

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

Dorothy Gertrude Allsop

176 Jackson Avenue, Bridgeport

Born: Jamaica, West Indies

Spouse: Marcus Allsop

Children: Marcia A. Rogers, Calvin Allsop

Education: College, Beauty School

Profession: Beautician, Real Estate Broker

Travel: Jamaica, West Indies, Bermuda

Church: Walters Memorial A. M. E. Zion

Organizations: National Association of Negro Business and
Professional Women's Clubs, Inc.
National Council of Negro Women
Girl Scouts of America
Council of Churches
Jack and Jill of America
Church Women United, President and Vice President
YWCA-Secretary
United Way-Eastern Connecticut
NAACP
Conference of Women's Organizations

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

Interview by: Gwendolyn Roberts Johnson

Interview with: Dorothy Brown Allsop

Date: December 28, 1983

JOHNSON: Mrs. Allsop, I understand that you were not born in Bridgeport. Can you tell me where you were born and when did you come to Bridgeport?

ALLSOP: I was born in Jamaica. At that time it was the British West Indies. Now it is the West Indies because it's an independent country. I came to Bridgeport in April of 1923.

GJ: How old were you when you came?

DA: I was six years old.

GJ: Where did you live in Bridgeport?

DA: I lived at 40 Gregory Street.

GJ: Where is that located?

DA: Gregory Street is in the south end of Bridgeport near Seaside Park. It runs off Broad Street.

GJ: Can you describe the neighborhood for me? What was the neighborhood like at the time that you moved there?

DA: The neighborhood was always quiet. It wasn't an elaborate neighborhood, but as a youngster growing up, we always took care of what we had. That sidewalk had to be swept every day. We would play in the backyard in the morning. In the afternoons we would clean up and come and play in the front. But everybody's front porch, veranda -- whatever they had -- sidewalk was always well taken care of.

GJ: Was it a mixed neighborhood?

DA: Yes, that is a mixed neighborhood. Gregory Street is right behind Walters Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church there. There were about three or four families that belonged to the church and the others in the neighborhood -- It was a Polish

[neighborhood]. There were quite a few Polish people right around in that vicinity.

GJ: Where did you go to school?

DA: I went to several schools in Bridgeport. First I went to Jefferson School which is still standing up there on Myrtle Avenue. It's going to be made into apartments or offices. It's under construction now. I went there for one year. Then I moved to Norwalk. I went to Norwalk for three or four years. Came back to Bridgeport, still on Gregory Street. Went back to Jefferson School. After Jefferson there was Prospect -- went to Prospect -- and after I left Prospect I went to Bassick the first year that Bassick was opened. I went there for the seventh and eighth grade, left there and went to Congress High School. We always called Congress the Bastille because it was such an old building [chuckle]. I went to Central High School which was across the street from the Bastille as we called it. Two of the four years of high school was half session because the enrollment was so large and the school, I guess, was so small, you'd say. So I went half time for my sophomore and senior years in high school.

GJ: What was the teacher-student relationship like?

DA: Teachers, students -- We suffered with our -- I think we were colored people then, then we became Negro. There was always that feeling where they looked down on us or felt sorry for us. We didn't really always have the opportunities that the whites had, the others had. There were even clubs that the school had that kept us out. If the announcement went around, we didn't get the announcement. The rest of the class would

get the announcement, or the teacher worked around it in such a manner that if they didn't want the Negro students, we never saw those announcements. We knew those classes were going on. We knew different clubs were going on, though, because the others would come and tell us about them, but we knew we couldn't join them because they never extended the invitations to us.

GJ: Was this during the whole time that you were in school?

DA: Most of this was when I went to Central. When I went to Bassick, I don't know if it was because it was a new school, but we had more opportunities. More things were extended to us.

GJ: You went to Bassick before you went to Central?

DA: Yes, Bassick was junior high, seventh and eighth grades. We could join all the clubs out there. No one prevented us from joining the various groups out there.

GJ: Did Blacks belong to any clubs at all?

DA: A few -- not the majority, just some -- because there was always that tension that you really had to push your way and you knew that in some groups you were in, that you were really not wanted. No one said anything, but the tension and feeling was always there.

GJ: What about student-student relationship?

DA: With some students it was very good; for others, not good at all. I was in high school during the Depression. Lots of rich children had to leave the private schools and come back to public schools. Some of those, now -- the rich children

that came back -- they were always very pleasant. Some of the poorer students were just not pleasant with us. I guess there was that feeling still of looking down on us as blacks.

GJ: There weren't that many Blacks I think you said to me before ...

DA: No, because when I graduated from high school, there were sixteen that graduated in my class. That was a high number for that graduation class.

GJ: Do you know what the whole enrollment was for the class?

DA: The enrollment was over six hundred. There were sixteen Blacks. As I said, we were Negroes at that time [laughter].

GJ: What were some of the things you did when you were not in school, some of your social activities -- after school, when you were not in school?

DA: There was always the Girl Scouting. We belonged to Girl Scouting. Hall Neighborhood House was located on Main Street.

GJ: It existed during this time?

DA: Yes. 815 Main Street. And we went there for Girl Scouting. We'd go to the YWCA which was over on Beach Street Phyllis Wheatley. We would take up different activities -- a little knitting, sewing, play games. We had little parties, dances, Maypole -- the Maypole Dance in May. We looked forward to that. We'd practice and winding of the Maypole was always one of the features. We belonged to mothers and daughters -- we had a mothers and daughters banquet each year around Mother's Day, and that was always great because our mothers went to the affair with us. Of course, church was always a big part --

I lived next door to the church. Every time there was a new club or organization that formed for young people I was right there. I could never sing, but I joined them for singing [laughter], every singing group they had. As I said, Hall Neighborhood. Some of the church members would take us aside in the summer to keep us occupied. Some of them would take us down to the beach that we would be protected while we were down swimming. One lady, Mrs. Lee Smith, was always showing us how to do tatting and crocheting. Never did learn how to tat, but I had lots of time practicing [chuckles]. That was a grandmother to -- I can't think. Jackie, do you know Jackie Williams, no? Jackie [unclear] Tracy, Tracy. How 'bout Traceman?

GJ: Well, I've heard the name.

DA: Tracy, I think, teaches over to U Conn. Not U Conn, Housatonic.

GJ: I've heard the name.

DA: Yes, yes. But she always gathered up a group and would take little trips. Might be just going to the museum that was on Main Street, but she'd gather up the neighborhood children to take. This I always remember is after our Christian Endeavor or the BYPU for some groups, our parents -- this is when we were teenagers -- each parent took a turn to prepare food for us. And all the group, all of us would go to this one person's house for a little party and eat. We looked forward to it. We enjoyed it. We didn't realize that our parents were keeping tabs on us [laughter], but we enjoyed it anyhow.

GJ: Who were some of your friends at that time?

DA: My friends. Well, I can't think of -- Edie and Ethel Lively.

Edie and Ethel Lively were twins but were never identical twins, but they were always very smart, very brilliant, very active, very outgoing. They lived on Garfield Avenue. I lived on Gregory Street, but they came down to church. Jeannette Bobby -- Jeannette Grant -- at one time we traveled around. Lillian, I went longer with Lillian Farrar Lillian, Edna, Gerry, Doris. After all, you got thrown in with the different groups. But Lillian was the one that was --

GJ: Lillian was the oldest sister.

DA: The oldest one, yes. Closer to my age. Most of my friends were right there from church. I came down to Walters Memorial to worship. There has to be some more [chuckle].

GJ: How did you celebrate holidays. Holidays, for example, Christmas. The same way with these --

DA: Oh, holidays. With these same people. We were always -- Oh, the Stewarts, I mustn't forget the Stewarts. That was a family down on Broad Street. There were twelve children in that family so there was always someone for whichever age you were [chuckle]. And I can think of

Different neighborhoods. And we would get together. We would plan parties at each others home. Like this week now, the week after Christmas, each night, each day or afternoon or early evening we would go to that person's house for a party. The YW would have parties. Churches would have parties. When I got into Girl Scouting we would go on hikes, different trips. Girl Scouting you always had to work for badges. You might be working towards a Homemaker Badge. Or star gazing. Or the

spring of the year when it was nice we were always going on hikes to learn the names of trees, flowers. We spent a lot of time. Fairchild's Memorial Park is, was in back of Beardsley Park. Route 25, I think, has taken that now. But those parks were not active or busy with pedestrians and people, so we would go up there to study star gazing, trees, flowers. Oh, it was a very pretty, empty park [chuckle]. But at that time I guess someone left it to the city and it had to stay there until the highways took it.

GJ: And there was always someone available to take you there, is that right?

DA: Well, the parents

GJ: Parents?

DA: The parents planned, yes. Our parents planned -- those that were not working would take a group of us. There was a good cooperation. Everyone worked nicely together. Our people worked hard. They worked all the time. But they always had time, not to just take her own child or children, but to kind of gather up two or three others from the neighborhood. Of course, if you didn't behave, that was it [laughter]. You didn't go the next time. And we had to always be on our best behavior. If the neighbor told our parents that we did something, even though it might not have been so, we were never just chastised. We were always chastised in front of that person. Our parents always appreciated the other parents taking care of us, because we had to always behave, we had to always respect the elderly, and that was always bad news if a parent came and told your parents that you insulted her,

talked back to her, or just something. [Chuckle.] You could beat up the kids, but you had to be very courteous to the older people.

GJ: What was courting like in those days?

DA: Well, courting I don't think has changed [laughter].

It was always the sneaking around and there's always someone that always has all the boyfriends. And then, there were always those that didn't care about studying, going to school. They were always going out to parties. We still had our parties and dances.

GJ: They were allowed to come to your house?

DA: Along when you were sixteen or seventeen [chuckle]. When you got older, got up in high school. Almost time for graduation from high school. And, of course, when I was coming up there, if a girl had a baby, you just couldn't socialize with that person.

GJ: Ostracized.

DA: Yes. I never thought it was a good idea because -- I didn't think it was a good idea then, and I don't think it's a good idea now.

GJ: To ostracize that person?

DA: To ostracize that person. And some of the girls just went downhill. There were always some that could leave town and probably come back. I do remember some of the youngsters I grew up with that just got worse. Their parents put them out. And they went out there and they had to make it on their own. And they did what they could. And they didn't help them.

GJ: Did you always go to the A.M.E. Zion Church?

DA: I always went to the A.M.E. Zion Church because I just lived right next door to the church. But when my people came to Bridgeport first -- my first aunt that came to Bridgeport was along there in 1911, 1913. We were always Episcopalians or the Church of England. But that aunt, when she came to Bridgeport, couldn't find a Black -- a group of colored people to worship with. It was always that they had service after the white Episcopal group got through. And I remember up there on Broad Street, I can remember her hustling about going to church, and after a while she just said well, she just wasn't going to take it. She wanted to go to church in the morning, and she wasn't going to wait to go to church at one o'clock. And then we got affiliated with the Walters Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, and I stayed there. Then Saint Mark's, when Saint Mark's became a mission -- it started out of this Episcopal Church from Broad Street. And then we moved to Wells Street, but by then we were well fixed and well established in Zion so we just stayed at Zion.

GJ: Can you remember some of the ministers who were there?

DA: Oh, the ministers. Yes, I remember this Reverend Weller because I always thought he was such a brilliant minister. And, in fact, one of his daughters got married to a Nigerian and moved to Africa. I saw her about twelve years ago; she had come back here to educate her children. I haven't seen her lately. One of her daughters is a doctor now, but I've been getting information that they'll be coming up to Milford to visit and so someone

is going to invite me up to see them, because I haven't seen them for a number of years. Reverend Hillard Jackson was the presiding elder. We had a Reverend [] Brown at one time, but he became a Bishop in our AME Zion connection. Reverend [] Black. Reverend -- oh, because our ministers change frequently in our connection. Oh, what's that minister. This other well educated man that we always thought a lot about. Can't think of his name [chuckle]. But lots of the men were very well educated; some were not as well educated. But Edith Coles that sings now, her father was our organist down at the Zion for a number of years. He read music; oftentimes he didn't need the instrument. We always had a beautiful choir, and he had a lovely voice. And Edith, you heard Edith Coles?

GJ: Yes, I heard Edith.

DA: Yes, Edith's voice is still very pretty. In fact, she sang last night at the --

GJ: The AME Zion Church has always been where it is now. Right? The same location.

DA: All right. The story on Walters Memorial AME Zion Church is that it came out of Bethel.

GJ: Did it?

DA: Bethel is on one side and Walters Memorial is on the other side, but evidently a group got mad with Bethel and formed its own group.

GJ: But Bethel is AME and that's CME, isn't it?

DA: No, I'm A.M.E. Zion. A.M.E. Zion. Yes. That's A.M.E. The story of A.M.E. and A.M.E. Zion that both of them probably got started at the same time. A.M.E. Zion in New York, A.M.E. in Philadelphia. But not realizing

that they were forming at the same time, we ended up with the two connections. The AME is African Methodist Episcopal like the United Methodist Episcopal. Now again, A.M.E. Zion was formed because we had to worship after services, and someone didn't like the idea. They started a church and the "A" is there for identification.

GJ: Was your family very much involved in church work?

DA: Yes, yes. Not the family as much [chuckle].

GJ: Well, you weren't in Bridgeport during the time of World War I, so I won't ask you about that.

DA: Not World War I. I wasn't here during World War I. [Laughter.]

GJ: That's what I said. You weren't here at that time so I am going to ask you about the Depression. What recollections do you have about the Depression?

DA: Oh, I wouldn't have known there was a Depression because we were always poorer than the poor people down the street [chuckle]. Of course, we knew about the crash of '29. I was going to Bassick. I was in the seventh grade and when we had world studies or current events, we knew about it. There has always been a lot of unemployment and the colored -- Negro groups -- had poor housing. The last to be hired and the first to be fired, so these things had come down through the ages. But I do remember that my people always worked. They were never on relief on the city. But I can see very vaguely now the people making their trip down to the bread lines to get their bread and milk. Sometimes it was prunes, potatoes. We were potato eaters. Lots of our neighbors didn't eat potatoes so they gave us their potatoes. Rice, we ate rice. Lots of the people

that didn't use rice to eat, they made whiskey [chuckle] out of the rice, because they were not brought up on rice. Prunes.

GJ: That was a part of your diet -- it was a West Indian diet, wasn't it?

DA: Rice. Yes. So we always had rice and potatoes. Macaroni and spaghetti were the things we had to learn to eat, I had to learn to eat.

GJ: Do you think that most people had enough to eat at that time, or were you aware of the fact that some people might not have been eating well?

DA: Yes, we were aware, because the people that had to go to get the -- Every day, every morning people had to go up to this bread line -- a designated place in the neighborhood -- to get the merchandise that they were going to give out that day. If you got rice and you didn't like rice, of course you were going hungry. Not hungry, but you wouldn't have as much. The people, some people, they couldn't eat what was in front of them. They wanted to eat what they were accustomed to. And then I have known families when we went visiting -- one of the children's home -- where the mother would do without, 'cause the father was the one that was working, and the children always, not always, but in some of the families I know, the children -- if there was just a small amount of food to be gotten -- the children got it. The mother went without.

GJ: What about employment for your family and for your friends?

DA: Yes. My people were always -- they were domestics, did

domestic work. And they worked. There wasn't always enough money. Then, again, this aunt of mine owned the house where we lived, and we didn't have the monthly rent to pay, but we had to pay taxes and had to keep the house up. So some of our responsibilities were not as heavy as some of the other families. Then some of the other families had larger families. There were more children in the family. See, there were just two of us, two of us, and we never did without. I was never brought up that we did without. We always had whatever was going. It might not have been the most expensive, but things were always very nice. Yes. We had always had good shoes [chuckle]. We always had good shoes, because those were the days when you could get shoes for a dollar ninety eight, but we would probably get two ninety eight shoes [chuckle], three ninety eight. But it was always a hassle to get the money to buy shoes for two ninety eight [chuckle].

GJ: Could you say as much for your friends. Did your friends have what you had?

DA: No, no. Some of my friends definitely didn't have what I had, no.

GJ: How was your frame of mind at that time? Were you aware of the fact that the Depression was on, or were you in a good frame of mind?

DA: Yes, because our parents kept us going. [Inaudible] taught us to be thankful for what we had. And they taught us not to be envious of what you couldn't get. We didn't, of course, think of ever going out to steal. I'm not saying everybody was like that. But at that time you were looked down on if you

went out to steal or if you stole anything. Even if you went into the store and things were right there, if they didn't belong to you, you were taught, you left them alone. In those days, we never had to bother locking our doors. The neighbors looked out for each other's homes. You could go away for weeks. When you came back, everything was just right in order. They might even sweep your sidewalk for you, put out your rubbish for you. But there was a togetherness -- there was a togetherness there when I was growing up. I miss that now.

GJ: Can you give an example of the people's ingenuity in trying to survive during this time?

DA: Yes. Like I know if my people got extra work like folks wanted someone for a day's work or just to do little jobs around, she would always spread it out. She'd call someone, or the word would get around that she would have a few day's work. In fact, folks thought she had an employment agency [chuckle], because she got more work than she could do. She worked out in Southport, Fairfield, Westport.

[end of side one]

She would take the bus. I remember one of the cars we had was an Overland, but you didn't drive it all winter.

GJ: You had a car at that time?

DA: Yes, we had a car, the Overland. I think we had two Overlands. I don't really even remember who did it, who made them, but I remember the name. But the cars didn't have heaters, and they

didn't have glass in the windows. So when you went out in the fall of the year, you always took your blanket to keep warm. When you got sub-zero or freezing weather, you couldn't drive the car. The car would freeze up, or you'd be so cold, so the car was in the garage for the whole winter until it started getting warm in the spring which was mostly around Eastertime before that car got out again [chuckle].

GJ: Can you tell me something about medical care?

DA: I know the doctors were there [chuckle]. We never had too much sickness, but we was always going to the doctor's. I don't know the kind of care they got.

GJ: Do you remember some of the doctors who were in Bridgeport at that time?

DA: I remember a Doctor Meckland, a Doctor Bradley, Doctor Alan Bradley.

GJ: I've heard about him.

DA: Oh, Doctor Bradley, yes. He always gave everybody a lollipop, and I often wondered why he didn't give me one. It turned out I had acne [chuckle], and I never got a lollipop. But he always ran around. He was a little short fellow, always had a big raccoon coat, big raccoon hat. And when he took that outfit off -- must've been sometimes in June -- we, the neighbors, used to say, "Well, Doctor Bradley has his fur coat off. We can start wearing our spring clothes." [Chuckle.] But he lived up there on Highland Avenue. He came when Highland Avenue was an exclusive -- Highland Avenue and Fulton Street were exclusive streets. If you had money, you lived there. Beardsley Street,

the Blacks that could make it, that had a little something moved over to the East Side on Beardsley Street. And I just couldn't wait, I just wanted to grow up to see if I could make enough to move over to Beardsley Street, but by the time I grew up, there was a big change.

GJ: To move from the South End to Beardsley?

DA: If they made it. You had to have a little money because they had very fashionable homes, beautiful gardens. These people had done domestic work and worked in the rich white people's homes. Therefore, they brought some of their mannerisms, the way of taking care of their homes with them. And the gardens, streets. Oh, Beardsley Street was so pretty. Beardsley Lane over on Newfield Avenue. All that section that's so broken down now was just so pretty and nice. And if one person moved in that didn't keep up her property, the others kind of fell in to help that person. But it wasn't the condition it's in now.

GJ: I've heard that Stratford Avenue was very nice.

DA: Stratford Avenue, yes. Mr. John Smith, not John Smith, John Stevens. John Smith was still living, but he lived on Iranistan Avenue. But John Stevens worked in the post office. We looked at him as being a man of means. Again, his father before him worked in the post office, and they lived quite well. I always heard the older people say that they probably had the first dollar they ever made [laughter], because they were always saving. But they always bought the very best. They looked very fashionable. And when they came out to our churches or came out to social affairs, you could always tell

that their clothing was of a better quality, more stylish than some others. They had the means to get better clothing.

GJ: I wanted to ask you one other thing. Did people have babies at home at that time or did they go to hospitals?

DA: Yes. Babies and funerals were at home. Those that had the babies at home had midwives, and then later everybody started going to the hospital. And about the same time that people took their funerals out of the home and went to the undertakers, too.

GJ: The funerals were at home? The bodies --

DA: The bodies, I don't mean the funerals, the bodies were at home. The bodies, yes. The funeral's probably at church. The remains.

GJ: Where were you during World War II?

DA: Oh, I was working during World War II [chuckle]. Oh, I was working in World War II, yes, because Mark went into the Army, was drafted. He was to get out the tenth of December.

GJ: You're speaking of your husband.

DA: Of my husband. And he was to get out the tenth of December. And Pearl Harbor was the seventh; therefore, he stayed four years longer [chuckle]. I was working, and I got married four years later [chuckle].

GJ: How did the war affect your family then? Was there food shortages?

DA: Oh, prosperous. Things became more prosperous. We could get more of the things we wanted, and people were working.

GJ: There was lots of work in Bridgeport at that time.

DA: There was lots of work. Lots of newcomers came in. Rents

were scarce to those coming in. But people could go on trips. They got money that they didn't have before. They bought clothing, they started buying houses.

GJ: Did you move to another neighborhood?

DA: I didn't move to a neighborhood until after I got married, and my husband thought he should provide a home for me. I moved from Gregory Street up here to Jackson Avenue.

GJ: Where you are now?

DA: Where I am now. This was a lot. This was a lot. It had a big hole in the middle. Nobody wanted to buy it because it had the big hole. But the minute Mark saw it, he thought that was good, because he wouldn't have to dig that hole out to build a house. We came to look at this lot on a Sunday. And the man that owned it, black man, he says "Yes, you can buy it, because I'm not doing anything with it. You can have it for four hundred dollars." So we say, "Oh, we'll let you know by Thursday." By the time we got back to him on Thursday, his lawyer had encouraged him to go up to six hundred dollars, to charge us six hundred and fifty dollars. We kind of got a little deduction and got it for six hundred dollars. That's this lot that the house is in. The other lot -- later years we wanted to sell this lot to the fellow that owned the other lot. We didn't realize he had owned all of them at one time. But that lot we had to pay twelve hundred dollars for. The lot that doesn't have a house now.

GJ: Think what it's worth today.

DA: Oh, yes. I think lots are running around eighteen, twenty, twenty five thousand, up there now.

GJ: More than that, I think.

DA: Yes? I haven't priced them lately.

GJ: Yes. It is much more than that.

Did many Blacks change their economic status during the war?

DA: Oh, yes, yes. This neighborhood, though is still classified -- I think it's still classified as a white neighborhood. There were two families here.

GJ: Where you are now?

DA: Yes.

GJ: You're saying this neighborhood where you are now?

DA: Yes it is. It's classified as white.

GJ: But did Blacks in Bridgeport change their economic status as a result of the war, because Bridgeport was a war town, a factory town.

DA: Oh, yes. Yes, it changed. And there were more people that got more education. The children could go off to college. The children were really able to have more things, of course, than their parents had with their cars, with the clothing. Even the larger families always were well dressed. Provisions were better for them as they came along during the war.

GJ: Do you think many people changed social status during that time?

DA: [Chuckle]. Yes, that's always there. There were always people aiming to get into a group that they wanted. And whatever it took to get there, they would try to work towards it. Some people were never accepted, but they worked hard at it. And some of the changes that came about were much better. I think people didn't look down on others as much. They accepted them more. If someone was working hard, she got accepted a little better. Course there were always the people they never wanted

to accept, but they always got there anyhow. And the social ladder [chuckle], some people liked to climb the social ladder and they got there.

GJ: What about changes in race relations? Changes during World War II, after World War II, during the period of World War II.

DA: Yes. There was, I don't really think that has gotten -- well, no, I think it got worse. 'Cause I don't know. I think it got worse, because I know I hear some of the younger people were talking about ... And there was just that feeling that these were newcomers into the city, and they had taken what the Black people should have. And there was always that little bitterness that things were easier for them, meaning the foreigners that had come in. But of course --

GJ: Easier for the foreigners than for the Blacks.

DA: Yes. Well, of course, first of all there was the white foreigners, and later then, it became the Black foreigners. Because when I was going to school, unless you remembered your geography, you didn't even know where Jamaica was. Some of the people here don't know where it is now [chuckle]. But the only Black foreigners that we ran into -- besides, some of the people from the West End were the Black Portuguese. They stayed to themselves. Before World War II, the population of Bridgeport was five hundred. Some of those people were Portuguese, some were Chilean --

GJ: Cape Verdians.

DA: Cape Verdians, yes. Cape Verdians.

GJ: After the war, would you say that living conditions changed generally for Blacks?

DA: Yes. Yes, because they could move into neighborhoods that they were not allowed to move into before.

GJ: Do you think work conditions changed? Did they get better jobs?

DA: Some of them were better. Some jobs paid better, but Blacks still had the menial jobs to do. People from the brass or the foundries still -- and some of those jobs affected their health. Like one time I remember people -- someone, they got twenty five dollars a week was making a lot of money. But they were still doing this hard, menial job in the brass. I remember the Bridgeport Brass, because later some of the people had that lung -- I guess it's that Black Lung condition from working with all that smoke, working with steel. There were a lot of steel plants here at one time. Bridgeport and Waterbury. It was definitely an industrial city. But they made more money; therefore, they felt they could get the things they wanted, more things they wanted.

GJ: We're going to talk a little bit about the sixties. Were you aware of the social upheaval during the sixties or any social upheaval?

DA: Oh, yes. I always knew that, because my people were from Jamaica, the West Indies, and this is something they always talked about. They always talked about the Black people, Negroes, colored people that were in the professionals or And, even when I went to school, I knew I didn't get the same training that the whites got. But the teachers were subtle, the way they did it. If a new book came in -- like the beginning of the year -- we knew we didn't get the new

books. Some of the white kids got the new books, and we probably got a book, but it didn't look as well. If you ran out of papers or whatnot, we were the ones that did without. And when we left, like when I left Jefferson School -- when I got to high school, I knew I didn't have the same training that some of the students had that had come from the North End or those that had been to the parochial school.

GJ: You felt that the teaching was inferior?

DA: The teaching.

GJ: In your neighborhood.

DA: Yes, the schools that I came from, because, see, I was always in a Black neighborhood. It was always a Black neighborhood. We had black neighborhoods; now, see, in Bridgeport, everybody's scattered. But, at one time, if you wanted to find Black people, you'd go down the South End. And, of course, as they elevated -- over the East Side, and up on Lexington Avenue. There were definitely sections where there were more Black people.

GJ: Did Bridgeporters participate in the demonstrations in the sixties? Do you know of any participation?

DA:

were these folks up here [chuckle]. No, somehow the other, it was always the people that came from out of town. The people up here -- the people that were born and brought up here always thought they had so much that they didn't have to do anything for themselves. And it was very discouraging how they looked down on the newcomers that wanted to do

something -- the newcomers that thought Bridgeport was a disappointment to them, because it didn't offer conditions better than what they had been accustomed to at home. And the people were always boasting and bragging about what the Northerners -- meaning the Northern Blacks -- and lots of the Northern Blacks didn't have as much as they should have, because they had better conditions. They could work. Some could live in better housings. Things were better all around, but the people didn't make the best of that, their opportunities.

GJ: Do you think the civil rights movement had any effect on neighborhoods. Did any neighborhoods change as a result of civil rights movements, demonstrations.

DA: Yes, I think -- It was the younger people that did it though. The older people always wanted to keep out of trouble, stay away from trouble. Some of the younger people could see that these changes needed to be made.

GJ: Do you know of any facilities that were desegregated during this time?

DA: That was desegregated?

GJ: Desegregated, yes.

DA: When you said desegregated, I'm thinking of the term in earlier days when we couldn't even go in certain stores. We couldn't sit upstairs -- we couldn't sit downstairs in certain shows, shows in Bridgeport. I remember there were stores we couldn't go in to buy hats because they figured --

GJ: You'd try them on.

DA: We couldn't try them on. If we tried them on, we'd mess them up. Our hotels -- we often said the Stratfield Hotel was

always a large place, but the only way colored people could get in was to go in the back way. And they didn't even hire Black people to do domestic work there, because, see, Bridgeport is one of the places, too, that you have whites doing domestic work. They tell me, like some places in the South, you don't see whites doing some of the work they do up here. There were stories -- let's see. There were even housing -- apartment houses. Of course, they might just take one in and say it was desegregated, but at least that one got in in a few of these apartments. You just didn't feel before like you could apply at some of these places and not be turned down because of your color. I could see lots of changes that were made after the sixties. And one of the things I always felt about is that the people up here were not really as serious as they should have been in helping with the movement. We never deprived ourselves of anything. Even when Ella Anderson was out their picketing with the NAACP, there were people that thought it was just so disgraceful that she should get out there. They didn't mind donating a few dollars to help the movement, but they really never knew what it was -- what the people in the South had to go through. My friend Edith -- she's now Edith Ross -- that's in the plant, she was one of those that moved into a strictly white neighborhood. And, oftentimes, she'd say they couldn't even sleep at nights, because they didn't know what the people were going to do to them. See, they had to go through these sleepless nights. They probably had lots to do, lots to eat. They probably could buy all the furnishings and whatnot. But there was still that

discontentment that they were going to work with civil rights.

And that's one of the things they had to do without.

GJ: What about government programs and poverty programs? Were there many programs in Bridgeport?

DA: No, and I think we still need more now. They were never broken

Like we had one police, Bill Piper, as the Black policeman. And we figured there'd be more, but of course, it was a long time before they even got the second. We had Buddy Clark that was a fireman. It was a long time before we got another fireman. We're still trying to get a Black mayor, and of course, we need Blacks in City Hall. More Blacks are needed in City Hall. More Blacks are needed. When Robert Thompson got to be the assistant superintendent over to Harding --

GJ: You mean assistant principal.

DA: Assistant principal, I mean. That helped. But then it was a long time before they got another assistant principal.

Bridgeport, I think, is just way below.

GJ: But I was asking, do you think poverty programs, government programs -- were there many of them here in Bridgeport as a result of the civil rights movement? Poverty programs, government works in the sixties --

DA: In the sixties? Yes. Government programs, anti-poverty -- our system was anti-poverty in Bridgeport. It did help, yes. I know people that are still so proud to say that they worked in anti-poverty, Charlie Tisdale. They got jobs. They dressed differently. They could go to work dressed up, and, of course, they would get their hair done [chuckle], attend the beauty parlor more frequently because they had more money

and they wanted to look presentable and nice because they'd gotten new jobs. Yes, I think on a whole the programs helped -- helped some people. I don't think it really helped some younger people, because they're still looking for a handout, and I think that part is poor. It helped their parents, and the children are still looking for a handout. They don't want to work. They don't want to work. They don't want to go to school.

GJ: How did the Vietnam conflict affect you and your family?

DA: Oh, I couldn't say too much about that because it was another war, and I didn't have anybody that went into the service. I was conscious of the fact that the fighting was going on, but I wouldn't say there would be -- there wasn't a difference in the feeling.

GJ: Now, I'm about to close this interview, and I want to know if there's anything that I have not asked about that you think is important and would like to tell me.

DA: I know there should be some things. There should be more people [chuckle] in government, in all things. I would like to see more of our people seeing the people up here. I always felt they had such great opportunities and advantages. I think some of those families never did achieve. They should have achieved. They should have accomplished. They should have been building for the future. They should have looked out for the younger generation. They should have made plans for the future. They didn't make good plans for the future. Our Black churches are always there. And without the Black churches I think we would really have suffered more. New England -- right through New England, you have to kind of stick with

the Black churches. But, again, the achievement -- they still should have achieved and should have gotten more, should have done more, should have been better established. Our Black churches should have helped us to be better established by getting some training that we needed. The training that we need we should have been able to get through some of our churches, which we didn't, which we hadn't done. I'm not saying anything against the churches, because they have served their needs good and well. But I'm just saying that it could have been more -- more could have been done. More people could have been, as we said, worked in Civil Rights. More people could have made an extra effort to get out there to see that there was better representation. I don't feel our representation in Bridgeport is --

GJ: Government, you mean?

DA: Government, yes. In government. I don't feel our representation in government has been lifted that much. We need a ...

We have

Neighbors who really help each other.

We have nice facilities, too. Some of our facilities in Bridgeport -- some people don't even know we have this museum in Bridgeport. We have a beautiful zoo in Beardsley Park. I don't think some of our children have ever been taken there by their parents, maybe through schools.

GJ: Do you think parents need to also be more aware of what's available?

DA: Well, yes. They could use some of it. Make good use of it. Instruct our children of some of these availabilities.

End of Interview