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

Margaret Gardiner

285 Maplewood Avenue, #10F, Bridgeport, CT

Born:	May 8, 1907 - Bridgeport to George and Emma Clarke
Spouse:	Dr. William O. Gardiner
Children:	William III, George
Education:	High School (Business course)
Profession:	Secretary
Travel:	Continental United States, Mexico, Canada
Church:	American Baptist
Organizations:	YWCA American Baptist Convention Church Women United Connecticut Valley Chapter, Links, Inc.

"A Study of Bridgeport Neighborhoods:

A Black Perspective, 1900 -- Present"

Interview by: Juanita Wright
Interview with: Margaret Gardiner
Date:

Wright: Mrs. Gardiner, first I would like to ask you if you would just give me your name and your birthdate please.

Gardiner: Margaret Clark Gardiner. My birthdate was May 8, 1907.

JW: Could you tell me where you were born and the time that you arrived in Bridgeport?

MG: Yes. I was born here in Bridgeport.

JW: You were born in Bridgeport?

MG: Yes, that's right.

JW: Could you tell me about where you were born in Bridgeport?

MG: Yes. Unfortunately that street has been taken away from us, but in the center of town, about a thousand feet -- I would say -- from the Sheehan Catholic Center. It was the Armory. Fulton Street was the name of the street.

JW: Oh, my goodness. Do you remember your mother saying -- did she have a midwife or a doctor doing your birth?

MG: She had a doctor.

JW: Do you know the name of the doctor?

MG: Yes. He was Dr. Allen C. Bradley, a very prominent Black doctor here in Bridgeport.

JW: Could you give us a little bit more about the neighborhood where you lived? Did you live in that particular neighborhood long?

MG: Yes. I lived there until I married and then lived

another four years across the street in a house that my father owned. I was in that area for quite some time. It wasn't a very long street. The numbers went from 10 up to 107. At 107 is where the doctor lived.

JW: So you were born right in the neighborhood where your doctor was?

MG: Yes.

JW: Now in that particular street, was that a mixed street?

MG: Yes, it was. There was just about every nationality you could think of; and, of course, black and white. There were white Portuguese and black Portuguese, and then of course Irish, French, English -- many Irish were in on the street.

JW: Was Bridgeport a small town at that time or was it spread out of the whole area?

MG: I would say it was medium. Of course, we thought it was a small town. Then, as we grew older, we discovered that it really was a larger place than we had thought. It began to encompass like Stratford and Fairfield. Of course, the greater Bridgeport area was quite the size.

JW: Could you tell me something about school [and] where you went to school?

MG: Yes. I went to school up above Fulton Street. Now that street is still there. That's up on Highland Avenue, still down in the center of town. It was a school of eight rooms and three portable

buildings in the yard of the school.

JW: Do you remember the name of the school?

MG: Yes. Wheeler School.

JW: Wheeler School. Oh, yes, I remember. That's the old Wheeler School that we still have.

MG: That's right.

JW: Oh, yes. Can you remember very much about how far did this school go in grades?

MG: Yes. It went only as far as the sixth grade. Then we had to transfer over to Washington School -- which has been torn down just in recent years -- which was beside St. Augustine's School on Pequonnock Street. That school only went as far as the eighth grade. For the eighth first and eighth second -- that's the way the classes were divided in those years -- I had to walk all the way down to Prospect Street School, down the south part of Bridgeport, for that whole year for the eighth first and the eighth second.

JW: Did you happen to go to high school at all?

MG: After that. You see, I went to all these three schools and then came back and went to Central High School, where the City Hall is now. That's the Central High.

JW: Do you remember anything about the relationships in school? The relationships between the students and the relationships between the teachers and students and those kinds of things?

MG: Yes. We had good relationships with the teachers. When I say "good" I mean that they seem to have taken quite an interest in what we did, not only in school but what our extracurricular affairs were. At that time, there were not many Black students in the school. For instance, in the class when I graduated -- and we had a class of probably around three hundred, three hundred and fifty -- there were three Blacks.

JW: In the whole class?

MG: In the whole class. That was about the ratio for freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior classes.

JW: What you are actually saying is the area for Blacks, it wasn't that many Blacks in this area at that time?

MG: No. And not many of them went to high school because at that time you had to pay for everything -- our books and all.

JW: Oh, yes. That is right.

MG: We bought our books and everything else that you used in school. Many of the families couldn't afford that.

JW: Right. So your father was in business for himself I see.

MG: That's right. It was quite an opportunity for you to be able to go to high school.

JW: Could you explain something about your father's business?

MG: Pa had a very interesting business. When he came to Bridgeport, he worked for the Macatherine Boiler Works and made a salary of something like fifteen to eighteen dollars a week. Then the family began to grow and that wasn't sufficient to take care of a growing family.

So, he bought a horse and a cart -- a horse and wagon -- and began moving rubbish and trash for the rich people in the west end of Bridgeport. In this area where I'm living now, when I was a child at that time only rich people lived.

Then he went from a horse and wagon to a truck, and from the small truck to the large truck.

JW: What did he do -- hauling and moving?

MG: Yes, he would haul and move things, any kind of things people needed moved. He had a couple of stores which helped greatly because he was paid by the month. That was a surety in money coming into the house. The two stores that he had were Howland's -- which was on Main Street then -- and Smith-Murray. Smith-Murray has gone out of business entirely. Howland's is now out here on Black Rock Turnpike.

He would go there every morning and remove the cartons, the boxes, the trash that merchandise came in. That was a year-round job for years.

JW: So he had steady income?

MG: Steady income.

JW: What did your mother do? Did she do anything?

MG: Well, she didn't do very much because she had so many children. I'm the second oldest in the family. It seemed as though every time we turned around, there was a new brother or a new sister. She had eight children in all.

JW: She was quite busy.

MG: She was busy. [Laughs]

JW: We'll get back to the school activities and things after school. What type of things did you do during school as extracurricular activities and the kinds of things that you did after school?

MG: I was interested in music. That perhaps was the largest thing that I worked with. Singing and playing the piano and helping with plays that we had at school in that type of work.

Let's see, what else did we do? That was perhaps what kept me busy more than anything else. And helping to take care of the brothers and the sisters.

JW: Well, I know that was a busy job. [Laughs] Let's talk about some of the things possibly that Black people did -- say in the evenings in social life. What kind of social activities did you as Black folk take part in?

MG: As a youngster, we didn't go anywhere at night. We were right in the house at a large dining room table that was the size of this table. Our parents

taught us games -- my father in particular. My mother would probably be knitting booties and sewing things for a baby that was on the way, or mending our clothes.

We learned to play dominoes, checkers, games of that type. We did that at night. We even played games with my father that I love to think about, like hide-and-seek, in the house. It was just lots of fun to do that kind of thing. Ma and Pa got so much joy out of it as I look back. There we were, so they were never looking for us. They knew where we were.

JW: Yes. You were always home.

MG: Then as I got older, I became very interested in my church -- which at that time was the Messiah Baptist Church. That was only two blocks away.

JW: Two blocks away from home. When you became of courting age, what happened during your courting years? What kind of courting did you do?

MG: Those were interesting years, because we did things like playing tennis. We'd go either to Seaside Park or to Beardsley Park, or we would go on just long hikes up the North End or down to Seaside Park. We could walk to Seaside Park. More than likely, we would just go down to Main Street and take the trolley down to Seaside Park and go swimming. My father tried to teach us how to swim, but it wasn't easy because my mother was

one who didn't care particularly for swimming and was afraid that he'd let us get drowned. We laughed so about that because he certainly wasn't going to let his "babies" -- as he called us -- get drowned. So, I never really learned how to swim, but we would paddle around. He would swim way out and then he'd come back and say, "All right, you babies, come on." We'd go as far as we'd dare to go, because usually if we went as a family, my mother would be sitting on the edge of the walk saying, "Now, George, don't take those children out so far." But we had a good time as a family.

JW: What about friends? What about your girlfriends? Who were your friends?

MG: Oh, I had a lot of girlfriends. They were the friends whom we met in church in the B.Y.P.U. -- the Baptist Young People's Union -- and in Sunday School. Most of my friends, I am sorry to say, are not with us now. There is one friend whom I went to see fairly often and she came with her mother to see us, a Mrs. Ora Saunders. Let me see, I can't think of anyone else who's alive at this time. Oh, Mrs. Edna Amos -- she was one that was in the graduating class from high school. I don't see too much of her now. She did work at Read's and I saw her fairly often.

JW: The Saunders -- would that have been Mr. Saunders, the family that -- he was in the Post Office. Was

Mr. Saunders in the Post Office?

MG: I don't think so. Taswell Saunders was one of the members of the family that married Ora. She was Ora Holden. Now he died fairly recently.

JW: Right. I was wondering if he was the one that was the first Postman here?

MG: No, because he was a brother to Mrs. McAden. We spoke about that.

JW: Right. You said you went to Messiah Baptist Church. Was your family a member of that church? Were they involved in that church? The whole family?

MG: That's right, all of them. The whole family. We had a pew. We'd have to with that large family. The fifth pew was the Clark pew. The ushers made sure that nobody sat in the Clark pew because when we came in it was like a little young parade. [Laughs] I often say how most of us cut our teeth on the back of the pew of the fourth pew. That's how young we were taken to church.

JW: Tell me something about the holidays. How did you celebrate the holidays?

MG: We had delightful holidays. My mother had two sisters who lived up in West Haven. At that time, there was a railroad station and we went by train until my father got a Model-T Ford. Then we could go by car. Until that time, we would take a train from the Bridgeport railroad station up to West Haven and walk over to our aunts' homes and spend

the holidays joyously.

They had room enough for the large Clark family. We would divide up and decide which home we would stay at this time according to who stayed there last time. Then we would walk back and get the train and come home.

After my father got a Model-T Ford, we went more often. Then we also visited in Monroe to the Baskerville's home. They're gone now. The daughter, Mattie, who was only five months older than I -- she and I were close friends -- and her brother, who was one of my boyfriends -- he became a dentist -- he has died also. But we would deem it a real pleasure to pack a little suitcase and go up to Monroe to spend Saturday and Sunday.

JW: It sounds like you really had an enjoyable young life here.

MG: Yes, we did. We did things that children perhaps today wouldn't pay too much attention to, but it made us very happy.

JW: Right. Now let's go to World War I. Do you remember anything about those years?

MG: Yes, I do.

JW: Could you tell me some of the things that you remember? Did you have any family involved or anything like that?

MG: Only a cousin, one of the cousins who lived in West Haven went to war. My brothers and sisters

didn't because they were too young.

But I knitted for the World War I. They had things called wristlets for the soldiers that started just below the fingers and would proceed up the arm a bit. It was knitting and purling and making these wristlets. I made dozens of them. That's when I learned how to knit. The Red Cross furnished the khaki yarn and all we had to do was to knit them.

JW: Where did you do that?

MG: At home. After school --

JW: Was it a group of you together or just --

MG: As I remember, we just did it individually by families. An evening when we didn't play dominoes, we'd be sitting there knitting.

JW: And then you would take them to the Red Cross?

MG: That's right.

JW: Do you remember how the war might have affected your family; like food shortages or less work, more work, anything happening at that time?

MG: Particularly the food shortage. I can remember we had to stand in line -- as we did for World War II, but even more so for World War I -- to get the commodities such as sugar, flour, and things of that kind. The meat wasn't even plentiful during World War I.

At that time, it's interesting in that things like chicken that's inexpensive today relatively

speaking, wasn't at that time. You didn't have it too often. When we did, that was like a holiday. Other than that, we had beef and we had a lot of pork. And, of course, fish -- Bridgeport being here near the harbor. We've always had plentiful fish.

JW: Did anybody in the family fish or anything during that time?

MG: Yes. My father did. He'd go down to Seaside Park and he would throw the line in and we'd get some fish.

JW: So that would keep the family going then.

MG: Yes, and also provide more fun.

JW: Oh, yes, that's true. Do you remember whether the Black neighborhoods changed at all after World War I, or did --

MG: Yes. It did, as I can remember hearing my parents and other people talk about it. It did change because a number of Black people came from the South at that time.

JW: During World War I?

MG: During World War I. Many of them did work in the smaller factories, not the larger ones as what happened during World War II. That's when they came in large numbers because the big factories took in everybody readily.

Many of the people who came in World War I -- the women did domestic work, and even some of the men, in the homes or in the yards. At that time, we had many rich people who lived in this area which

we no longer have. They did find work.

JW: During that time, I believe say in the early twenties -- When did you get married?

MG: I got married in 1928.

JW: 1928. [Laughs]

MG: [Laughs]

JW: Did you get married at home?

MG: No, I didn't. The year before I got married, my older sister -- who was only fifteen months my senior -- got married. [It was a] church wedding. [It] took all the money.

JW: Oh, I see. All right.

MG: Would you like to hear about when my husband came to town?

JW: Yes.

MG: My children -- I mentioned it once. After that, when they would like to hear something, they'd say, "Mother, tell us about when you met Dad."

JW: [Laughs] So tell us about it!

MG: At that particular time, I was out of high school and an office secretary at the Phyllis Wheatley Branch Y.W.C.A. One Sunday, the pastor of Messiah Baptist Church said, "We have a new dentist in town and I would like to introduce him to all of you. Will Dr. Gardiner come forward?" And he did. He walked down the aisle. I was the head soloist in the choir and I looked over the railing of the choir. He looked up at me as he was walking down

and I looked at him. We sort of smiled at each other. So he gave his little talk telling the parishoners where his office is and the hours, and he had cards to pass out at the door. I guess I was a little smart because I took my time taking my choir robe off and leaving the choir room and going through the auditorium so that almost everybody had gone from church when he was still standing there giving out his cards. I introduced myself to him, told him about the Y.W.C.A. On that particular Sunday, we had what was called a forum -- young people's forum, I guess they called it. So I invited him to come because we had the program and I knew he'd be interested. He said yes, he thought he would. It would be another opportunity to pass out some cards, too.

We walked down from the church to Main Street. I said, "I just live two blocks from here." And he said, "Well, I'll walk with you to your home." Which he did. When we got to the house, I invited him to come in and he said, "No. I'll come some other time, but thank you very much." He was a very formal-type person. I learned afterwards he was just like his mother. He said goodbye. I went on over to the Y that afternoon because I was responsible for opening the door and letting the young people in. Who was standing there waiting to go in but this new Dr. Gardiner whom I had met

at church! He stayed for the program and then I invited him to walk back over Congress Street Bridge from Beach Street -- that's where the Phyllis Wheatley Branch was -- and attend the B.Y.P.U. at six-thirty, which he did. Then, for a second time, he walked me home.

The way I always said it to the boys then, "... and he's been coming home with me ever since."

JW: [Laughs]

MG: I think that was what they always liked.

JW: They wanted to hear that part. You got married almost at the beginning of the Depression years.

MG: Yes. It was the year before the bank holiday.

JW: What can you recollect about those times?

MG: They were very tight days for all of us, and particularly for my husband and me, because he was trying to build a practice and take care of paying home rent. Fortunately, we were living in a house that my father owned and he gave us the rent very cheaply. It was fifteen dollars a month, but that was difficult to make at that time. I worked until the following June when my oldest son was born. The money I made took care of the household expenses. Then he was able to use what he was making with customers or patients for the office and the costs of keeping that up.

JW: Did he find it difficult to set up a practice here or did he have --

MG: No.

JW: Did he have mostly Black patients or did he have a mixture of patients?

MG: He had a mixture because his office was where families lived on East Main Street -- 439 -- upstairs over a theatre. Most of them were foreign-born, so that his practice was very much mixed. The number of Black people who were here at that time usually went to the older Black dentists. At that time we had two, a Dr. Gibbs who lived not too far from here on Grove Street, and a Dr. McCallah.

JW: Those were the two Black dentists during that time before your husband came?

MG: That's right.

JW: Now you said he was over a theatre on East Main Street. Do you know the name of that theatre?

MG: Yes, if it's still there. They had a terrific fire I heard not too long ago. The last name of it was the Astra Theatre, but it was the Capital Theatre at the time when he started his office.

JW: I hadn't heard about one in that area. All I had heard about [were] some movies on Stratford Avenue.

MG: No. This one is practically across the street from Dorothy Alsop's hairdressing shop.

JW: Yes. It is still a movie there. It is a movie there.

MG: Either that or the remains of it. I haven't been over that way, not having a car now.

JW: But how about food during the Depression?

MG: Food was hard to come by because it was expensive. [end of side one]

JW: -- and what went on at that time.

MG: That's right. And how we were able to keep food on the table in many of the homes where not too much money was coming in. Fortunately, my mother had been taught in the home that she grew up in in North Carolina to make bread instead of buying bread, in spite of the fact that bread at that time was like four cents a loaf. She taught us. I learned how to make yeast bread by standing on a box to bring me up tall enough to the kitchen table. Of course, she made things like stews. She'd get the stewing meat, which was inexpensive. We made out very well with that kind of food.

JW: Was there any special types of things that Blacks did in the church to survive during this time?

MG: Well, yes. You mean in the church itself?

JW: In doing for people in the church. How did they help the people survive?

MG: In our church -- in Messiah Church -- they gave suppers. I think they charged something like twenty-five cents, if you had it; and if you didn't, then you were invited to come in and eat. We had those fairly often. The name of the organization [was] the Pastor's Aide Society. [It] was the group that did quite a bit of that.

JW: Did the church play a major role in recreation for

Blacks during that period?

MG: Yes, they did. Those of us who liked acting in plays found that we could really enjoy ourselves in church because we would have plays. In the summertime we had picnics. The young people didn't have too much time to get into crime. They were so busy preparing for one thing and after something was over, we would be preparing for something else. It was worthwhile to be connected with the church. The young people loved it; I think mainly because all of us went. That's where the boys met the girls and the girls met the boys. We courted in B.Y.P.U. [Laughs]

The church really was the center of attraction for both young and old Blacks at that time. I can remember my mother and father buying a large ice cream freezer. I think it made five gallons of either ice cream or sherbet. The organizations that they belonged to would meet and this freezer went around to different places for those meetings. That's how they lovely refreshments. It was certainly more inexpensive to have your sherbet. Then, of course, someone would make a cake. It was just wonderful.

JW: It sounds it. It sounds like it was great fun.

MG: It was.

JW: Now what about medical care? You had a baby, you say, a year after you were married. What about your

medical care during that time?

MG: There wasn't any such thing. When I had Bill a year after I was married, it meant that my husband -- Even though his business grew fast, we didn't have a lot of money. I had him in the ward at Bridgeport Hospital. The ward at Bridgeport Hospital was eighteen dollars a week. They kept you in two weeks at that time. Mothers couldn't get out of the hospital for the first baby under fourteen days and the second baby thirteen days. So, it cost thirty-six dollars for two weeks in the hospital in the maternity ward.

JW: Could you tell me, during that time, was the maternity ward segregated or was it --

MG: No.

JW: No, it wasn't segregated. That was pretty good. Two whole weeks. Things have certainly changed now, haven't they?

MG: It was worth going to the hospital because it gave you an opportunity to let your fingernails grow and get your fingers all -- Vaseline we would keep them oiled with. I don't know that I'd be too happy to go to the hospital today and have to leave in about three days, is it?

JW: Yes. Three days.

MG: It isn't worth going. [Laughs]

JW: A lot of times, they're sending some people home overnight after they have their babies.

MG: Really?

JW: They've started some of that, too. Your baby was not born through a midwife? You did have a doctor?

MG: I did have the doctor, Dr. Bradley, only once during the pregnancy. I don't know what it was now. One Sunday morning I didn't feel too good. All we had to do -- At that time, he had moved then up on the street where Wheeler School was. My husband went up and got him and he took care of me, whatever it was.

JW: That was the only time you saw him during your whole nine months of pregnancy?

MG: That's right.

JW: Did he deliver the baby?

MG: No. An intern at the hospital [did]. If you had a baby doctor [as] they were called then, that was another added expense. We didn't have it. I didn't need it, which I am thankful [for].

Now, it was a little different when the second child was born six years later. We had Bud and for that time I had a private room.

JW: Everything was different.

MG: Everything was different. We had the late Dr. James was the doctor. I went in to see him -- oh, I guess once every month for a while. Then, toward the end, once every week or what have you. It only cost then thirty-five dollars a week to be in the hospital.

JW: With the private room?

MG: With a private room.

JW: How things have changed!

MG: Haven't they? [Laughs]

JW: Let's talk about World War II a little bit. What went on then?

MG: Oh, yes. I remember quite a bit about World War II. Several men in my family -- two brothers and a brother-in-law -- served.

JW: You didn't lose anyone in the war?

MG: No. Fortunately, we didn't. But I even have one of the letters that you would send to a man in the service that I have kept. I think it was the older brother -- the one who lives now in Florida -- who had sent it. I save it just to show people what that little letter was like. He came back. He served in Italy.

The younger brother was in Germany. I can't remember where the brother-in-law went. I should because at that time he left Bridgeport to go to camp in Augusta, Georgia, he and my sister, Blanche, were courting. He wrote home to her and said he had gotten wind of the fact that they were going to be shipped out. You know they didn't always tell them. They wanted to get married before he was shipped out.

My mother had been ill. My sister -- This is the way she tells it now. She says, "You know, I

didn't even realize I didn't have to have my mother go with me down to Georgia." But my mother couldn't go so Blanche asked Doc if I go with her. Of course, he said yes. He was rather romantically inclined. I went with her to Augusta, Georgia. She was married. Surely enough, in about a week after she came home -- she stayed about a week, I came right back, I said, "I've done my duty, I've chaperoned her to Augusta" and I came back -- and he was shipped out. But, thank the Lord, he returned.

JW: That was good. Do you remember if the war affected any of your family with food, services, anything during World War II?

MG: No, I don't think so. Blanche was the only one married. The rest of them were still at home. Of course, my father's business had grown to such a size that even having grown-up children, he was able to take care of them. All of us were born on Fulton Street, the older sister in the house next-door -- but my mother and father bought the house that I was born in, and all the rest of the children. It was a two-family house; but by the time of World War II, we took over the whole house so that there was plenty of room for everybody. We just had that one married sister; and, of course, she was at home while he was abroad.

JW: In the service?

MG: Yes.

JW: Do you remember how the neighborhoods began to change during the war?

MG: It didn't change too much. At least Fulton Street didn't. It was long after the war was over when some of the Irish people moved away and more Blacks came in. Being downtown, it was a very good place. You were near to everything. Many people did not have cars like they have now. Many families, they didn't have cars at all. They didn't even have telephones, many of them.

The neighborhood began to change. We had a barber. I can't remember what his name [was]. His last name was Taylor. Of course, we called him Barber Taylor. I can't think what his Christian name was, but I can remember he moved in. Then there was another family that moved next-door when a Portuguese family moved away. Then across the street from there, a Mr. Clifford Ellis and his wife moved into the four-family house. The people -- I think they were Irish or Italians in that house, I think they were Italians -- they moved away.

The street then became more Black than white. But that was after the war mostly when that happened.

JW: But Blacks did come to Bridgeport in droves during the war to work in defense?

MG: Yes, they did. They worked in defense.

JW: Did you get to know many Blacks that came up from

the South during this time?

MG: Yes, because I was still at the Messiah Baptist Church at that time. I did meet quite a few.

JW: Were you still on Fulton Street or did you and your husband move out of Fulton Street?

MG: We moved from Fulton Street when the older boy was four years old. He was going to be four years old the next week when we bought a home in Stratford.

JW: So you moved out to Stratford?

MG: That's right. [We] lived in the same house forty-one years in Stratford. [Laughs]

JW: [Laughs] But you did not go back to work during the period at all after your children were born?

MG: No. After Bill was born -- the first child -- my husband said, "Well, now, your job is starting. A homemaker."

JW: You had to stay home and take care of the children.

MG: That's right. It was very different from the way it is today. We women weren't looking for -- what do they call it, "finding yourself" or -- [Laughs] We found ourselves.

JW: [Laughs] Being independent and --

MG: When we said "I do" to the minister, you found yourself right then. The husband, if they could afford it -- there are always cases where the wife did have to go out and work -- but usually speaking, the wife stayed home and took care of the family.

JW: That's the old way of doing things.

MG: That's it, yes.

JW: Do you remember much about the social upheaval that went on during the sixties? Did you participate in it in any way or anything?

MG: We weren't too involved here in Bridgeport as I recall. At that time, I had become very interested in the Y.W.C.A., not as an employed person. It was at that time when the Phyllis Wheatley Branch was closed on the advice of the National Board. But I worked as a volunteer and worked myself up to being president of the Bridgeport Y.W.C.A.

Then I was elected to the National Board. I was on that board for eighteen years. Then, the American Baptist Convention began to take my time. The women's work in particular, first the Home Mission Society. I was on that board for five years [and] that took me across the country to meetings. Then you get discovered. The women then found me and I am still caught with the women.

JW: You are still involved. So the movement in the sixties did affect you, then.

MG: It really did.

JW: It really did affect you. You got involved in the women's rights movement, sort of.

The changes at the Y -- what did you feel about those changes that went on? With the changing of the Phyllis Wheatley, which was a segregated Y, and then they came together -- Did you you have

any particular feelings about that?

MG: No. I didn't have any particular feelings about it. As I look back on it now, I can see how it really changed the complexion of Bridgeport as far as social activities. The Y then took the place of some of the things that church was doing. Or the churches, because there was the Methodist Church and Episcopal and so forth.

Many of us at the time, we were glad to get rid of the segregated Y and go over on Golden Hill Street where the senior citizens are now. But there were very many who were unhappy and did not go. They loved it on Beach Street. It was a good building, but it was small. We were upstairs and the International Institute was downstairs. And you know what that organization is --

JW: Right.

MG: They are now on East Washington Avenue where they help get citizenship papers for foreigners when they come to the country and things like that.

JW: They were up under the Phyllis Wheatley Y. What did they do at that time?

MG: That's what they did at that time, because we had many foreigners coming to this country. At that time, the foreigners wanted to become full-fledged -- I would call it -- Americans. They wanted to learn the language, what we were doing, and that was what the International Institute was responsible

for doing. They had classes for them, Americanization classes.

We had one of our outstanding Black women who was involved in that. She was a widow with two girls. She was involved in that work about forty years, teaching English to the foreign people who had come to this country. It was very different from the way it is now. We did not have two languages or three languages or whatever to accommodate the foreign languages of the people, so they had to learn English. Today it's very different.

JW: Right. So that was sort of a government program that was subsidized by the government.

MG: It was, by the board of education.

JW: Were you involved in any way or knew anything about the poverty programs around, or anything like that?

MG: During that time?

JW: Yes, during the sixties.

MG: I don't know too much. I don't remember too much. I know we had them because the building where you would go to register your need was there at the corner of Madison Avenue, Washington Avenue, and Main Street -- which was called Bull's Head.

JW: Right.

MG: That was the building where they went and they could receive aid for rent; or if they still had -- and many of them did -- coal stoves or furnaces,

they could register and get coal delivered. Many times my father was hired to help the city in delivering coal to people who were in need.

It was quite a program done out of that building there, the Welfare Building, I think we called it.

JW: The Viet Nam conflict -- You were just telling me about the International Institute and how they've moved now over on Washington Street --

MG: East Washington Avenue.

JW: The Viet Nam conflict -- Did you or your family or any of your friends, were any of them involved in the Viet Nam war of any kind?

MG: No, none of the family was. There may have been some friends. By that time, I had changed my membership from the Messiah Baptist Church over to the First Baptist Church, where I am now, and had gotten involved in doing church work all over the country from Maine to California so that I didn't know the people personally. But I know from what I read in the paper or things that I would hear at a meeting about their involvement -- which was extensive.

JW: I'm going to close now, but I am going to ask you if there's anything that I did not ask you that you would like to add or that you think is important that you would like to say at this time.

JW: Thank you so much, Mrs. Gardiner, for allowing us to interview you. We will, as the Afro Educators, use this tape very wisely. Thank you for allowing us to put in --

End of Interview