

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

Berkley P. Cox
316 Garibaldi Avenue, Stratford

Born: September 16, 1907 - Bridgeport to Amelia and
Palmer Cox

Spouse: Ruby Clayborne Cox

Children: None

Education: Central High School, St. Paul's Normal School,
Virginia

Employment: Sears, Roebuck & Company

Travel: United States and South Pacific

Church: Messiah Baptist

Organizations: Scout master - Boy Scouts of America

PERSONAL DATA

Roy Cox
71 Truman Street, #114, Bridgeport

Born: September 16, 1907 - Bridgeport to Amelia and
Palmer Cox

Spouse: Gertrude Cox

Children: Beverly Lewis, Barbara Gomez

Education: Central High School, St. Paul's Normal School,
Virginia

Profession: Chauffeur

Travel: Continental United States

Church: Messiah Baptist

Organizations: Official Board - Messiah Baptist
Boy Scouts of America

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

Interview by: James Johnson
Interview with: Berkley Cox and Roy Cox
Date: December 19, 1983

COX

JJ: Would you tell me where you were born, Roy.

RC: Born here in Bridgeport.

JJ: When?

RC: 1907.

Myrtle Avenue

JJ: Is Myrtle Avenue still the same as it was?

RC: We lived on Myrtle Avenue. We went to Prospect School which at that time was on Prospect Street. I remembered we were [there] two or three years. Then, the Chamberlains moved to Washington Avenue, 105 Washington Avenue and we lived right there on the place with the Chamberlains.

JJ: Who were the Chamberlains, Berk?

BC: J.C. Chamberlain --
mother and dad worked for him, a private family.
We lived right on their place for twenty-one or twenty-two years.

JJ: And this was on Myrtle?

BC: No; Washington Avenue. We were born on Myrtle Avenue.

JJ: How long were you at Myrtle Avenue, Berk?

BC: Maybe a year or so at Prospect. I don't know. And we went to Washington Avenue. We lived there about twenty-one or twenty-two years. I don't remember exact.

JJ: How large was your family, Berk?

BC: There was three of us, sister and the two boys.

JJ: Sister and a set of twins. Where's your older sister?

BC: Sister passed now. But, she lived in New York after she married.

JJ: Both of you attended Prospect School.

BC: Three years.

Two years, I think it was. It wasn't much more than that, two years.

Then, Chamberlain moved to Washington Avenue. Then, we went to Washington School.

On Pequonock Street.

RC: Right back of the St. Augustine's Church.

JJ: What grades were you in when you went from Prospect to Washington School?

BC: Second grade.

In our third grade we went to Washington School.

JJ: How long were you at Washington School?

BC: We went to Washington School -- we got to eighth grade.

And we were going into eighth grade; then, my mother and father began to go to Florida with the Chamberlains. Then, we went to St. Paul's School in Lawrenceville, Virginia. Sister went to Hampton.

JJ: This was your secondary schooling, wasn't it?

BC: Yes.

JJ: What were some of the things that you did for recreation when you were attending school -- elementary school, Prospect and Washington Street? What kind of activities were you involved in?

RC: Basketball and baseball.

At the time there was no other things. They hadn't gone into sports then. Teams would pick up a basketball

JJ: I see. Now, you would go to school and back home. What would you do in the neighborhood for recreation? Anything in particular?

BC: The Chamberlains had twin boys which was relatives of theirs.
Next door to us was the Sandfords. They had twin boys.

JJ: And so we're talking about three sets of twins.

: Right there in the neighborhood.

The other boys was white.

JJ: And your mother and father used to work for Mr. Lloyd Chamberlain,
What did he do?

RC: First dad was a coachman when we were small. Then, cars come
in and dad was the chauffeur for years. And they used to go
to Florida every year.

JJ: What part of Florida?

RC: Jacksonville.

Ortega. Ortega's right out of Jacksonville.

Chamberlain had a home there in Ortega, Florida and dad used to
travel back and forth. We

don't remember because we didn't go with him. He told us; but,
we don't remember all of it.

JJ: Is this your father and your mother stayed

BC: At times. Then, later years, my mother went. And then, that's
when we went to St. Paul's. It was through the Chamberlains
that we went to St. Paul's.

JJ: How did you like school? What was school like? How was the
relationship between you and the other students?

RC: I would say our relationship was very good.

We lived in a pretty good neighborhood and every body seemed to
be very good.

JJ: Were there many Blacks at this time?

RC: No.

JJ: About what year was this?

RC: At Prospect I can't remember just how many Blacks. But, when we went to Washington School, there was quite a few; but, still they lived mostly up in the "Hollow."

BC: As we said "the Hollow."

JJ: "The Hollow."

BC: They lived Harral Avenue, Capital Avenue.

JJ: That's where Greens' Apartments are now.

RC: They lived at Jones Avenue, Calhoun Avenue

[The boys who were in class with us] was all white, most of them was George Clark. He was the first Black fireman in the city.

BC: He went to Washington School.

RC: He was a great basketball player.

JJ: What year was this you were at Washington School? We talk about grades -- six, seven and eight.

BC: I never even stopped to think about to think about that part of it -- the grades.

RC: We left Washington School and attended a couple years at Congress High. Then, we went to St. Paul's Normal and Industrial School.

And we come out of St. Paul in 1927.

JJ: From St. Paul's in 1927. How long were you at Congress? You

mentioned Congress High School, after you left Washington High School.

RC: We put two sessions in there.

Washington was grammar school. Congress High was after.

JJ: And you were there for a while?

RC: I'd say about two semesters. Just about.

JJ: Two semesters. And from there you went to St. Paul in Lawrenceville.

JJ: How long were you there?

BC: We stayed there for two years. Then we came back to Bridgeport.

JJ: How would you compare the education, Roy, at St. Paul's with that that you had here for the one year at Congress High School?

RC: Well, St. Paul was very good, I thought. But, it was in the Southern way of doing things, not like the schools here.

JJ: How was that?

RC: It was all Black or as I'll say, at that time, all colored. We had no white teachers -- all colored teachers. Everything worked out very nice though. And it was an Episcopal School.

JJ: Were you able to adjust very well to an all Black school?

RC: Yes, we did.

BC: Maybe we adjusted pretty well to it. Let me just put it this way. From small kids on up we had a lot of relatives in Virginia we had to visit when we were kids. And we got used to the ways of the North and the South. Mother and dad used to sit and talk to us and explain different things to us. I guess we adjusted to it very well.

RC: In a store here we knew if we wanted to look at this or try this

twelve hour shift a night.

JJ: So, you worked twelve hours each. Where did you live here at the time?

BC: We lived with the Chamberlains. And we were very fortunate by living there. We had our own apartment up over the Chamberlain's garage. Mother and dad had five nice rooms over the garage. We used to live there.

JJ: And after you worked here for a year you went back to St. Paul.

BC: Stayed a year and then we came back here again.

JJ: This was about what year?

BC: We left St. Paul in '28. It must have been long about '26.

JJ: When you went back the second time?

BC: Yes. When we come out that time, we didn't bother to go back again.

RC: Mom and dad gave us a car.

JJ: What kind of car was it?

: Hubmobile.

JJ: Did you have any limitations as far as driving it?

RC: Oh, yes.

JJ: What were the rules?

BC: Mother and dad used to say, "Promise to be in by --

RC: Ten o'clock.

BC: Ten o'clock tonight. It was in!

JJ: Did the twins have any difficulty with the use of the car?

RC: No.

BC: I never drove. Brother did.

JJ: Roy did the driving.

BC: This was seven years after before I started driving. I never

cared to drive. Mother and dad told me I should learn to drive. I said, "Oh, Bob will do the driving." Since we both worked the same time, the same place. And so finally after, mother and dad persuaded me and insisted on me driving. So, I finally Dad taught me how to drive. At that time a parent or some friends could teach you how to drive. You didn't have to go through all this.

JJ: Where were your parents born, Berk?

BC: Virginia. Both of them were born in Blackstone, Virginia, in Williamsburg County.

JJ: And when you came back the second time to St. Paul's what did you do?

BC: Went back to work.

JJ: Where?

BC: Went back to Stanley Tools.

JJ: Back to the same place you worked the first time you came back. And how was the work relationship at this time, as far as co-workers were concerned? How was this with you?

BC: We worked with some of these Portuguese fellows. Some was Hungarian. But, it seemed like everything went very well. Some of the Hungarian fellows was "old-timers." They actually operated the machines.

JJ: How were your chances for promotion?

BC: We mostly done labor work, operating machines, loading and unloading skids. All our bosses was white, even the foreman.

JJ: How was the relationship with white and Black?

BC: We worked very good.

JJ: Now at Stanley, Roy, how was the relationship there?

RC: Very good.

JJ: And how were the chances for promotion there?

RC: At that time there was no chance to be promoted, like there is now.

JJ: What kind of work did you do at Stanley?

RC: I run the roller which bind these big coils.

JJ: At this time both of you were young men. What did you do as far as your social life was concerned?

RC: We had relatives here. We had a lot of friends here in Bridgeport. Of course, we all grew up together. Most of all we went to Messiah Baptist. That was on Arch Street at that time.

BC: Every Sunday -- well that's church, Sunday school.

JJ: Was there anything else, Berkley?

BC: Some weekends we'd have parties. In summer we'd have picnics. Backyard picnics -- hot dogs and all like that.

JJ: Any particular place or you'd just go from one friend's house to another?

BC: One friend's house to another; also, a relative's house. We had very good times. Sometimes we'd go up to Beardsley Park and have a picnic on Sunday up there in the park. It was very good, nice. No problem.

JJ: How is it that you happened to get jobs at different companies? Was this something that just happened that way?

BC: One morning I went out looking for a job. In fact I said I was

looking for a job and didn't care whether I got a job or not. Walked into Morgan Moran and there were several men ahead of me giving their hard luck story. The man looked at me. He says, "How about you?" I said, "Well, I'm looking for a job; I don't know." He said, "Where do you live?" I said, "I live home with mother and father." He said, "O.K., sit down." So, I sat over there and in a few seconds he came back and said, "You're hired." [Laughter] But, the men, some of them -- colored and white, at that time -- they give hard-up stories, "I have a family; I have this or that." I didn't have any family, just my mother and father. He said, "You're hired." I said, "I haven't got any clothes to work here." This was in a foundry. He said, "We'll find you some." [Laughter]

JJ: How did you happen to get your job, Roy?

RC: Just walking around. I had an idea I was going to a baseball game that afternoon. I went down to American Tool; walked in and looked around and heard all that noise. I was about to go out the door. Fellow said, "Hey! Where're you going?" I said, "Just taking a walk." He said, "Got a job open for you." I said, "All right; I'll try it." And that's all I did. I stayed there about a year, I guess, something like that. Then, you changed over

BC: I changed over and went up the Valley. Moved from here up to Valley. I didn't want to go up to Valley.

JJ: And you had worked there how many years?

BC: I'd worked there almost a year. And they went up to Valley -- Jimmy Durham and a couple of the fellows I used to work with

went up the Valley with me. Mr. Curtis didn't go up to Valley. He stayed

I come out to the factory where brother worked. There was an opening; and I got the opening.

JJ: This was when about?

BC: Late twenties. Up about '29 or so.

JJ: So, you went to work with Roy. How long did you work there, Berk?

BC: I guess we worked there almost two years, off and on.

JJ: And then after that?

RC: There was a lay-off. They wanted to put me over on Stratford Avenue where the Carpenter's Steel is. And I refused to go over there. Then, my cousin knew I wasn't working and he called me. He was foreman at the Sprague Ice and Coal Company.

RC: I went over there and he said to me, "I need somebody around here to take care of the office cars and do little odds and ends down here and run errands." "Well, O.K., I'll try it." So, I worked around there for a while. One day he came out and said, "I've got something else I want you to do. I'm going to take you up to the house and you're going to take Mrs. Sprague out on a little ride." That was the boss's mother. They lived on Mill Hill Avenue. I went up there and he took me out to the garage. There was this big, old car from here to there -- a Cadillac. He showed me how to start it. You had to pump the air into your gas tank first. It started up and then Mrs. Sprague came out. She told me where she wanted to go, out to Brooklawn. The fellow that did drive for them was sick. And so, I took her out to Brooklawn. She brought some books out of

of the house for me to read while I sat there and waited until the meeting was over. I brought her back to the house and got her out and got her into the house and put the car back in the garage and I went back to the office. I fussed around the office there, I guess, for about two weeks doing first one thing then another. Cousin came out and he said, "Mr. Sprague wants you to be at the house regular to take his mother this place and this." So, I started driving for them.

JJ: This was for how many years?

RC: I was with them seventeen years. And after that driving I used to go to Carolina. I was down there about a month. And the next season I went to Carolina and I was there a month and a half. After that they began to change around. I'd go in November and I didn't come back until the first week in May. That's the only thing that bothered me was that my family was here, Gert and little baby Barbara. Then, Gert and Barbara came to Carolina with me one year for a couple of weeks. And later on as time went on she and Barbara came down. I made three trips that year to Carolina.

JJ: What part of Carolina?

RC: Southern Vines. My folks had a home there. They had a cottage for me and Gert and Barbara. I went down and took the big car down and put that in the garage and I caught the train back and got the second car with the mother and son and took that down. In a week I came back and I got my car. They paid all the expense of my car and everything so that Gert could have the use of it while she was down there. They were awfully nice people to work.

for. Couldn't have found any better.

JJ: Berk, what happened to you as far as jobs

BC: While Brother was off and on in Florida I still worked for the factory.

JJ: At Stanley?

BC: I stuck it in Stanley Works quite a while. Then, I got tired of heavy work.

Dad talked to some drugstore used to be on State Street across from the World Globe Theater -- nothing but prescription work.

[There was] Mr. Damtaft's son and five pharmacists. Mr.

Damtaft. He was Danish.

He tried to get me to go to Yale to take up pharmacy. He taught me a lot there in the store. "I'll go next year." He said, "Berk," -- No, he called me Bob -- "Bob, what you get up here -- they can't take it away from you." That's what the old man said. I said, "I'll go next year." And the year that I got ready to go they changed the system at Yale. I couldn't get in. You had to have all

this I said to myself, "Gee and Mr. was rooting for me." [Laughter] And all the pharmacists was good, Mr. Kelley, Mr. Brennan, Riley and Doc Rubin and Stephenson. They all were showing me how. I could read prescriptions as good as some [of them].

JJ: What kind of work did you do in the pharmacy?

BC: Porter's work. After that

They got somebody else to take care of that. And I just went in and took care of the stock, ordered stock, whenever I walked into the store. The store was long and deep. I'd go down in the basement and watch the stock shelves.

JJ: And how long did you work for them?

BC: I worked for them about twenty years. Then, Mr. Holley asked me if I wanted to go into Sears Roebuck. He figured I'd been at Bancroft's so long I might not want to change. But, I did change because Bancroft was private. I worked for Sears almost twenty-one years.

JJ: How about dating? How was your social life back in those younger days, Berk?

BC: Social life? I don't know. I just lay around. My friends, a whole lot of friends.

JJ: How did you meet your wife?

BC: Mother and dad left here in 1932 to go back to Virginia after Mr. Chamberlain passed. The house was finished in '33 and mother went down for good. And they lived there for two or three years. I was down there visiting mother and dad; that's how I met Ruby. She was visiting there in the neighborhood. And the people she knew was visiting mother and dad. And I met her.

JJ: How long had you known Ruby before you married?

BC: I believe we got married the fifth time we saw [each other].

JJ: What happened after that? What did you do? Where did you go to live?

BC: I stayed here in Bridgeport. Mother and dad lived in Virginia. We lived here. We used to go [there] three or four times a year.

JJ: You and your wife came back to Connecticut after you married?

BC: Yes.

JJ: What did you do then?

BC: I still worked for the drugstore at that time. And after she was

here a year or so, she went to work for Read's.

JJ: And this was in the early thirties.

BC: We got married in 1936. August the twelfth, 1936. Ruby

JJ: Where did you live when you came back to Bridgeport after you married?

BC: We first shared the apartment with my brother, We had a five-room apartment, a flat. We shared the for a while, for a couple of months. The first rent was on Beardsley Street. We lived on Beardsley Street for five or six years and then we moved. We bought the house on 205 Newfield Avenue. We stayed there until -- We've been out here fourteen years now. We got here in 1969.

JJ: So, you moved here to Garibaldi from Newfield Avenue.

BC: Brother moved to Pitt Street.

JJ: How did you meet your wife, Roy?

RC: My wife, Gert's aunt lived upstairs over my Uncle and Aunt on the corner of Newfield and Smith Street. That house is all bricked up now, red brick. We used to go to my aunt's and I met her. She had come up from Virginia to live with her people.

JJ: What part of Virginia?

RC: She was from Bracey.

JJ: And you lived here at Newfield Avenue after you married?

RC: After we married we lived on Read Street for a while. And her aunt had tenants there and he passed. Then, the widow moved away and we moved there. We lived there for several [years].

[end of side one]

JJ: And from Read Street you came to Newfield Avenue.

RC: And we lived there several years. Barbara was going to school and Beverly was born. We were there around seven years.

JJ: Where did they go to school? Where did Barbara go to school?

RC: Newfield School. Beverly went from Newfield to Lincoln and then from Lincoln to Harding. Both of them [did].

JJ: Then when you moved from Newfield Avenue where did you [go]?

RC: First, we lived at four- fourteen and then two-0 -seven, the house that my brother and Ruby had. We lived upstairs over them.

BC: Yes, they did.

RC: Until you got ready to sell. We bought in Pitt Street and they bought, too.

JJ: So, you both moved about the same time.

: One day difference, wasn't it?

: Yes, one day difference.

JJ: And then you moved from Pitt Street to Truman.

: We've been out there a little over three years.

JJ: What kind of work did you wife do during this time?

RC: She worked at Read's.

JJ: Your wife worked at Read's and Berk's wife worked at Read's.

RC: She worked at Read's before we married. Then, after the children were born she would be "on call." If they called her, she would go to work for a few hours or whatever time they had. That's how it worked out. Her Aunt Corey was home quite a lot and the children could stay with her.

JJ: Do you recall anything much that happened during World War I, 1914 to 1917?

BC: I kind of remember that my father was called up for service. But, somehow, I guess the war was over. I can't say for sure.

Chamberlain might have had something to do with that because my father had been with Chamberlain so long. And he was a lawyer, too.

JJ: Were either of you impressed by anything during that time as children by World War I? Were you affected in any way?

RC: Not at all. We lived right there on Chamberlain's place. We had everything we wanted.

BC: They had the farm up there -- cows, chickens, everything. So, we just had everything with Mr. Chamberlain being wealthy. He had people up there to run the farm. And Dad to work down here -- the chauffeur, and had to do the yard and the garden. We lived very well.

JJ: How about the Depression?

RC: We didn't feel that.

BC: That didn't bother us.

JJ: But, you were going back and forth to school together at that time -- St. Paul -- during the Depression.

RC: The Chamberlains wanted mother and dad to take the trip South with them; so, we went to school.

BC: At that time school wasn't as expensive as it is now.

JJ: Did you observe anything around you, that is, in terms of how other people lived? Did you see much poverty or were you aware of food stamps.

RC: Not that I can remember, was it?

BC: I should say once or twice during World War I we used to have a shortage of coal; couldn't get it in or something. People used to have to go to the coal yards to get bags of coal.

JJ: What coal yard was this?

RC: There were several coal yards here in the city. The man that I worked for was an ice and coal company. And then there was the West End Coal Company and the Black Brothers Coal Company. There was a number of coal companies here in the city at that time.

BC: People used to go there and get bags of coal. Sometimes we'd see them, especially in the wintertime, with a sled, one or two bags sitting on it, white and colored, pulling coal home to keep the houses warm.

JJ: The same during the Depression era?

BC: Yes. We lived at the Chamberlains and coal and everything was already there. So, it never bothered us in that way.

JJ: Were you aware maybe of any hard times outside of the Chamberlains' environment?

RC: No, no more than just what we heard. They'd speak about different ones, "They haven't got this; they haven't got that." But, as far as we were concerned, we had everything, my father and mother being with the Chamberlains.

JJ: What about transportation during those years?

RC: We had an old trolley car. We used to ride trolley cars before people started getting cars. Quite a few people had cars; but very few colored people had cars at that time. One here and maybe one planning to get one. But, mostly when they bought them then, it used to be like a nice, used car, a Ford or Chevy -- something like that.

But, the average person used to ride trolley cars. Lot of the

men used to ride bicycles. Lot of the men used to ride bicycles back and forth to work.

JJ: And this was during World War I. How about during the Depression era?

BC: Can't say too much about the people who lived over here, over there. In our area, it seemed that everybody fared quite well.

JJ: This is what we would call the South End, the southern part of Bridgeport, Myrtle Avenue?

BC: Myrtle Avenue was the South End, yes. But, at that time, there was quite a few wealthy lived right through there. Some the people that used to own Read's used to live on West Avenue and Myrtle Avenue. I can't name a lot of them by their name. Mrs. Davis.

Out through from Park Avenue going back towards town, from State Street, there was doctors and lawyers and all [who] lived all through there. The turnpike took all of that.

BC: Before the turnpike come through there, the doctors had to move out. Remember Dr. Johnson, Dr. Lynch.

JJ: What about Black businesses?

: There wasn't any at that time.

BC: Only thing I can say around that time, maybe there was a few.

JJ: That time -- are we talking about World War I or the Depression?

BC: Right after World War I, as I remember, growing up we had Mr. the ash man, Mr. Clark --

JJ: Ash man?

BC: He had his own truck and removed the ashes from your house. We'd pay him so much. And Mr. Clark, that was George Clark's father,

the fireman. Who was the other?

RC: There were several others; but, I can't call their names now.

BC: Mr. Hanstit.

JJ: This is the Black business?

BC: Yes; a lot of them elderly men, like my dad, too, on the side line, after working for Chamberlain. My dad used to have sometimes fourteen furnaces he'd take care of a day, in the mornings. He'd go out each morning. Dad would get up and go down to Mrs. He used to take care of their furnaces. Nights he'd go out and do the same thing, fix them up and bank them for the night. They had all coal furnaces at that time. After dad would go to Florida, we took over the lighting of the furnaces. And we used to get up and go do the furnaces ourself. And people at that time paid us two dollars, three dollars a week. And we had a couple of big furnaces on Fairfield Avenue in those big buildings just east of Harrison Street. Bob and I used to go there and buy our furnace system.

RC: For quite a while.

BC: That was our own extra work.

JJ: How did Blacks take care of their money? Did they save money during this time? Did they invest their money?

BC: As far as I can say, a lot of them saved a few dollars. And then they did go into a development company here. People put money in. Mother and dad did.

JJ: About when was this?

BC: I don't remember the year now. There used to be a development company here started. What did they call it? Providence

Development Company or something like that. It started. There was Mr. Jordan, Mr. Brooks Faulkner and several others were like the board members. It worked pretty good buying property here

Finally, it folded up after several years.

JJ: Why? Why?

BC: We never understood. And as far as it goes, my father's lawyer, Chamberlain, told him he didn't understand why it failed.

JJ: How about since then as far as Black business is concerned as we go past the Depression era going into World War II?

BC: As far as I can remember, I never bothered to inquire too much about it.

Another development Company came here and bought up that big place on Broad Street. Was that the same one? That's the same set up for Father Divine. Father Divine took that.

RC: Father Divine bought that -- a big hotel on Broad Street just below the railroad.

JJ: Where is that? The marina?

RC: Where Marina Village is now on the left hand side of Broad Street across the street from the Methodist church. There's big apartments there and a hotel here. I can't recall the name of the hotel now. It slipped my mind.

Father Divine bought that and moved there for several years.

I don't remember what happened.

JJ: Have you heard of Afro School that they used to have on Broad Street? Do you ever recall your parents speaking about that?

: I can't think of it.

JJ: Do you recall a person by the name of Percival Carter?

RC: He was a serviceman. He was around here for a while.

JJ: He seems to be one of the, now we would call them, a "cause" leader, a leader in the community.

RC: He went from church to church, visiting and he tried to get things organized. But, I don't know; you start and then all just breaks up. I guess he must have give up after that. Later years his health wasn't good.

JJ: World War II -- what was your situation then?

BC: At that time I worked for the drugstore. I was inducted into the service in '43. And I finally went away the last part of '43. I did twenty-eight months in the service -- Navy. Twnty-seven months of the thirty-two I was in I spent at sea in the South Pacific.

JJ: You got out in what year?

BC: I come out in 1945 just before Christmas.

JJ: Had things changed much in Bridgeport during that time?

BC: To me I didn't pay much attention to it.

I had three jobs waiting for me. I came back here and went right on back to work. The Stanley Works was waiting for me; Bancroft's was waiting; and another man was waiting for me. to go to work. I went back. I went back to work for the drugstore. [Laughs]

JJ: The drugstore to the navy and back to the drugstore.

BC: Before I went into the navy I went back to work for the Stanley Works.

RC: Yes; you did, because at that time the drugstore job wasn't essential to hold you from the [service].

JJ: Stanley was what they call a defense plant.

BC: Yes. I went there and worked for twelve hours a night for I don't know how long again. [Laughs] I'd be coming from work and Ruby would be going to work. I'd be going to work; Ruby'd be coming [home].

JJ: How about you, Roy? What were you doing during those years of World War II?

RC: After Mrs. Sprague died, I stayed with the son -- they had a home in Lordship for three years and then I gave that up. I went to work then on the medical building on Golden Hill Street. They called it Golden Hill and Main; and that building still stands there. I worked there for several years. I don't remember just how many I stayed there. Then, I gave that up and went to work for a printing company. I stayed with the printing company twenty-two years.

JJ: Which printing company?

RC: L. P. McAdams; it's out at the West end. I stayed with them twenty-two years. I done a little of everything out there -- delivery, work around on this press and that press; whatever I was called to do, I went on and done it. Things worked out pretty good.

JJ: There was a lot of money to be made during World War II. Did Blacks take advantage of this? What did they do?

BC: Some did and some didn't. A lot of them to tell the truth. A lot of the Blacks couldn't get in factories until World War II broke. Because as far as the Remington Arms and those factories, Blacks didn't get in unless they got a sweeping job or else they'd work down in the "hot room" where they threw

metal and stuff.

JJ: In the foundry.

BC: Brass shop, the same thing. And as time went on and the war come, they fell right into some good jobs.

JJ: Prior to World War II jobs weren't as good. But, they began to get better jobs during World War II because of the defense plant. How was it immediately after the war? How were jobs then for Blacks?

BC: Well, let's put it this way. Maybe people thought I wasn't interested. I was working steady and I didn't bother to follow the factories up because I didn't want heavy work. I got tired over here at the Stanley Works. I don't know more than what different ones would say.

I didn't bother with the factories.

JJ: Did Blacks invest much after and during World War II when they were making a lot of money?

BC: Near as I can say, quite a few [invested in] property for a home. But, as far as going into business or something -- no.

JJ: But, many of them bought homes.

BC: Anyway, they tried hard to do it. But, at the end they may not have been able to keep it. They made a --

RC: Good start at it.

BC: Of course, we used to always think to ourselves,

at that time we said "colored," if from Yellow Mill Bridge all the way back to Stratford nothing but Black neighborhoods [existed], wouldn't it be wonderful. But, today, I'd change that. [Laughter] Things have changed so, now. But, at that time we thought if Blacks could live all

through in white homes, it would be wonderful.

JJ: A sense of Black pride.

BC: Yes; but, things changed so now. A different environment.

JJ: How about Black employment after World War II, when the war was over?

BC: Some done very good. And if they were working in the factories, they stayed on the jobs.

JJ: Was it difficult for Blacks to get jobs then?

BC: At times it was; and at other times, it wasn't. I was told to go up to the Remington Arms one time for a job. I went up there; but, at that time they wouldn't hire Blacks.

JJ: What would say were some of the plants that would hire Blacks more so than some of the other plants? You mentioned Remington Arms. Were there some plants that would be fair in their hiring as far as Blacks are concerned?

BC: Take the G. E. -- they hired the Blacks. The Brass Shop would hire. But, they had all that dirty work and all that.

JJ: But, no white person wanted to do that.

BC: Yes; they had cleaning to do and pushing brooms. Some of them were able to work down in the "hot room" where they handle all that heavy, hot metal and stuff. But, the whites didn't need that job. So, the Blacks were able to get it.

JJ: What do you think about the sixties? How do you think the sixties influenced Bridgeport? I'm talking about Jackson, Martin Luther King and the Black Movement. Did you think it had any influence on Bridgeport?

BC: It may have. But, I'll tell you, I was working steady -- never was laid off or anything. It never seemed to bother me. I had

a steady enough job. And I was with Sprague. I worked for him for seventeen years. Nothing seemed to bother me, pay and all or not. Then, after Mr. Sprague passed, I stayed with him three years. He was doing a lot of traveling then. I didn't want to travel any more. So, I went to work for the medical building and I stayed there several years.

When I left there, I went to work for L. P. McAdams, the printing company. And I stayed there for twenty-two years.

JJ: How did you see the sixties, Berk? Do you think it had any influence here in Bridgeport? Did you see any changes in comparison to the forties or twenties as far as Blacks or

BC: As far as I can say, on the same basis, Mr. Holley got me into Sears, Roebuck in '52. From there on I said, "I fared very good.

So, I talked to different ones and they'd say, "I'm doing all right." [This was] to different friends. I know I never bothered to venture out to ask too many questions about how other people were.

JJ: Did you have an opinion as far as Black leadership was concerned?

BC: After I come out of the service, I did have one ask me why didn't I come out and try to be an alderman. That was here in Bridgeport. But, I was never interested in politics. That's something I didn't go for.

They figured that by living on Beardsley Street

I'd make a very good alderman.

But, I was never interested. So, I didn't go for it. Then, again, I'm not much of a talker to be out in public .

JJ: What do you think about the education in the sense of comparing schools? What do you think about schools at the time you went and schools now or even at the time your children went?

BC: I'll say one thing. Lots of times in school I did notice, even as a young kid, some of the teachers was very intersted in, whether you were black or white, that you learned and got your lessons. Others, if you got it, all right; and if you didn't, all right. The time we went to school we had a very nice group of teachers.

JJ: Did you have any Black teachers?

: No.

BC: I don't remember what year Mrs. Marion Jennings was a teacher. I know she went in for teaching; but, the year I couldn't tell you. And then, remember Thelma Foster. Her son is a dentist now -- Taylor. His mother taught. I would say at that time was two colored teachers, Mrs. Jennings --

RC: One of them lived next to Mr. Roy on Central Avenue.

Hamilton. She taught for a while. That's Harold's mother.

BC: During World War II -- the beginning of it or during it -- that's when a lot Blacks really got into teaching jobs. And some of them came here from classes from the South. Looked like some of the boys and girls here didn't make it. Didn't care to.

JJ: There's another thing I want to ask you about that I've heard about and that is the place that they work on these trolleys. Was there a company by the name of Locomobile. Could you tell me something about that?

BC: Locomobile Company was an automobile company. They

used to be right down to Main Street on the left hand side.

All those factories are [there], where the Remington Company is now.

JJ: Yes. Remington Rand.

RC: That used to be the Locomobile company and they used to build the Locomobile cars there. They closed down.

BC: They used to build the old army trucks there, too.

JJ: Now, this Locomobile did they build trolleys?

RC: No, they only built cars.

JJ: What kind of cars?

RC: The Locomobile pleasure car.

JJ: A regular car.

RC: Only the rich owned them at that time.

JJ: What about the trolleys? Where did they go? Was that a barn or something?

BC: The trolley car barn used to be out here in Stratford for a while, this side of the cemetery. It used to be someplace in there. Then, it used to store and park them there at night. Then, after that they bought -- You know where the city has a sand pile on Congress Street now, just before you get to the bridge. That used to be there place.

RC: Right across from the fire department.

JJ: It used to be the bus barn.

BC: The first trolley -- it seemed to me years ago, they had to bring them all out this way, near Stratford, between Bridgeport and Stratford. Someplace in there.

When we were kids, we used to see them. After that they went on Congress Street.

JJ: I think we have covered everything. The conversation is open now if you have anything you want to comment on, anything that we haven't covered or that you'd like to say.

RC: After that things was tight for jobs. Colored went into the service. And different women went to apply for jobs with the trolley company and all like that. They needed help; but, they wouldn't give the colored girls the driving. At that time the trolleys was out. They had buses here. They wouldn't give them the job to be a bus driver.

JJ: Was there many Blacks that worked at the barn?

RC: At the trolley barn? Not too many.

JJ: How about Locomobile?

BC: Down at the Locomobile Company -- what was his name?

Marion Jennings' father was the head chef down there and his wife used to be the ... Two of them worked there. Mr. Holley worked there before he went to Sears, Roebuck. There may have been a few more; but, I don't remember their names. Not too many could get jobs at that time. Mr. Williams worked for the railroad company. He was in the railroad office down there on Waters Street -- New Haven-Hartford Railroad Company. Mr. Fred Stevens worked in the post office inside at the window selling stamps and his brother, John Stevens

He walked --

RC:

BC: Mr. Fred Stevens worked at the post office that used to be on the corner of Cannon Street and Broad Street.

JJ: What they call Post Office Arcade.

BC: Yes. He used to work there. Mr. Fred Stevens used to sell

stamps and so forth. His brother was a letter carrier.

RC: Up on the East end side, around East Main Street area, above the railroad; we'll say the nice part of East Main. He carried mail. They were the only two Black mailmen in town. He was the outside man and his brother was the inside man.

BC: Mr. Jordan was one of the tellers at the First Branford National Bank.

RC: Mr. Lively was something.

BC: Mr. was up there on --, just a little before the National Bank there. Mr. used to work for a brokerage company. Bill

RC: He was the first Black scoutmaster in the city.

BC: He took over the Zion Church Scout Troop. I worked with him for a while.

End of Interview