

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.

AAEA Education Committee Members:

DeAise Foster-Bey
Susan Golson
David Hicks
Gwendolyn Johnson
James Johnson
Juanita Wright
Frances Judson, Chairman

Consultants:

John Sutherland, Ph. D.
David Palmquist, Curator

PERSONAL DATA

Marion Williams Jennings

445 Valley Road, Fairfield

Born: May 27, 1901--Bridgeport to Norwood and Mamie
E. Williams

Spouse: Wendell P. Jennings

Children: None

Education: B. S. Degree, M. A. Equivalent

Profession: Teacher (City of Bridgeport)

Travel: Europe and Carribbean Islands

Church: Walters Memorial A. M. E. Zion

Organizations: Les Treize Business and Professional Club
Girl Friends, Inc.
Links, Inc.

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

Interview by: Denise Foster-Bey
Interview with: Marian Jennings
Date: January 14, 1983

Foster-Bey: Okay, Mrs. Jennings, you were born here in Bridgeport, correct?

Jennings: Yes, I was born in Bridgeport, and lived here all of my life.

DF-B: What part of Bridgeport were you born in?

MJ: I lived on the east side, on Beardsley Street. At that time, Beardsley Street was a wonderful street. The people owned their homes. We were very good friends, and people took very good care of their homes. The front yard was always neat. I went to Newfield School as a child, which was as far as the fourth grade, I think. Then I went to Lincoln School, which, you know, was burned down. It was a very nice school. I was treated very well in that school. Many of my friends did not go on to high school. It was during the war when I graduated -- or just before World War One, when I graduated from Lincoln School, and I went to Central High School in 1916. Central High School was a brand new school then, so I had the privilege of being [in] one of the first classes in that school.

I started out taking a college course, but then my mother did not want me to go away; I was an only child. She didn't want me to go away to college, so I changed to the normal school, or normal course. Now at that time there was a two-year normal school in Bridgeport. I graduated; and as I said before, not many blacks went to high school. I guess when I went in 1916, there were just about four or five blacks. It was the beginning of the War, and there were a lot of jobs, because Bridgeport was a factory town; munitions. Many of my dear friends just didn't go to school. When I graduated, my high school years were uneventful as far as prejudice is concerned.

I had wonderful parents. My father came from North Carolina;

my mother came from Virginia. They taught me to have pride in myself, so I never felt inferior to anyone.

DF-B: Was the neighborhood that you grew up in an integrated neighborhood?

MJ: There were whites and blacks living there, and we were friendly. But as I look back, you know, I wonder why there were just so few blacks in high school. I was always one black in my class. I don't remember very much prejudice of people; the teachers liked me, and I got along very well. Of course, at this time there were no black policemen. There were two black postmen, and no black firemen, so I didn't have any images to go by except my parents.

My father was not an educated man but he read the Times every Sunday, and he called himself sort of a politician, and he was a Republican. [laughs] He took an active part in the community. He worked in the Locomobile Company of America. Now that was a automobile which was built in Bridgeport. It was built down at the end of Baines Street, near Seaside Park. He was a foreman there, of people who took care of the factory. When the War started, he had a little restaurant there, right on the boardwalk on Long Island Sound there. The people from the factory came in to have lunch: thirty-five cent lunch. Then he had another room for the officers of the factory, as they came in. People in the factory worked in our lunch room, and then people from the city worked in our lunch room, so that was providing work.

I was in high school, so I would go down there every day for my lunch. When the War started, they were making trucks for the Army. I had a pass, and I'd walk down and go in the factory

and have my lunch. That was quite an experience.

So as I said before, I graduated from high school and I went to normal school. I was a very protected child, not having any brothers or sisters. So when it came time for me to go to normal school, and I said to the black children, who hadn't gone to school -- Some of my father's friends -- My father had a very dear friend who was sort of the leader of the city at that time; he worked in a bank, and he was sort of a messenger. He called my father, and he said, "Norwood, do not let Marian go to normal school, because they're not going to let her in." My mother was a wonderful woman, and there was no one going to stop me from going to normal school. So, very reluctantly, I went down. I went to normal school, and no one kept me out.

But the first month, I was failed two or three subjects. So I went to the dean, and she was out talking to my parents about it. I said, "I'm going to leave." She said, "Marian, don't ever come to me again. You're not going to leave. Go and take the exams and make-up exams, and pass them and go on." Which I did.

Then I had trouble. We had critics. We were practice-teaching, and when it came time for me to have a critic, no one of the teachers wanted to be a critic. But my father was working with the father of one of the critics, and he said to my father, "Norwood, do you have a daughter who's in normal school?" And he said, "Yes." He said, "My daughter is a critic and no one wants to take her, but I told my daughter she had to take her." And she was wonderful to me. So then I didn't have any more trouble in normal school.

DF-B: So you were the only black student there.

MJ: I was the only black student there. Before, there had been -- I have another friend who has passed away; she was the first black student to go to normal school.

DF-B: Do you remember her name?

MJ: Her name is Mercer Whiting Hamilton. She was a very smart girl: she became a teacher. She had a little trouble getting her job, but she had a very dear friend, or the N.A.A.C.P. [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] helped her. She taught for a very, very short time; then she married and had a family. So she didn't teach long, but she, Mercer Whiting Hamilton, was the first black teacher in Bridgeport.

So I graduated from normal school. Just before I graduated from normal school one of the teachers, who was just terrible -- I would sit down on the bus with her and she'd be facing me, and she wouldn't speak to me -- and then I'd have to go in her class. She was one of the teachers who failed me. So she said to me one day, "Miss Williams, will you come into my office?" I went to the office, and she said to me, "Now, you're going to be appointed." And I had always been very polite and kind to them, and I said, "Thank you, Mrs. Kelsey," and I walked out, saying to myself, "I'll never speak to you again." [both chuckle] Then September came, and it was time for me to be appointed. Everyone -- my father's friends were trying to help me, you know, they'd say, "Marian has to get a job." So I was appointed, with the help of my father who had political friends. They had a meeting at the bank on Stratford Avenue, the Board of Education meeting,

and my mother made my father go over there at twelve o'clock at night, to see how the meeting -- you know, what had happened. And sure enough, I was appointed.

DF-B: And where was your first school?

MJ: My first school was Hallen School. When I was in normal school, we had a Phys[ical] Ed[ucation] teacher who would tell us about this school. He said that there was a school up in the north end, and it's a portable school, and they don't have any plumbing. We laughed. Well, I was the last one appointed, because in my class there were sixty pupils, and there were thirty to be appointed, and my rating warranted me to be among the thirty.

So when I went up to this Hallen School, and saw these two portable buildings and this outdoor plumbing, I almost fainted! But I taught in that school for forty-three years, and the pupils were all ethnic groups, like Italian, Hungarian. There were no blacks. And I taught in that school for forty-three years.

DF-B: Did you have any problems with the parents?

MJ: Never had a problem with a parent, as far as my color; never with the principal. It was fine; I got along very well. A few weeks ago, they gave a party and they had five of the older teachers and I was one of them. They have a Catholic church called Our Lady of Good Counsel. It's off of Reservoir Avenue. When we first went there, they had no church, no buses. Just these people, and these were foreign people. The teacher could do no wrong. If you taught their children, they were so proud of having education, the teacher could do no wrong. I have so many, many friends. These children, I see them, they're old people now. They remember me because of my color, but I don't

remember them. But they're so glad to see me, you know. Every time I see them, I say, "Well I must have done something wrong, because they don't have to speak to me." But I never had any trouble at all.

I was just saying: they had this party, and I was supposed to meet a girl outside of Lady of Good Counsel. But I thought she had gone in, and when I went in, there were about a hundred and fifty people in there and they stood up. They all started toward me, and they were old men: sixty-five years old. And these were my students.

The neighborhood was a beautiful neighborhood, and they built this project, and that spoiled the neighborhood. Then, I've had some very nice black children who came to our school, afterwards. But at first, for probably the first ten years, there were no blacks in this school.

DF-B: Just to go back a little bit: what church did you attend when you were a child?

MJ: I went to Walters Memorial Church. That's on Broad Street. I've gone to that church all my life. I went to Sunday school, and I've taught in Sunday school. I played the piano for Sunday school.

DF-B: Were there any other social groups that came from the church, that helped the black families in Bridgeport at that time?

MJ: Well, you know, we were like a family on the street. We all lived in rather nice houses, you know. I don't remember. And then our church was a family. But you know, you must remember, this is 1918 and '20, and before the War there were about three thousand blacks in Bridgeport. But then, when the War

started, people came from all over, from the south. They had plenty of work. So we didn't know anything about people who didn't have.

DF-B: When did your parents come to Bridgeport?

MJ: My father came in 1898. My father was, as I said many times, a very energetic man. He worked -- There was a boat, the Nutmeg State, [that] used to come up from New York to Bridgeport. They'd bring passengers in the morning and the evening. It was a black man by the name of Mr. John Stevens who was probably the most outstanding black man of the community at that time. [He] lived on Stratford Avenue; had two sons. They were both in the post office; they worked in the post office. They were the first black people who had the very, very good jobs. They worked in the post office, and Mr. Stevens, the father, was the steward, the head of this boat in the food and the hiring of people. He was a very outstanding man. My father worked on that boat when he first came, in 1898, and my father and mother were living in New Jersey.

So my mother was on the trolley car one day in New York, and she saw where the Nutmeg State had burned. My father was one of the people who helped save the people on the boat. And he couldn't swim. He could have been very rich, because the insurance company wanted him to go on their side, but he didn't. He was a very honest man. So after the boat burned -- now, my father would tell me about that, all my life. My father really inspired me in many ways, because he was always telling me about the burning of the Nutmeg State.

We had a big red encyclopedia, and he would read that and tell me about the presidents of the United States. I had a very unusual father.

So we gave affairs in our church. On this street where we lived, there were deacons from the Baptist church, and I just adored them. Sometimes they took me to the Baptist church, which had more people. It was a larger church. But if there were people in need -- My mother always helped people who were in need, but there wasn't any big thing about it. She did it quietly.

A very big influence in Bridgeport was the Y.W.C.A. [Young Women's Christian Association]. We had a wonderful Y.W.C.A. here. It was called the Phyllis Wheatley Y.W.C.A., and it was on Beach Street. That was the gathering place for people, for children. In the Y.W.C.A., black people -- women -- learned how to be president's at meetings; they learned a great deal. I, in high school, was a leader. I taught the children crafts; we went there in the afternoon. That was about the only place that we had to go, of our own.

DF-B: This was strictly for black young people?

MJ: Well, it was a branch of the Y.W.C.A. We had a black branch and a white branch, and we took part in each of them, but blacks went to the Phyllis Wheatley. And then we were on the board; they had a board of directors, and there were black women on that board of directors. Then the executive director from the Y.W.C.A. always came over, and we took part in this very nice thing. But finally, we had a director in the Y.W.C.A., when they said, "Well, you can't have a separate Y.W.C.A." They were going to build this new Y.W.C.A., which is on Golden Hill. So, very reluctantly -- and it

upset the people, it broke the people up in Bridgeport, when they had to give up the Y.W.C.A. Because it was ours: we had our dances there, and the children had their parties there. When the new Y.W.C.A. was built and they did away with Phyllis Wheatley, the black people wouldn't go. Very few black people would participate. I continued, and Mrs. Gardiner, and a few other people. We were on that board; we became members of that board. But it was sort of a fiasco. They just did not like the idea of going together. So it was just until recently that black women became interested in the Y.W.C.A. in Bridgeport, and they're on the board. I always liked the "Y," and I was very sorry when the feeling became so strong, but that's the way -- It was the times coming, you know.

DF-B: When did you and your husband --?

MJ: Well, I'll tell you: I taught in Bridgeport -- When I graduated from normal school, I didn't have a degree, so the teachers had to go and take courses, you know, to get a degree. So I always went when I was teaching; I was always taking courses.

DF-B: Where did you go for those?

MJ: Well, I went to New York University, at Columbia. Then we had New Haven Teachers' College, and I went up there. We used to have our meetings at Yale, at -- but then that became Southern. So I didn't get married until I was thirty-eight years old, and I was going to Columbia. I met my husband at Columbia. He was working in New York; he was a chemist. He's retired now. He worked in New York, so that's when I met him.

DF-B: Do you remember any of the dating practices when you were a teenager?

MJ: Well, no, because I wasn't allowed to date. [laughs]

My father was very strict. Dating. Well, of course, if I wanted to go to a dance, very seldom did I go with a boy. My father would take me and then come and get me. I was very sheltered. I think I must have been crazy, when I look at these teenagers now. But I had boyfriends. But I was very sheltered, and the boys that I went out with, my mother sort of checked out. But my friends went to parties. We just went to a dance, and our parents were there. My parents were there. I didn't have many dates, per se. I went to church things.

When I got older, I went to dances. But we didn't have any cars, remember. We had to go on the trolley car or the bus. And we had house parties.

DF-B: How extensive was the trolley car system?

MJ: Very. When I was a child, we had a trolley car that went up to -- They had a pleasure place called Savin Rock. We'd go up to Savin Rock on a trolley car; we went to picnics on trolleys. Our whole life was trolleys. My parents did not have a car. I had a car in 1929, after I had taught a few years. I had a car of my own; I bought a car, but my parents never had a car. Then we had jitneys. These were like buses. And private cars. After the trolley car went out of existence.

DF-B: Now, World War One started when you were in high school. You mentioned that when the War started, more black families came into the city. How did this change your family? How did the War change your family?

MJ: Well, the War didn't, because my father had this restaurant, and we had these people working for us. My mother went to work

down there at the restaurant and helped in there. Before that, my mother -- First of all, it was a lovely place. Main Street; every time I go down Main Street, I just almost die.

D. M. Read's was on the corner of Main and Fairfield, and they had a footman. The cars came up and he had a purple uniform, and he'd open the car doors and let the people out. This was the people who owned these factories and all. D.M. Read's was a beautiful store. As her first job, my mother worked in the tea room. D.M. Read's had a beautiful tea room. My mother was head of that tea room. Not many people went; just the people who had a lot of money. I used to go there, and every November they'd have a fair, and my mother and some of the other black women who worked there would dress up in Japanese costumes, and they'd serve tea. When I would go in there, I'd just be so proud of my mother.

DF-B: Were there any other black women that worked in the tea room?

MJ: Yes, two or three of them. And when I was a child, we went to the "Y," I paid three cents to take up sewing. My mother was always having me take up typing or sewing or something, and I'd pay three cents, and we'd walk across the bridge to the "Y" to take sewing, and go back home. Those have been the things we went [to]. Everything -- The entertainment was at the "Y." They had dances at the "Y." The young people went to the "Y." for dances and parties. We had mother-and-daughter banquets. That sort of thing, where the family was more intact. Children didn't go off on their own.

DF-B: And there were agencies to keep that. That's so great.

After the War, were there any great changes after the War?

- MJ: Yes. After the War, people left. I remember whole blocks of vacant houses. People left, and it changed a great deal.
- DF-B: Did you notice after the War that there were now more black families in Bridgeport that were in need?
- MJ: No. Well --
- DF-B: Or jobs were still --
- MJ: Yes. After the War. But there were other industries, like laundries, and the people worked in those private places. Then of course people worked in homes, you know, in service. That was another thing that kept people working, a lot of people working in Bridgeport.
- DF-B: You mentioned that your father owned a small restaurant.
- MJ: Well, yes. The restaurant belonged to the automobile company, but he ran it. It was his; he ran it. Yes.
- DF-B: Were there any other black small businessmen in the area?
- MJ: Yes, there was a wonderful woman who was a caterer. She catered for all of the wealthy families, and she and her husband started this business. Then banquets; and my father was the head of that. My father would always be like the maitre d' of these banquets. When I was in high school, or when I was teaching, we'd have a banquet, and my father was a very handsome man, and so I was always very proud of him. He'd always come up and speak to us at the table. That was a very wonderful business, but it ended very tragically. The woman, the lady who -- I don't think I'd like to say what happened.
- DF-B: Oh, fine.
- MJ: And of course the doctors.
- DF-B: Yes, there were black doctors in the area.

MJ: We had several black doctors who came. The first black doctor was named Dr. Bradley, and he was a marvelous man. He lived up on Highland Avenue, and he went to black and white. He had quite a history of being a very kind man. Then we had Dr. James, and Dr. McCallum. We had several black doctors and dentists. Dr. Gibbs. And they did very well.

DF-B: Where did you live after you married?

MJ: Well -- no -- but before I left Beardsley Street -- I told you I lived there. When I was about fifteen years old -- I told you this man, these people who were deacons in the Baptist church, they built a brand new house; we lived in that house. My father wanted to buy it, but this man who owned it couldn't sell it to us, because we weren't Baptist. [chuckles] So then my father decided that he wanted to own the house. (I told you that he had lots of white friends.) He had this friend who had just built a house on 196 Fairview Avenue, not far from St. Vincent's Hospital. So he said to my father, "I'll sell you the house, Williams." It was a lovely house. He and my mother was very fair. So they went to look at the house. And we bought the house. But the very next day after we bought the house, his wife was furious, because this man had built several houses, and he had promised that she would live in that house. So he said, "You'll have to sell it back to me, Williams." And my father said, "No, I'm not going to sell you this house back." When the people found out -- they thought my mother was white -- there was a man who owned a phonograph place, and he had one of the mortgages on this house. We had a friend who worked in that place, and he said, "That day there was a whole line of people coming in and

out, protesting us living on that street." And my father got the money somehow to pay the mortgage.

[end of side one, tape one]

I still own the home; I rent it, and I intend going back there. I want to sell this house, because we're getting old, and I'd love to go back. But we've never had any trouble; it's always been a very nice neighborhood.

DF-B: When you got married, you lived

MJ: So when I married, my husband somehow got in the Army. He really was not the age, but he lived in New York, and I guess where he lived, he was probably a desirable person. He went in the Army, so we lived with my mother and father for several years, and he commuted back and forth from New York. One day I met him in New York, and he came running in at five o'clock to get the train, and I said, " you have to come and live in Bridgeport."

He had a very, very hard time trying to get a job in Bridgeport. He went to many, many places. He had his Master's in chemistry, but he just could not get a job. Then he started work for the city, as a chemist at the sewage treatment plant, for many, many years, until he retired.

Now, what question did you ask?

DF-B: Okay. I'd like to hear a little bit more about your experiences as a teacher in Bridgeport.

MJ: Well, okay.

DF-B: What was the school system like?

MJ: We had a very nice school system. I liked teaching, and I worked very hard with the children. I corrected all my papers,

you know, and I tried very hard; I tried to teach them to read. I went to all of the meetings; I did everything I was supposed to do. We used to have a teachers' convention. I always went to the meetings. We had supervisors; at that time, we had a general supervisor, then we had supervisors for phys. ed. and music and things like that. Of course when the supervisor came, we [teachers] were petrified. I remember the first time a supervisor came in my room. Her name was Mrs. Hurley. (Miss Hurley, because nobody got married.) She was tall, and I just fell apart. She would test the children, you know. It was entirely different. We looked forward to the supervisors, and if they saw us doing something they didn't like, they would tell us, and they would remember the next time. We tried to correct it.

We had teachers' meetings all the time, and we went to them. We worked together in the schools. We took them on trips -- just as you do today.

DF-B: You said a lot of your children were coming from different ethnic backgrounds. Did you have problems with language?

MJ: No. You know, when they talk about "bilingual," I can't understand it. Because I used to act things out for them, and if a child came to my room in, say, September, and he was Italian and probably just came from Italy; I don't know, somehow, by June they could speak English.

DF-B: Did you have any of the problems, with their parents, not speaking English?

MJ: No, because parents learned how to speak English. They came to the meetings; they took active part in the P.T.A. [Parent -

Teacher Association]; P.T.A. was very, very active. And we had a meeting every month, and it was active. We had lots of children who came, who couldn't speak English. Of course, you know, we had discipline problems too.

I remember the very first day I went to the school. The children were big. We always say, they were almost as old as we were; I don't know what had happened to them. But they went to another school, and some probably were discipline problems. They brought things to school like rats that they -- We'd have to be very, very strict with them. But most of the children we had wanted to learn. Now, some of them couldn't learn, because we didn't have anything about dyslexia or anything like that, and we didn't know about the eye movements, about children. We knew they couldn't read, and we weren't taught about those things. But I always found a way of doing, of trying to teach children.

One time I had a boy who couldn't read, and I did everything on earth to make him read, and I just couldn't understand why I couldn't teach him to read. So I told my principal -- now this is the only time that I ever had anything unpleasant -- there was a clinic at Yale [University], and I said, "If he could go to Yale, maybe he could learn to read." I don't know whether I made the contact -- she made the contact, because I didn't. The teacher from Yale came, and I think it was the Gesell Clinic, but I'm not sure. And she would not talk to me. The eighth grade teacher took that child to Yale, to see if they could find why he couldn't read. But I never knew that. They never told me that. I wondered why I didn't go, and I guess I wasn't as

aggressive as I should [have been] to find out. But that was the only time. About ten years later, I found out. The principal was -- called herself -- protecting me, because she didn't want me to be hurt.

But I went to all the banquets and things. A lot of times I went, they'd -- I know one time they were going to have a banquet, and I had a boyfriend who was a dentist. He had gone to the Algonquin Club, right here in Bridgeport, to a dental meeting. Although he stayed, the waiters would never pass anything to him, because he was black. So one day we were going to have a banquet, our teachers in our school, and it was going to be at the Algonquin Club. I said, "Oh, I'm not going." So my friend said, "Why aren't you going, Marian?" I said, "No, I'm not going." "Tell me why." I said, "I'm not going to tell you why." So the principal said to her -- because she was my best friend -- "Why won't Marian go to the banquet?" And she said, "When Marian gets that look on her, I'm not going to ask her." So the principal asked me, and I told her. She said, "Well, we won't go." So I went many places, and it [was] the first. But it didn't worry me. I had very good friends. My friends were Irish and Jewish and Italian and they were Catholic. I went to the synagogue with them. It didn't worry me at all that I was the only black.

DF-B: What grades did you teach?

MJ: I taught all grades. All but kindergarten, and eighth. I started in the third grade. This was another thing: one day, the principal came to me and said, "Marian, I would like to have you go and teach the first grade. I have Miss Congdon

with me, and she is a third grade teacher." Now, I hadn't learned how to fight that, you know.

DF-B: This was a new teacher coming in?

MJ: This was a new teacher coming, and she'd like to teach third grade. And like a dope, I went and taught Chicken Little. You know -- [laughs] they were taught Chicken Little in the first grade, then. And that cured me. No one ever, ever asked me to do anything I didn't want to do. It really taught me a lesson. And today I see that girl, and she kisses me and all, and I don't think she's conscious of the fact of what happened.

But I taught all grades. I taught seventh to eighth grade social studies, most of the time. I loved it.

DF-B: That's what I teach. While you were a teacher in the earlier years, were there any regulations as to whether teachers could be married, or --?

MJ: Well, yes. During the Depression, the married teachers had to leave. They had to leave, and then later on they started back again.

DF-B: They had to leave to give jobs to the single people.

MJ: Yes, to the single people.

DF-B: What was Bridgeport like during the Depression?

MJ: Now, some of my friends could be telling you. Well, it was bad. We had rationing, you know. But my father was the kind of a man -- He always had a job. He didn't have one job, or two jobs; he had three jobs. I told you he worked at this catering place, and then he worked in many, many places. But then, my father did get out of jobs. When they closed the Locomobile factory down, my father was out of a job for a long

time. Then he did, you know, extra jobs. But then he was the first black man to work in the jail, on North Avenue. He had charge of the food in North Avenue. He worked there until he retired. And he got Mrs. Lancaster, who was a nurse -- she worked in there. My father and the sheriff were very good friends. And my father liked the people who went to jail, and he was very kind to them.

DF-B: You know, you've mentioned a lot that your father was involved in politics, to a degree. Were there any black organizations, political organizations, clubs?

MJ: Well, yes. They weren't black. My father did not belong to any black organization. He would join the white Republicans. And there was another man who was living -- and he'd go to the Baptist church. I can't remember his name, but I could find out. [He] was with him, and he'd take me to these rallies. Claire Booth Luce was a young woman then. She was just in politics; she was beautiful. Oh, I used to look at her, and hear her speak. I became interested in politics; my father talked about it all the time. But as far as black organizations, there were none, as far as I can remember.

DF-B: But black people were involved in the political system, to some degree?

MJ: They were, but they were sort of reluctant. My father was on the polls, and there were a couple of other people with him, who, on election day, were on the polls. But the black people were reluctant to do things. I guess that's why there aren't many black businesses in Bridgeport today. [pauses] Of course, then the girls and boys did start going to school, you know.

Probably during the War, their fathers and mothers saw the necessity of an education. But it's very hard, if there are a lot of jobs around like there was during the War. I guess that's why they didn't go to school. But then children started going to school. I don't know.

I belong to Les Trieze Business and Professional Club, and that's up to thirty-five years old. I think we have been a wonderful way of helping these younger -- plus we've been giving these scholarships, all of these years. I think we had a great deal to do with encouraging black youth to go to school.

DF-B: Do you remember when you first noticed black neighborhoods in Bridgeport? From some of the things that you have been saying, I get the feeling that people were living pretty much all over.

MJ: Well, yes. I guess we were about the first to live in another neighborhood, you know, to go to live -- of course, black people live all over Bridgeport now. But I think we were the first black family -- well, no -- we were probably the first or second. I had a few friends who lived in other neighborhoods. I remember I had a friend who lived on Jackson Avenue. But I can't remember any other people. But when I used to go back to Beardsley Street, where I was born, and then people were moving into it and it was changing. It would break my heart. My friends started moving away, too; as they began getting good jobs, they moved away. But I still have friends who live over on the east side. But they have made the neighborhoods better. There are very nice neighborhoods. Davenport Street and Wilmont Avenue;

I have friends who live there. I don't know what happened to Newfield Avenue and Stratford Avenue. When I was a child, I used to go down and mail a letter, and it was beautiful. Lincoln School was a lovely school. But then the people just came in and ruined it. I know, I went down Newfield Avenue one day; I said to my husband, "They're even taking the shingles off the houses." It's terrible. I don't know what happened.

DF-B: You worked in the school system for forty-three years, and you retired. What have you been doing?

MJ: Well, when I retired -- I have a friend, Mrs. Gardiner. She was very active in the "Y," very active. And she was very active in her church. She went to conventions and all. When I retired, she just gave me a push into Churchwomen United. I've been on the board of Council of Churches. I've worked in "Y." So I've just been doing a lot of things.

DF-B: You've remained active.

MJ: Yes. And I still am active on the Council -- I was on the Council of Churches for about six years, on the board and I worked on that. Then I became active, a president of Churchwomen United. That has been fairly -- I'm very interested in Churchwomen United. It's kind of going down now because people are getting older, and we haven't gotten as many young people coming into it. But the Council of Churches and Churchwomen United and the "Y" were my favorite organizations. I left the "Y"-- we had a "Y" secretary; I think she's borrowed the "Y" for Bridgeport. But they seem to be getting along nicely now.

DF-B: Well, before we end this, is there anything else that you'd like to [say]?

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DF-B: Well, before we end this, is there anything else that you'd like to [say]?

MJ: I hope I haven't been too redundant. I just think that I wish Bridgeport could change. It breaks my part to go see Main Street, and see the things that are happening in Bridgeport. I just wish we had strong black organizations which could do something about it. Now, the N.A.A.C.P. was very active. They did a great deal. Mrs. Anderson was a wonderful president; Mr. Lancaster was a wonderful president. But lately, they just can't -- The people don't support them, and that's a very, very bad thing.

DF-B: Were you involved with the N.A.A.C.P.?

MJ: No, I've never been involved in the N.A.A.C.P., for some reason. I don't know why. But I've been involved in these other things, I'd say. But I wish the young people would take advantage, and inspire the young people of Bridgeport. And I think the churches should take a better -- I'm disappointed in the churches. In my church. I wish there was some way of teaching these young people how to be parents. You know. That's a terrible thing. Young people, they don't know how to be parents. I pray all the time, if they don't know how to be parents, let's some organization teach them. Let the church do something about it. I think the churches should be more active, because Bridgeport has sort of gone down. They need young people who would inspire other people. They need churches who would inspire. They need some kind of an active organization, like N.A.A.C.P.

DF-B: Well, I think listening to people like yourself would be an inspiration to many of our young people.

MJ: Well, I've worked all my life in the "Y." All my life, since I was fifteen years old, I've worked in some organization. But

now that I'm older, you know, I don't go out at night, and I don't feel that I should. I'm still very active in

Do you know about Les Triezes?

DF-B: Yes, I do. But I haven't --

MJ: Would you like to be a member? [laughs]

DF-B: [laughs] Not right now; it's a little difficult. But I thank you very much, Mrs. Jennings. This is very nice.

End of Interview