized first. We've got to get organized.

Now, once you get organized, you've got something going because you've got something in common that can be organized. We start off simple and we're going to build a building. But we know we're going to build a building because we have put our minds to it. It's like anything you want to do. Like a man and wife who are going to buy a house -- you're of one accord, we're going to buy a house. Now I can't take my money and throw it away and she going to buy a house. She can't take here money and throw it away and I'm going to buy the house and carry the weight and

everything. It don't work that way. We've both got to be of an accord, work together. If you want to have -- and God didn't bless us with many children -- but if you want the children to have an education, you've both got to work together to see that the kid gets an education. It's just one of those things where we have been what we were supposed to have been in the beginning.

Another thing, too, in many cases from down south where most are ministers are from, they had what you had what you'd call a captive audience wherein they could tell you anything they wanted and you don't say nothing about it because you're a captive. He get up there and tell you a lot of them down there tell you what that man told him to tell you, see? A lot of those ministers from down home and a lot of them practicing right up here now -- You don't do that no more. You're supposed to teach me. Teach me something. Teach me that I don't have to let this man's foot stay on my neck. Let's get it off. How we going to get it off? Let's cooperate. Let us work together. Let us become in harmony. Let us know where we are going. Let's organize. Not just join -- let's organize, get the things straight, then we'll take the joiners later because we're organized. If he going to come in here, be organized, you got to fit in in this clog , otherwise you don't get involved with us.

Now that's the way I see the whole thing so far as how race is concerned. Another thing -- it happens because sometimes the states where you come from, they tell me that the Black people from Florida have been taught that they're the smartest people of all the Black people in the United States. And some of them really believe it. Some of them don't know how to pull a foot

out of a boot, but still they've got that belief that they're smarter than any other Black person. I worked with one and he just knew he was the smartest fellow in the world. You couldn't knock it out of his head that he was the smartest.

Those are things that's instilled in the mind. The mind's a funny thing. Something gets in there and it won't move. It's not flexible in some people. The mind's got to be soft to absorb. See you can't absorb anything new if you've got something in there so hard you can't move anything else in there. That's the way I see our people. Unless some drastic changes are made in us -- we've got to make them ourselves --

JJ: You say we must make ourselves. In what way, Mr. Amos? As a group, or would you comment as far as Black leadership is concerned, or where is it coming from? In Bridgeport, more specifically.

DA: We've got to get together now. Look your wife is doing a good job trying to fight for what is ours. But there's always that faction that's always against us. Half of us won't come in on what's good for us. "It's not hurting me so much that I'm going to bother about it."-- you know. See now, we've got to lose that atmosphere. We've got to say, "Well, now, if it's happened to them over there now, eventually it's going to happen to me later. So let's fight it over there before it spreads over here later."

Those are the things -- I fought until I almost gave up one time. I said now, what's the use in keeping on fighting? These people going to always have the upper hand. They got the money and they got the law. All we got is just us and our few bucks. The money we need to fight them with, all the time we have to fight for everything anyway. They can sit back and wait

until our coffers get low. Then they can move in and we've got nothing to fight them with. I started to think about that a lot of times. Now if all of us get together and go around there and tell the man, tell them all, "You're not going to touch this. It's all stacked on the books here. This is supposed to be an "A" zone and no zoning board has the right to change it." I bought with this privilege, I paid tax for this privilege. This is an "A" zone. If we don't go down there in numbers and fight like we're supposed to -- If more than just a few white people come there, they do anything they want. If one or two white people come in there with us, they would do anything they want because not enough of us going down there and fight.

I've stuck my neck out in Bridgeport since I'm a kid. As I said, when John Lancaster was in charge of the N.A.A.C.P., I was still going to high school. And I used to go down to the Y. I was one of them that went down there to try to get the boy to go to the Y.M. I put up \$25 a year for that boy to go to the Y.M. Mr. Mitchell used to come in and collect that dollar, golly, every two weeks or whatever it get to make that before the year comes. Come and collect from me to make sure that boy goes there. Now I'm in there and I ain't got cheek or charlie at the time, but I wanted some kid to go there. Those are the things that we've got to forget ourselves sometimes. We never got rich up to now, so don't try to get rich now because you might get a living, but you ain't going to get rich by stepping on somebody else. That's where a lot of people are making a wrong mistake in

our people. They're opportunists -- you know, use you to get where I want to get.

It's bad to say, but I belong to an organization where I know some of the fellows have gotten up to the high rung on the ladder by using the order -- stepping on you. When something big, I be out with my chest stick out -- going on, "heh, ha, we're doing this and we're doing that." You're not doing anything, you just here to stick out your chest and say what we're doing. That fellow out there shoveling snow is doing it. You're using him to get your honor. Now that I don't approve of. We've got to stop that.

But, as I've said to my wife -- sometimes I sit here and we talk. Just like when you try to tell somebody something that you think is good or your ideas. She says to me to stop trying to tell them that because you're just pouring water on the duck's back. You know how water runs off a duck's back because his feathers are all made of oil. It don't sink in. A lot of them don't want to hear. Sometime I just sit and listen to things. I have very little to say because I am wasting my time and theirs, too.

I can't see too much change yet, but I do say this much -- let's get the younger people. That's where its got to come from now. Stop being -- When you go for school, let's stop jumping in the commercial course or just a general course. Let's jump in something hard. Like I say, I can do it. You've got to master anything that the other fellow can master. That's when they'll open their eyes. We've got some astronauts now -- cosmonauts whatever you call them -- we've got some of them now. Younger

people on the way up -- steer them away from that easy thing. Why take Spanish when you can speak Latin and French and all that stuff. Get away from that there follow the crowd stuff. Let's get up there where the action's going to be in the future.

JJ: Become more of an individual.

DA: That's right. In times to come, this is going to be different. Houses are going to be different. So you might as well get in on the ground floor now, especially the children, the younger people. Soon as we get on this computer stuff, the system -- Now, my granddaughter, she goes to a private school where they got computers in there already. The kids are learning to use the computer. I told my wife as soon as I find out the type of computer they're using in the school, as soon as she starts to know how to handle it pretty good, I'm going to buy her one. I work with a lady whose husband works at a computer maker. He's an analyst, that's what you call it. He can feed the thing. He can do mechanical work when they need to be done on it. He's good. She says they're going to get their son one, but they're not buying it yet because they is coming out better. She says when that comes out he could get one for me cheap. I haven't said anything to my son-in-law about it because I don't know whether they want her to go along with the way she is doing or whether we should sort of give her a little push. I'll let them decide. I would buy one for her just for her to get in on the ground floor while they're --

JJ: Yes.

DA: Because it's good. Now I see on television where the man already

playing with his kid on it -- maybe you see it -- showing this kid to point the way. That's how it's going to be. Because the pick and shovel, buddy, is gone. No more days like that. Now even now we're having the computers for everything. A man going to be able to sit in his parlour and run his shop. He look out a big glass in there and see his shop working. Everything computer.

JJ: There is hope for us.

DA: Yes, that's right. You know never say die. That's why I say we're great. The fight is there, see. Sometimes it might look a little dim, but don't give up. Like I say, I don't give up. Sometimes I get disgusted, but never give up. That's when we've got to stay in.

JJ: Is there anything that you would like to say that I haven't asked, Mr. Amos? I've covered just about everything that --

DA: No. I think you have. I think you've done a pretty good job. I've tried to tell you -- some of it might have been a little pieced -- of what I have experienced and what has happened so far as my knowledge is concerned about me and about conditions around Bridgeport. As I have said, Bridgeport so far as a growing man -- growing up from a boy to become man -- I don't see any drastic changes. I see mediocre changes but not a flood of changes. But there are changes.

I think one of the great philosophers say something like that. He say "nothing is definite but change." Change is a definite thing, therefore I may not see it as a rush, but I see it in many changes when I look around. I see changes. Some of the changes I see are not so good, like living conditions in

in Bridgeport for some of our people. The housing situation is not so good. The people who get these houses -- some of them don't take care -- The landlord gives some people a rent, I've seen it done. Now we had it ourselves. You give somebody a house to live in because he paid you rent. He thinks he's making you rich. He's not able to buy his home. He hasn't been able to do it. Maybe circumstances, but everybody can't do it. It's not meant for everybody -- Things just don't work the same way for everybody. He's unfortunate enough not to be able to own his home and somebody be kind enough -- be good enough -- to let him have a rent. Pay the man the rent. But a lot of them think that by them paying you the rent, they're making you rich.

We had the home that my father-in-law left my wife and daughter and me in Greensboro. A beautiful home -- seven room house, two tile baths and one big room, it was just a half-bath, carved doors, hardwood floors, plaster walls -- beautiful. Doctor's house. We had this school teacher staying there. She said she would stay summers. She wouldn't go home because since we're not living there, the vandals would probably mess up the house. She would collect rent from the other teachers that's going to live there in this house. We told her, "Well, you take care of the house for us and we want -- down there, you know the rent's a little cheaper -- used to be about \$72 a month. That was about the going rate down there for rents. All right, she was glad to do it. We told her that that's for year-round and "Oh, yes, that's understood." We gave the house to her for her to take care of. Then one day we got a letter when the checks supposed to come, "I can't send you but \$30 (thirty) dollars. The

plumber came and I had to do this and I did that. I won't be able to send you no money, no more than this." Then it got so she was sending less and less. It was about two years we let her stay there -- three years. In the winter sometimes she'd send it right along, two or three months good, regular. But when you sit down and start figuring out, I said, now look -- we've got to pay the insurance, we've got to pay the taxes, and other occidents we had to do, certain little work on the house -- the roof and stuff like that -- which we are responsible for. You figure it out what she sent here is not enough to even take care of that. It don't pay us, so we might as well sell that house down there, since my daughter don't want to live down there she said.

So the same summer that I went down there in 1954, I told my wife don't tell her we're coming. We're going to go down there and we're going to [unclear] . Something was going on in her mind because she says, "When summer comes, I can't send you no rent in the summer because teachers all go home. I just stay here to keep the vandals away from the house." I said I don't like the situation. We went down there, drove up. She had a sign in the yard, "Tourists". The house so full of people we couldn't get in. She got on the phone and calls some of the neighbors and people she knew to get the people out of the house. Then that's when I told her that we're going to sell the house. "Well give me first preference to buy." Say, "We'll let you know." Then she was on pins and needles. I says, "Something is going on wrong down there. That woman's so anxious to buy the house." We came on back and didn't say nothing. One Sunday

we came from church and she sitting on the front stoop where we lived at the time. She says, "Have you decided on what you're going to do about the house?" "Well, we'll let you know."

We had a lawyer down there get us the best price we could get down there. We went to the bank. The bank got us a good price -- better price than the lawyer could give. But the bank want us to wait -- dribbles, dribbles, dribbles. I don't know. Once we get rid of it, get rid of the whole thing. This lawyer we had told us what we could get and the best price he could get anywhere was eleven thousand dollars at that time. Now that house had been up here -- you get a hundred thousand dollars for it. My wife says since we can't go on down there and live and my daughter when she graduates she don't want to go down there and live, so we might as well sell it. We wrote her a letter and told her that we were contemplating selling it and the lawyer who was handling it for us and she could get in touch with him and he'd give her the price. About three days later after we had sent the price to the lawyer, the check came in the mail -- an eleven thousand dollar check. I says to my wife, "See, that woman paid us for your house with your money." For our house, that is. She didn't want to get rid of it too much. I said, "If you want anything, be where it's at to watch it. The money to that house belongs to you. That money belong to you. She paid you with your own money." Now, you see, we were doing her a favor. She didn't have to send us nothing in the summers if she meant well. But send me in the wintertime when the teachers there. Make sure. If you're going to make that on your own, that's all I ask. If you're going to be straight, don't tell me I can't.

She put that in. After she stayed in at first, I said year-round in the beginning, I want \$72 year-round. When she write me a letter and say "I can't do it, all the teachers gone home now. I just stay here and watch the house for you."

Now those are the things that we've got to get out of our systems. We will in a way do each other when we don't have anything. You know what I mean? I don't have nothing that belongs to you, but they broke in my house and stole.

JJ: Yes.

DA: Now we're hurting each other. We don't go up there where the man got something and take that. No, walk by his house and go there and keep clean. But he'll come in and steal the little Fisher radio I've got that I struggle to get. It don't make sense. And it's us who do it.

Another thing we do. I was just hearing it on the radio and television, and you see it in the street. If you ever go down on Newfield Avenue and Stratford Avenue and just stand there -- like you go in the bank and you come out and just observe what's passing and the language you hear. Those are things we've got to get away from. You've got to act like you're somebody, but you don't have to put on no pedestal. Just be natural. Be a human being. Boy, some of the things that you see over there on that side of town and the language -- You drive up there and the light changes and you're supposed to go, he'll walk right in front of your car and stand there and talk to somebody on the porch. Stand right in front of your car and the light's ready for you to go. You blow your horn and say anything and what kind of language you hear? Those are the things

-- the killing and the dueling, standing on the corner see them selling those reefers and things. And they're young fellows. Opportunities is out there but you can't sit there and become fame put in your lap.

My father told us when we were kids, he says, "Son, [unclear] didn't have a lot of education, but my mother and father both had good morals." "Son," he says, "if you're going to work for a man and he tells you to be there at a certain time, you be there. If a man's got a job and you know he's got a job over there. You go and ask for the job and he says 'no, come some other time, come again, come tomorrow.'" He say now, "He may be trying to get rid of you, but you go there tomorrow. And he says, 'come next week' -- you go there next week. You keep on worrying him and he's going to give you the job. You see, he knows that he'll be able to depend on you after you come."

That's another thing. We're not dependable enough, many of us. I've had to cover for my people that worked for me them forty-two years I was there. I had three of my people out of seven that I was in charge of, gave me more trouble in them years that I worked there than the whole shop of people. I bet you I could write a book out of the excuses that they bring in. /All kinds -- they could manufacture excuses. I know they're lies. See that's what gets me -- I know they're lies. But I've got to cover for him in order to make me look good. I've got to tell a lie for him. But do you think he'd ever come to my aid to make me look good? No, he'd want to hold me down. That's the way people is.

JJ: I see.

DA: You see, Brother Johnson, we have come a long way, as that
cigarette ad goes. But brother, we've got a long way to go.

[laughs]

JJ: Thanks for the interview, Mr. Amos. We'll close on that note.

End of Interview