

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

Ella L. Anderson

1795 Elm Street, Stratford, CT

Born: July 7, 1914 - Petersburg, Virginia to
Wilson and Mary Tabb

Children: Rayfield Anderson, Mary C. Yates

Education: A. B., B. S., M. S., C. A. S.

Profession: Teacher (City of Bridgeport)

Travel: Europe, Bermuda, The Bahamas

Church: Messiah Baptist

Organizations: Les Trieze Business and Professional
Fairfield County Chapter - Girlfriends
NAACP

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

Interview with: Mrs. Ella L. Anderson
Interview by: Denise L. Foster-Bey
Date: April 24, 1984

DFB: Mrs. Anderson, can you tell us a little bit about your early childhood, where you were born, and your birthdate. The story of your birthdate was interesting.

EA: I was born in Petersburg, Virginia, really of a family of five of us, but my grandmother delivered all of us. And she happened to have gotten our birthdates mixed up. She has my brother, my sister and myself all the same age, and I was definitely born July 4, 1917 in Petersburg, Virginia.

DFB: And she has you down as being born?

EA: July 7, 1914, and that is the way that it was recorded in the U.S. Census.

DFB: So you get an extra three years.

EA: Right.

DFB: [Laughs] Good. Can you tell me a little bit about what life was like growing up in Virginia?

EA: Well, I had a beautiful life, I think, in West Virginia. I was lucky enough, after my mother and father died, to become a part of a household of an aunt of mine who was really just like a mother, and they sent me to school. That's where I got my education in West Virginia where they lived, and they were really just like parents. I really didn't even know I didn't have a mother or father because of the way that I was reared. It was a beautiful life as far as how we were reared in that kind of way. At the time I was in West Virginia we didn't have many things like we thought we would have in some other country or some other city. My aunt, of course, never knew what prejudice was as far as she knew, but there was such a thing as prejudice. But she didn't know it. I recognized it as a youngster, and I recognized it one Sunday morning when she

became ill, and she asked me to take her to a little town not too far from us at a place called Oak Hill, West Virginia. And I took her there to the drugstore to get some medicine, and she was so sick she couldn't stand. So I asked her to sit, and the minute she sat in the chair, the manager said, "Oh, you can't sit there!" You know, Black people couldn't sit down. And this stuck with me over a period of years.

DFB: Was the community where your aunt lived an all Black community?

EA: We lived in a little town called Greentown. That's what they called it, a little out of town from the city of Oak Hill. All white people lived in Oak Hill, but we lived in a little town called Greentown. And of course, we commuted back and forwards or we walked back and forwards to Oak Hill to do whatever kind of shopping that we had to do.

DFB: And where did you go to school?

EA: I went to school in a place called Whipple, West Virginia. That's where I went to elementary school, Whipple, West Virginia, and that was when they closed the school in Greentown where we lived, but we did have a school there and I went there in kindergarten and first grade. And the reason why I went to the other town was because they closed this particular school down.

DFB: And these were all Black schools?

EA: All Black schools. We had nothing but Black schools in West Virginia that Black children could attend. You know, the white kids went to the white schools and Black kids went to the Black schools. This is the way it was at that time.

DFB: Now you went to college also in West Virginia.

EA: Yes, but in between college -- you see, I did not go to high school in West Virginia so to speak. It was West Virginia, but

it was Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. I did not go to the public elementary schools in West Virginia. I was sent to a high school. And of course, Harper's Ferry is just outside of Washington, D.C. It's closed now, but that's where I got my high school education at Harper's Ferry, and then after I finished Harper's Ferry, I went to West Virginia State College.

[Interruption]

As I was saying I went to Astoria College, Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, and that is now an historical place.

DFB: The college or --?

EA: It was a college, but they also had high school.

DFB: I see. And Harper's Ferry is, what is it, John Brown?

EA: Where John Brown's fort is located, and of course, right now it's an historical park. It was one of the very best schools at the time that we had, because I remember when I went to West Virginia State, they thought I was a pretty smart kid because we had to have an average of seventy-five before we could pass at Astoria College. You know, you have to make seventy-five; that's passing.

DFB: Seventy-five all the time.

EA: Right. I wish we could have that now. [Laughter] Right. Right.

DFB: What was it like going to an all Black school?

DFB: I thought it was fantastic. We learned. I have never regretted one day of having gone to a Black school, because we were able to become presidents of our class, you know. We were able to do so many different things that you don't even get exposed to when you go to a white school. And I haven't missed a thing. And another thing that I really enjoyed doing was the fact that we were taught Black history, and it was part of our curriculum.

DFB: It was just a natural --

EA: It was a natural thing for us to talk about Black history. It wasn't a big issue. It was part of our curriculum.

DFB: Mrs. Anderson, after college you said that you taught fifteen years in West Virginia.

EA: Yes, I did.

DFB: At a Black school? Elementary school? High School?

EA: Yes, I did. The first year when I finished college I substituted. I substituted in high school, and that was one year. The second year, and at that time jobs were hard to get, I was out of school I got a job teaching at a little elementary school so far down under the mountain that you had to go down on one of these sliding [Laughs] -- I don't know what they call them now. You get on it and they let you down the hill.

DFB: Oh, like a lift.

EA: Right. They'd let you down that hill, and when you get to the bottom of the hill, you get off and this is flat land down here. So that was the first school where I taught, and it was sitting right on a riverbank. And in the morning if it were so that we went down on the train, I would get off at the train and we had to go across a swinging bridge. And this is when I would almost go berserk -- across a swinging bridge and about six inches worth of space and the river down and the bridge swinging.

DFB: That's some dedication.

EA: So I was there one year, and the superintendent of schools claimed that I did such a terrific job with the kids, he decided to move me to another school which was one of the best schools

that we had. It was a four room elementary. The one I was teaching in was a one room, and I had a class of sixty children.

DFB: Wow! In one room.

EA: And I taught every subject from K through eighth grade. And every one of them learned how to read. That's a fact. And then of course, when I was moved to the so-called better school, there were four rooms. And I had one subject there and I had one grade. I had fourth grade. It was a good set up that we had there, and we had a hot lunch program, and we had a lot of good things going for the kids. We were able to give affairs where we could get whatever we needed for our school. You know, at that time they didn't have anything in the classroom for you. They would say, "Here is your school; this is your room. You can do anything that's legal to get anything in this room that you need." So on Friday nights we would always give a dance concert. We called it a jitterbug contest, and we'd raise money and buy books for the school, any kind of mimeographing materials that we'd need. We'd buy just any kind of supplies that we'd need. And we did that every Friday night. And I would put on what you call talent shows, and we raised money at them.

DFB: Now you started teaching during the Depression or just before?

EA: I taught during the Depression. I taught at a time when people were in bread lines and children didn't have shoes to put on their feet. And I have taken much of my salary many times and bought my children shoes to put on their feet.

DFB: What was the salary like then?

EA: The first year I taught I got a hundred dollars a month, and the next year I taught I got a hundred and ten dollars a month. And the last year I taught I got three hundred and seventy-five

dollars a month. That was over a span of fifteen years, but we bought everything we needed with that hundred and ten dollars. We had cars just like we have now. We bought anything we wanted. We called ourselves dressing well. We did everything for that hundred and ten dollars. And we still had some money out of the hundred and ten that we could put in the bank and save a few pennies.

DFB: How did the Black community in West Virginia fare during the Depression?

EA: I think they did very well, because first of all they had land. They could grow crops, and a lot of them canned their food. They preserved. I really didn't see much of a bread line. Really what we saw at the time were people who lived in the area where they had coal, in the coal fields as we call them, where people didn't own their homes. You see, everybody in West Virginia tried to own a home except those who work in the mines. And of course, they live in the mining houses. And when they are not working, of course, they are not, you know, making any money. The company's making all the money, but we did have some tough times with kids at the time. But one thing about it, the kids couldn't afford -- now, they do now furnish materials, furnish books and things. But at that time the children had to buy their own books.

DFB: Right.

EA: They bought their own sets of books, and the school furnished nothing. Everything they had to buy.

DFB: To buy themselves.

Yes. So if they didn't have any money --

EA: Exactly. It was difficult.

DFB: Did any of your family -- you said you were born in 1914 and that was during World War I -- participate in World War I?

EA: I would say a brother, not a blood kin brother. I had cousins, but not too many close relatives did I have to be in the war at that time.

DFB: Do you remember any stories or impressions that they might have mentioned about their experience in World War I?

EA: No, I can't remember one thing. Maybe I was too young.

DFB: Too young, yes.

EA: [Laughs] This is what I go by. I was probably too young.

DFB: So the Depression was really when you were really aware of things that were going on because you were part of it.

EA: Exactly.

DFB: How about World War II? Where were you in World War II?

EA: In World War II I was in West Virginia. I was still teaching in West Virginia. Well, I got married during World War II. I got married back in 1943, and I was teaching in West Virginia at the time.

DFB: How did World War II change living conditions and things in West Virginia? Or for you personally?

EA: Well, for me personally, things were about the same. I was still teaching. The only thing that I noticed particularly that I was able to help many of the people who were in the coal mining fields. I was able to help them to do a lot of things. They used to cry because we had rationing of sugar. They couldn't find their stockings; they couldn't find food; they couldn't find their pork, because all of this was sent overseas.

They couldn't get many of the types of food that they would enjoy, but we would try to encourage and help them as much as we possibly could. But what I did really during the war was to work in a defense plant.

DFB: Oh, you did, as well as teaching?

EA: Between times of teaching I worked in a defense plant up in Elkton, Maryland, and we gauged the shells, long shells; they must have been six or eight inches long. And that was my job I was gauging those to see if they'd fit perfectly into the gun that was being shot overseas.

DFB: Did you notice migration from West Virginia or migrations starting, people leaving West Virginia and going north?

EA: Yes they did. They went where they could find a job. Many of them went to Elkton, Maryland. Many of them went to other places where there were defense plants. Of course, you could just see that, and then of course, a lot of them who wanted to be there working in the mines. The jobs there became more important then. In fact there were more jobs. The mines began to open up.

DFB: Coal mines and things.

EA: Yes, and work. They made excellent money working in the coal mines. So the people who had been there and received the salaries and all that they were getting weren't too anxious to leave. So they stayed.

DFB: Were they recruiters coming down?

EA: Not too many.

DFB: So when did you come to Bridgeport?

EA: I came to Bridgeport in 1952. After I married, my family and I were talking about our children. If we had children and we

felt that the schools and the educational facilities and all would be better if we were to move some place else. And many of us who were in school were told many times that the east offered quite a bit, and so we said, "Let's go up and visit." So we came up and we visited. We spent the summer. Oh, we were here quite a while. And we stayed downtown at the Stratfield Motor Inn. And from all indications that we had when we came here we thought that Bridgeport was the ideal place. Our visit showed no prejudice, nothing. It was just simply beautiful. So we went back home and we came here to this very house, and talking to some people downtown at the Stratfield Motor Inn, we said, "Gee whiz, we would love to move to this area." So we had Mr. Robert Turner who was a mortician here and lived on Stratford Avenue show us around in Bridgeport. And he brought us to this house and showed us the outside. He said, "There's a house for sale." And we looked at this house, and when we went back to the hotel the man who owned the house was at the hotel. And he said he would bring us out here and show us this house, and he did.

DFB: Was this a white man?

EA: White man, yes.

DFB: And he had no problems with a Black family moving into his house?

EA: No. Well, I think really what happened, and he admitted that the neighbors might not be too friendly because they weren't too particular about Blacks moving in. And we knew that. When we moved in this house -- we did not know at the time, I did not know until ten years later that some people down the street from me carried the petition around to keep us out of

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the house. And I was sitting in the yard one afternoon and one of my other neighbors said to me, "Ella, see the lady going down the street; she is famous for carrying petitions." And she came to my yard and said they wanted to put a playground on the end of the street over on the other side for children. Well, the only people in the neighborhood who had children were only about five or six of us. So we wanted it. It would be fine for our children. This lady didn't have children, and so we said to her, "We're not going to sign the petition when we have children. We want the children to have a playground." So then my other neighbor said, "Ella, don't sign the petition because she's the one who brought the petition around here ten years ago to keep you people out." [Laughs] And we thought it was that was something else.

DFB: She could turn to you for help another time, right?

EA: [Laughs] That's right. Yes, it shows you how things happen. Of course, when we were here the Welcome Wagon was supposed to come around and invite us into the community. I didn't know that until I went to the bank downtown here. And I walked in one day and the lady said, "Did the Welcome Wagon come to your house?" And I said, "Welcome Wagon, no, I haven't seen the Welcome Wagon." She said, "Well, the lady was supposed to come to your house." I said, "I haven't heard a thing about it." And we haven't heard a thing about Welcome Wagon yet. And that's been thirty years ago over.

DFB: Right. You're going to welcome some people.

EA: Yes. Right.

DFB: How did you find the school system in Stratford for your son at that time?

EA: Well, my son never had a problem. He never had a problem.

I never had a problem with him in school. Everything was just grand. I never had a problem with my neighbors. I never had a problem with my son not getting along with the other children. He always made friends. In fact he is the one, my son is the one, who made it possible for my neighbors and myself to become closer, because he went in every home and learned every name and said, "I want my mother to meet you; I like you." This is what my son would say, and he was only two years old.

DFB: Children have a way.

EA: Yes. Right. And he traveled from one house to the other, over here, there and there. And at the time there was a house there for the sick people -- I forget what they called it. Anyway there was a house over there, and he was a little boy and he would go over there and talk to those sick patients every morning, those old ladies. He was a little boy. And those old ladies wouldn't even eat their breakfast in the morning until this little boy would come over and tell them, "Now let's eat breakfast; it's time to eat breakfast."

DFB:

EA: Christopher Raphael -- really he was a terrific kid. And the same way over here. He'd sit in the window and he'd watch over there. He would call -- this is my "Uncle George." Mother, I want you to meet my Uncle George." Oh, he was terrific.

DFB: Yes.

EA: So children can really do a lot.

DFB: They can make it, yes. When you moved to Stratford was there a large Black community in the south end as there is today?

EA: No. When I first moved to Stratford, there were not too many Black people. They just started moving in. In fact I remember when I first came to Bridgeport, even to Bridgeport, I would go downtown and I would be downtown sometimes all day long, and I didn't see two Black people. I would go to town every day just to be going because I was lonesome. My husband was working, and I'd just go downtown to look around. Sometimes I didn't see a Black person all day long. So that shows you how many are here now.

DFB: Right. When you moved to Bridgeport you didn't immediately start working?

EA: I didn't work in Bridgeport. I was here for about fifteen years before I --

DFB: Before you started teaching.

EA: Right.

DFB: And you were just at home?

EA: I was just at home all that time, working with community groups. I worked with every community group you can mention. I worked with everything. I worked with Red Cross, Cancer -- everything. I'd go house to house knocking on doors, ringing for money for cancer, for Red Cross, for Muscular -- everything, everything. So I have worked with everything that I can think of, and I belonged to so many different groups that I worked with, I actively worked with. I worked with the Council of Churches for about ten or twelve years, and I worked up to be the first vice president, and we didn't have too many Black people in that at the time. So I worked with everything, and then of course, I found the time to be on some boards. I was appointed by Governor [John] Dempsey to serve on the state Scholarship

Commission and the Board of Community Colleges, and I served there for a quite a while on the Scholarship Commission and on the Community College [Board]. And I'd commute over to Hartford all the time to do that.

DFB: To do that work. Right.

EA: So that's the way I spent my time. And then of course, I became president of N.A.A.C.P. And before I became president of N.A.A.C.P. I worked with Reverend William O. Johnson. I worked with him on the Freedom Fund of N.A.A.C.P. He was president at the time, and then I became president after he went out. And I served there for six years, and I served as the state congress president for a couple of years.

DFB: Now, during the sixties, the entire United States was in an upheaval. The Civil Rights Movement was really in full swing. How was Bridgeport during that time? How involved were people in Bridgeport in Civil Rights activities here in the city and in the world and nationally?

EA: I'll tell you about Bridgeport. Nationally everybody had it together, but Bridgeport didn't have it together. I remember when we first had a demonstration in Bridgeport because of conditions. People said everything. It was hard to even get Black people to join you, to march around city hall. People were very complacent. Those of us who wanted to do something they would tell us we were too militant. Bridgeport was conservative. They wanted you not to talk too loudly. They wanted you to play down the issues. This is a fact, and what had happened, I think, in the past is that everybody -- the people who lived here -- just didn't realize that there was a problem in Bridgeport. But they had problems. They didn't

realize that they had problems in Bridgeport. They always said, "We didn't have any problems until the Southerners came here." But they had problems, but they didn't recognize them. We can recognize our problems wherever we go. In the south we recognized problems. Nobody has to say to you, "We have a problem, because we know it." I found out when we moved here and you couldn't buy a house where you wanted to buy it. Right off the bat. That was thirty some years ago, and yet they were saying to us, "Oh, honey, you can buy any place you please." But it was not true. You could not buy a house where you pleased. You could not get a job where you wanted to work. You could not do many things in Bridgeport that people who lived here thought that they could do, and I think that Southern people who came into Bridgeport made it very clear that many things were denied people who lived here. And I think that later on they found this out, because a good example is in, I hate to even mention this, was in the idea when Geraldine Johnson -- even later on, all the years down -- wanted to run for the Superintendent's job in Bridgeport and how they did this. You see what I'm saying. Geraldine Johnson was the person who was qualified for that, but look what happened. It was either she was a woman or she was Black. And I think it was both.

DFB: She had a double whammy.

EA: Yes. So that's a good example years later.

DFB: Right.

EA: John Lancaster's another one. John Lancaster was a lawyer.

They kept saying he could not become a lawyer, because he couldn't pass the bar. All the rest of the dummies passed the bar. Excuse me for saying that, but they all passed the bar.

They didn't have any problem, but John Lancaster was kept back. This is a good example of what happened, and you can just go right on down the line and see that it was really racial discrimination.

DFB: When you got to Bridgeport -- now some of the other interviews that we've done, people spoke about not being able to eat in certain places in Bridgeport. Many of the women could only get jobs from the department stores running the elevator. Was this still so when you were --

[end of side one]

EA: We were never denied, in fact, we never ran into the situation where we were turned down as to where you were going to eat, and we ate a lot of places. That never came to us, but we did hear people say when they went to the bars, that sometimes they would take their glass and throw it out, break it while you were there so you could see it, but we never ran into this kind of thing. And we went out quite a bit to eat.

DFB: Right, because you were staying in a hotel.

EA: That's right. Now as far as the jobs were concerned we had problems; even in N.A.A.C.P. people were coming and saying they were denied a job at AVCO. They were denied a job out here at Lycoming or wherever the places are. And they were turned down at Metropolitan Insurance Company, and these are just the facts. But you see what happened is they didn't have an organization at the time that would follow through with their problems, and they didn't feel that they could do it themselves, because even at the time a person could go and ask for a job and if they say they don't have it, then, they don't have it. You do nothing about it, but then the

N.A.A.C.P. came along and we started saying it's something wrong with this and I think we should do something about it. And then this is what we started to do; we started to do something about it. People were satisfied when they told them, "This house is not for sale," when a Black person showed up. Well, we didn't take that. O.K., we'd send a white person and they'd tell the white person it's for sale. So then we'd send a Black person and they'd tell them it's not for sale; it's been sold. So we kept following this through, and this is the kind of thing that they did with jobs and housing and every other thing.

DFB: While you were president of the N.A.A.C.P., how did you find working with the local politicians? Were they difficult to work with?

EA: No, they weren't. The local politicians really didn't know what we were going to do. They were looking really for a vote. The local politicians always wanted to be on the side that they thought would be right, you know. A good example is Mayor Tedesco. At the time when I was president of N.A.A.C.P., Mayor Tedesco did everything he could possibly do to please N.A.A.C.P. because he felt that this group was a group that wanted to get something done, and he wanted us to press it because politicians can't afford to stick their necks out too far. So they need someone behind them pushing, and he enjoyed the N.A.A.C.P. because this is what we did.

DFB: So you feel that he was sincere?

EA: I really feel that he was sincere. I really feel that Tedesco was sincere, because many times he came to our rescue. And when we talked about the housing over on Hall Neighborhood.

area, Mayor Tedesco called and said -- it was an eighteen building apartment and we had been fussing and fuming about that -- it belonged to a corporation and they will either have to fix it up or they are going to have it torn down. But before they could have it torn down, it was burned down. I would say another person who was a supportive kind of person, supportive, was Mayor Curran. He tried his best to do whatever he could do, whatever we were asking for and they thought we were right. The first thing that got me though, is the fact that we fought against the Blackface minstrel show. That was the first issue that we really got on, was the Blackface minstrel show. A church group was putting it on. They had made all their plans involved, and we had a meeting here on a Sunday afternoon and we said we were going to the Press, and we did. Bob Thompson, John Lancaster and all of us got together and we fought that Blackface minstrel show. Frank Corbitt had the Interview Council at the time, and we finally outlawed that Blackface minstrel [show]. I don't think anyone else has tried to have a Blackface minstrel in Bridgeport. And also, we were on the Maids Incorporated at the time. That was an employment agency who recruited all these girls from down south and brought them up here in the hot summertime with their winter coats on and dragging their trunks through the street because they didn't know what kind of weather we had up here. They thought it was cold. And they put these girls in the homes, and many of the homes paying thirty-five dollars a week, twenty-five to thirty-five dollars a week. And we fought that. We felt it was wrong, and it was wrong. Those were two things that we started. Then at U.P.S. out here, United

Parcel Service, they didn't hire Blacks either. They were discriminating against Blacks, and we demonstrated out there I mean for about two weeks every afternoon, until finally they gave us a job.

DFB: Wow! This was in the 1960's?

EA: That's right. That's right. Against that U.P.S. right out there, and later on, years later, not during that year, but even after I started teaching and my son was then in high school, and even in later years they hired him as a big boss out there, you see. But it wasn't because I was demonstrating; I wasn't president then, but it opened up the way. The youth group did this, the youngsters in Bridgeport did, but these were just a few things, and then we did some nice things, too. We gave five debutante presentations for kids in Bridgeport.

DFB: This was the N.A.A.C.P.?

EA: The N.A.A.C.P. We gave five debutante presentations with girls and boys who were never exposed to getting out in front of the public, and we put on some lovely affairs, and the money that we raised from it we gave scholarships to those kids to go to school. That's what we did. Then the Shakespeare Theater opened over here, and we had what you call a Fall Festival. And we put on several of those to raise money for scholarships for kids. We've done some fine things for scholarships which people just don't know about, but we did.

DFB: If you were to think back in the time that you were president of N.A.A.C.P. and as a member of the N.A.A.C.P., what do you think might have been the greatest thing that the organization and yourself helped to accomplish?

EA: I would say that the greatest thing that we helped to accomplish

was to tell Black people to stand up for what they know that's right and not to be afraid. You know, they used to be afraid to speak out, but I think that's the grandest thing and the greatest thing that we've ever done. We gave them some pride in themselves. We let them speak out, help themselves help solve those problems. I think that in doing that we gave them some kind of feeling that, "I can help myself. I can speak for myself." And you can tell even right now in the community how some people speak out and speak out. They're not afraid anymore, and I think that the whole Movement of the Civil Rights, the whole era of it, gave Black people that pride, all over the country. And I think that one thing about being N.A.A.C.P. is you know that whatever one says, everybody says all across the country. If I say it's discrimination in housing, discrimination in employment, every chapter across the country is saying the same thing. So we say this, every chapter of the N.A.A.C.P. has tried to instill in Black people a sense of pride, a sense of saying, "I'm somebody, and I'm going to speak up for my rights." And I think that this is

because we did now. In Bridgeport we had Black people who were afraid to be seen with us marching around city hall, but now they are proud. They used to ask, "When are we going to march again?" [Laughter] Used to it!

DFB: Yes. Mrs. Anderson, when you decided to go back to teaching, how difficult was it to get a job in Bridgeport?

EA: Well, I'm telling you that I got a job in Bridgeport. It was the easiest thing I have ever had in my life. I got on the telephone and I called the Superintendent of Schools, and I said, "This is my last year that I will be president of

N.A.A.C.P. and I would like to get a job working with kids in Bridgeport, and I want to go back teaching." The superintendent said to me, "Well, Mrs. Anderson, I will put an application in the mail to you tomorrow." Within the next two days I got that application. I filled it out and I sent it back in. I got a telephone call from the Superintendent of Schools saying to me, "Mrs. Anderson, we are going to consider you, and come down for an interview." Well, a date was set up for an interview. I went for that interview and in a few days I received a contract in the mail.

DFB: My goodness!

EA: Just like that. And also in addition to that, the superintendent said to me, "Mrs. Anderson, if you have anyone else from West Virginia that you know who would like to teach in Bridgeport, give me their names." That was just how it was done.

DFB: What differences did you find teaching in Bridgeport and from the time you taught in West Virginia?

EA: In West Virginia I was my own boss. Whatever I did was it, but here I was teaching and I had a supervisor or a principal. And of course, you had to go by the standards that they set. I guess wherever you are you teach under the boss, and in Bridgeport I really -- you know I teach in Bridgeport, but I still think that teachers don't have enough voice. In West Virginia when you were given a class, you were responsible for it. You were given a school, you were responsible for it. Nobody came around and bang you across your head and said, "I don't want you to teach this class this way; teach it this way." As long as you were accomplishing results in West Virginia that's what they expected you to do. And they would tell you

that they hired you because you are a teacher. You have had the training. But I have worked here in Bridgeport, and I have my sixth year just like everybody else, but this sixth year seems to be able to say a little bit more than this sixth year, and I got my education at U.B. (University of Bridgeport) just like they did.

DFB: I know what you're saying. As a member of N.A.A.C.P., as a past president of N.A.A.C.P. and as an educator in Bridgeport what were your feelings about the desegregation suit that the N.A.A.C.P. started to initiate?

EA: We did initiate that report, and when we first started that desegregation report, I thoroughly believed in what we were doing. I thoroughly believed that the children were being denied many things in this city, but they messed around for so many years and didn't do one thing about it, and many Black people lost courage through the whole thing. They just felt like, "If you can give me something for myself, you know, for Black folks, I could care less about whether I go to the school with the white folks or not. Just give me what I need to work in my own school, you know." And I think the decision was handed down in 1954, and in 1984 we're still talking about desegregation! I think many people are disheartened. You lose faith. I, personally, feel that the way the set up is now and with whom I'm coming into contact with now, if I can get some money to get all the resources that I need to teach, a Black kid can learn in a Black set up. He doesn't have to sit with a white person to learn. The only thing you get is how to get along with different colors, you know, but as far as learning is concerned, I'm all in favor of giving me the money

and I can get what I need. That's what I feel about desegregation now, and I was one of the ones who went through it, who helped to draw up the report and put it together, and Bridgeport will never say -- that very report that we put together, that was the report that went to Washington, D.C. And when A.B.C.D. became a part of Bridgeport, they took the housing report that we prepared, they took the education report that we prepared. We had congressmen and senators to come here, and we had a discussion with them here, and they had a meeting and they took these reports back to Washington, but nobody ever knows anything about all of this, you know. But this is what happened. We were saying then that the children in Bridgeport, even when they were integrated in the schools, they were set aside as the "bussed children," children that were bussed into the neighborhood. And in some of the schools right here the kids were put into different rooms and just sat there all day long and waited. And even those who were bussed out to some of the other areas, I understand that those kids were sitting in the back row of the classroom or sitting here or there and were never called upon as part of the class. So if that's the way integration is going to be, I wouldn't even want to see it

DFB: Our children still lose out.

EA: So they are; they feel like they're not a part of it.

DFB: Mrs. Anderson, how would you say Bridgeport has changed from the time that you got here to today?

EA: Well, I am not too sure that much change has taken place. I'm not too sure of that. The only thing that I see is that we do

have more Spanish speaking people and more Black people who have moved into the city, and I'm quite sure that it wasn't so bad that there were only a few, but when it becomes necessary to have to share something with a lot more Spanish people, a lot more Negroes or Black people, it may become a little more difficult. Now Bridgeport still has a long way to go. First of all I think about them running a Black mayor for the city, and there was no reason why they couldn't have gotten a Black mayor. If he were white, he would have made it, but Charlie Tisdale happened to have been Black, and he didn't make it. And that was why he didn't make it -- because he was Black. You know, I'm listening to this. So Bridgeport hasn't changed. Other cities have done so much more than Bridgeport. They are the last one. I don't live in Bridgeport, and sometimes you're sort of reluctant to talk about a place you don't live in. I can talk about Stratford, too, because Stratford isn't doing a thing. Stratford is a little prejudiced town, and I know that, you know. They can hide, and look into Bridgeport. Many of us who live outside of Bridgeport, I think, we ought to keep our mouths closed and talk about our own town. I think I could talk about Stratford, you know. As far as I know I don't know anybody Black that Stratford has that's any place that's important. They've had one or two Black people on the Board of Education. Well, I would say "Oreos," on the Board of Education because they certainly weren't speaking for Black folks. We had one Black man on there who talked about we didn't need integration. So we certainly weren't learning anything there. But I don't see any change in Stratford. Now I'm going to say it in Stratford. Now

Bridgeport I can't say too much. I don't live there. I don't pay taxes in Bridgeport, but I do know that we have had good things go on in Bridgeport which they didn't go for. They had a good mayor in Bridgeport which they could have had, and they had a Superintendent of Schools which they got after she fought. So people in Bridgeport haven't awakened yet.

DFB: Mrs. Anderson, as we get ready to close this interview, is there anything else that you think is important that you would just like to say before we stop?

EA: Well, I don't know. I have enjoyed living in this area. If I had to do it all over again, I think I would still do the same thing. I may be able to work a little harder with some of the other groups that we've had around here, but I really enjoy this area, and I think that there are a lot of potentials.

DFB: Now as I went through some of your newspaper clippings and things I realized that you were a great force in Bridgeport history. I'm not talking just about Black history in Bridgeport, but Bridgeport history. You made a lot of changes, and I'm glad that there is somebody like you around to have done those things.

EA: Well, I appreciate you coming and asking me these questions. I'm sorry that I can't just give you all of the information because I'm sort of forgetful of some, but I do have boxes of material that we could go through sometime and pick out some.

DFB: Oh, I'd love that.

EA: Tonight I went through some materials there that were very important. I had to think about the time when we had Dr. King here.

DFB: Oh, yes. I remember. You know, I remember seeing his picture.

EA: Yes. I scanned through this. You see, Dr. King, at the time when we started working in the Civil Rights Movement, was well-known, but not as well-known as he is today or as the years went by. His secretary was Dora McDonald who lived in Bridgeport, and Dora and I became very good friends. So she told me one day, she said, "I'm going to Atlanta, Georgia and I'm going to be Dr. King's secretary." And I said, "Oh, isn't that grand." So throughout the years I never kept in contact with Dora, but I would write to Dr. King's headquarters. So I did write and ask Dr. King if he could come here to speak. That was when the old Central High School was there. And he said at the time that he couldn't come; his schedule was so great he couldn't do it. So one Sunday afternoon Wyatt T. Walker called me from Hartford, and said Mrs. Anderson, "Dr. King is speaking in Hartford and he doesn't want to go back to Atlanta. He does have a couple of days open. Could you arrange to have him in Bridgeport?" He said, "Maybe you could?" I said, "Oh, yes. I would love to, because I know exactly how to do it." So I contacted all the ministers. We had a meeting here at this house, and we got that thing together, and we had Dr. King to come to Bridgeport. He spoke. That was up here at the old Central High School. And as a gift from Wyatt T. Walker and Dr. King, they gave me this Black history book library. You know the dictionaries? You've seen them, haven't you?

DFB: Yes.

EA: Do you have some in the schools?

DFB: Yes. I have some in school.

EA: As a result they gave me that set of books.

DFB: Oh, that's nice.

EA: They said, "Thank you so much, and show it to your friends, and maybe they would want a set." So Dr. King came and then Bridgeport got him later. Bridgeport University.

DFB: The University, right.

EA: But we had him here first. And Rabbi Nelson -- oh, he was a terrific person who worked so closely with us. We had all kinds of good, wonderful people working with us. This is why we were able to be successful. All the ministers worked with us. Now you can't find that, but we had rabbis; we had Catholic priests; we had nuns -- a lot of good people working, and this is why I think that we did a lot with N.A.A.C.P. We had a lot of intelligent know-how people like Eugene Speer, Scott Melville, you know, and John Merchant. And these were good people who knew what they were doing. And I think that was the success of the organization, because you could delegate a responsibility and you didn't have to worry about it being taken care of. It was taken care of, you know.

DFB: Do you envision the N.A.A.C.P. returning to that level?

EA: Well, I hope so. I hope so. At this point I have some mixed emotions, but I think if you find the right person who has the time and the energy, because I was not able to take care of my family. So I know what it means.

DFB: I can imagine.

EA: I was gone all the time, and I think it has to be someone who is dedicated, who believes in it, who would follow through with everything. And you have to read the paper and keep up with everything that's going on. And I think that right now the people we're getting are people who don't know the background

of N.A.A.C.P. And you have to be in N.A.A.C.P. really for years. This is why they always say, "Gee, all these old folks. They've been in there for years." But the reason why the N.A.A.C.P. keeps them there is that they want someone to know the background and who knows what you're doing at the time. You've got to be ready to answer a person overnight or at the spur of a moment. And the leadership that we get now, they'll say, "Well, who asked you to make that statement?" The N.A.A.C.P. can't wait for somebody to make a statement. This is why you keep your old people there; so they will know exactly what they're doing, but this is what the young crowd said now. They'll read something in the paper. Someone called me the other day, "Well, who asked him to make that statement?" You see, I'm saying they don't know N.A.A.C.P. You don't have to ask, you know. You do what you know that's right, but I don't know when we'll return back to the way that it should be. I don't know what's happening right now. I just really can't say, and I'm very disheartened about it. I really am. You really hardly know N.A.A.C.P. is in town, and it's a force that people will listen to. They don't give you credit for what you do, but the Klan is afraid of it, and the people at city hall are afraid it. At any city hall in the country they don't want N.A.A.C.P. on it, because the average politician doesn't want to see anything in the Press about them. Everything has to be good. You know, people get the idea that we want to be seen and heard, but that's not the issue. You've got to keep N.A.A.C.P. in the paper so people will know that you're there because nobody else is going to publish it. So you have

to keep your own self there. And what I would like to see, I would like to see a good man take over the N.A.A.C.P. The one we have now is good. He's good, but he's old, you know. [Laughs] And it takes a good, young, spunky person ready to get up and go any time, any minute and be really like that. The person who really was the person was Reverend Williams, but he didn't do it. He was really a good guy. This man knows the answer to give. He knows what to say, you see, but on many other things, things didn't go right. you can't say, but he was a terrific person as far as president goes.

DFB: O.K. I guess this is about the end, and I've really enjoyed speaking with you.

EA: Well, thank you.

End of Interview