

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALICE JENNINGS ARCHIBALD

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

MARCH 14, 1997

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mrs. Alice Jennings Archibald on March 14, 1997 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

Eve Snyder: Eve Snyder.

KP: And I guess I would like to begin by just asking you if you could tell us a little bit about your parents?

AJA: Well, my parents were just average people who worked in New Brunswick. I guess ... you might say we were like Mr. and Mrs. John Q. Public. We just worked, just did ordinary work. And my father came originally from the country, somewhere in the area of Harlington, Rocky Hill, and so forth, which was in the radius of twenty miles of New Brunswick. And my mother was born closer to the city. But we're Jerseyites, really, Jerseyites. We're not here by way of Virginia or any other place, we're here by way of New Jersey. And they just did hard work so they had no particular skills, but just worked hard, were good Christian parents.

KP: Do you know how far back your family goes? You said you were a Jerseyite family. Do you know how far back your family goes in New Jersey?

AJA: Well, I can go back to maybe about five generations. One of my ancestors was a slave, but I can't remember just when he came over. But most of us had lived within the New Brunswick area, most of us.

KP: What did your father do for a living?

AJA: Well, he just did ordinary work. He worked in a drug store and did just ordinary work that people who had no particular skills did, and then, being a person of color, there weren't so many jobs that you could do, so he did those things he was able to do. My mother did laundry from time to time, things like that. But the aunt who raised me had been a school teacher at one time. She had a normal school education; she graduated from Trenton Normal and although she didn't teach after marrying my uncle, she was a dressmaker, and she used to do dressmaking for the neighbors and others in the area.

KP: You mentioned that your aunt raised you, what had happened?

AJA: Well, what happened was this: my mother had four children, I was the fourth child, and they were bing, bing, bing. So if anyone who knows what stair steps are with three and then one coming, my aunt and uncle who had no children thought they would relieve my mother and father, and they wanted to take one of us to stay with them. So they asked my older sister and when night came, she didn't want to stay, she wanted to go home. They asked me, and I stayed, and I stayed ever since.

KP: Your aunt and your uncle also lived in New Brunswick?

AJA: Yes, they lived in New Brunswick. My aunt originally came from Trenton, but when she married what happened was her father was one of the early pastors, if you look in that blue book

[One Hundred and Forty-Five Years with Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church], her father was one of the early pastors of our church, and when she came to New Brunswick as a single woman, she met my great-uncle who was also single at that time. This is a picture of her father, Reverend Jeremiah Pierce. So Reverend Jeremiah Pierce's daughter, Gertrude Pierce, married my great-uncle, Joseph Titus, so that's where they come in. And this is a picture of the house they had, which I still live in, but at that time my mother and father were staying there. I was born in the house and ... I've always lived there.

KP: You mentioned that they owned the house. How long did they own the house for?

AJA: Well, they had owned the house for a number of years. It's over a hundred and some years old, over a hundred and some years old. The man who used to live there, who sold it to them, used to shuck oysters, and I remember in the back cellar there were a lot of oyster shells that may still be there when he had shucked oysters years and years ago. But that's been a long time ago.

KP: You mentioned your aunt was a schoolteacher and also a dressmaker?

AJA: Yes.

KP: What did your uncle do?

AJA: My uncle was a chauffeur, and at one time, ... he was a chauffeur for some of the J[ohnson] & J[ohnson] family. He worked for the Rosses who used to live on Livingston Avenue and after they died out, he became caretaker/janitor at the New Brunswick Savings Institution, which is a bank on Bayard Street. He used to take care of the furnaces and like that.

KP: So it sounds like he stayed fairly well employed?

AJA: Yes, they were. My father and my uncle were employed, but they didn't make much money. But they were always employed and we were all brought up to make due with whatever you had. You made due with what you had; you didn't worry about, like young people today, they got to have Nike shoes or something like that. If you can't afford it they still have to have it to make an impression. We didn't grow up that way, and yes, we grew up with, "When you're old enough to make it, you can get it, yourself." And we're none the worse for it, you know, just the feeling that well, if you want it badly enough, you can work and earn it.

KP: Growing up, what did you do for fun? What are memories?

AJA: Well, for fun, ... it's an interesting thing, there are a couple of young people, young people who come up to the Senior Center who grew up with me. They're Italians, and they remember playing in the yard with me. I always had to stay behind the picket fence; my aunt said: "They can come in here and play, but you can't go out in the street." So they used to come in my yard and play, because I had a swing, ... we had a cherry tree, a pear tree, a peach tree, a walnut tree, ... but I had to stay in the yard; they came in and played with me. And we were really what a neighborhood is supposed to mean, what neighborhoods don't seem to be today. The whole people on that city block knew us, we were the only Afro-American family there, but we didn't

know we were Afro-Americans, they didn't know they were Italians, Jews, Irish, Hungarians. We all grew up together, we ate together if company came. Next door, Mrs. Iacouzzi invited everyone over to see Gertie and all of us. If we had company we took them, so forth. That's the type of neighborhood we had. We were really what a neighborhood means.

And we had mystery in our neighborhood, too, if you have heard of the Hall-Mills murder. Mrs. Mills used to live right up the corner from me, the house on my corner, and I used to play with her daughter, Charlotte Mills, when I was in the first and second grades. And, of course, when I went to Howard University. This murder happened during the time I was at Howard, the psychology professor was trying to find out from me what did I know about the pig-woman and so forth. It was really interesting. [laughter]

KP: Well, what did you say to him?

AJA: Well, at that, I don't remember what I said, but ... I just said, well I didn't know her or what not. But, of course, they had various, I don't know whether, they felt that the particular family they accused, whether Willie had done it or not, because he wasn't bright, but they had money so I don't know, I really can't say. That's one of those things like the Lindbergh case; you don't know for sure, so.

KP: What were your thoughts and the time, what did you think?

AJA: Oh, at the time, when you're in college, sometimes you aren't interested in those things, I didn't, I read about the pig-woman and all that, but it didn't, I was more interested, I guess, in the boys. [laughter] ... At that time, I wasn't interested in what the pig-woman had done.

KP: Your schooling in New Brunswick you mention you had an integrated neighborhood. Was your school integrated?

AJA: I always went to white schools until I went to Howard University. I attended the public schools in New Brunswick; I graduated from New Brunswick High School in a mid- year class of 1923; I took a scientific course; I was co-historian of the class; elected to the National Honor Society and gave a salutatorian address. And then, also, I participated in a track meet and got a couple of ribbons and the medal from second place in the track meet. So that was in 1922.

KP: In New Brunswick High School?

AJA: In New Brunswick High School.

KP: Interscholastic Meet, June 1922, second place, for the standing broad jump, and you also got second place in the basketball tournament.

AJA: Right, right.

KP: Did Eve tell you that she is an athlete? She is on the Crew team.

AJA: I thought she was when I saw how tall she was.

ES: Either that or basketball, right.

KP: You liked sports a lot, too.

AJA: Oh, yes. I used to go to football games and run up and down the sidelines cheering and what not. But being short, you know, there wasn't too much that you could do. ... Do you like playing basketball?

ES: Oh, no. I'm on the Crew team.

AJA: Oh, the Crew team? Oh, you row. Row, row, row your boat.

ES: Yes. Did you used to see Rutgers, some of the Rutgers athletics when you were growing up?

AJA: No, I didn't do to much then, see. When I attended Rutgers, I got my master's in the summertime and, since I attended during the summer months, I didn't have time for that sort of thing.

ES: What about when you were growing up?

AJA: Oh, when I was growing up, I participated in things, but not too much because I wasn't tall, you know. What I've done more than anything else is, I used to speak a lot. I've done a lot of speaking in my day and I had been a ghost writer for a lot of people. So, I guess that's the story of my life, so to speak. [laughter]

KP: Your mother and father only had some elementary school; they never went to high school?

AJA: No, no.

KP: What about your uncle and aunt? You mentioned your aunt.

AJA: My aunt did, my uncle didn't, but my aunt did. She had a normal school education. Then I have a sister; my older sister went to the eleventh grade, and then she thought she'd get out to work and help my mother. Well she was tired of school, but she was smarter than I was, and my two younger brothers and my younger sister have all finished high school. My sister worked for the government for a number of years here and in Washington, D.C., and she was very good in secretarial work and so forth. My brothers both worked at Squibb, which was a good place for people working, and my youngest brother worked two shifts to help educate his two children, my sister-in-law also worked along with him to help send them to school. So he has sent his two children to college, a boy and a girl; both have college degrees. And my sister has no children; my other brother, who finished high school, is a bachelor. He's 81 years old, so I don't think he's going to get married now. [laughter]

KP: Did your parents expect, or your aunt and uncle expect you to go to college?

AJA: My aunt and uncle were the ones who spearheaded my going to college because my parents didn't have the money, and they had these other children and all. My aunt was, ... I guess you'd call her a visionary. Well, she came from a family that was professional. Her father was a minister, a sister married a doctor, another sister was principal of a school-- a vocational school in Atlantic City. Another sister taught home economics at Bordentown Manor Training School. The brother didn't do much. He was--well there were two--brothers, one was a chauffeur and one was, well he was non-descript I'd say. He just didn't, didn't do anything per se, but the girls all did quite a bit. So I was the first one actually in my immediate family who went to college, ... in fact among all of my peers, I was the first one that went. And that's one reason why I have been written up a bit lately, because I was the first one who went and saw, blazed, you know, blazed the trails for others.

KP: In your neighborhood, you mentioned it was integrated.

AJA: Yes.

KP: How many of the white children went to college?

AJA: Ah, let me see, the Bellizias, I think of those who lived in the neighborhood. I believe the Bellizias were about the only ones who went to college, and they, the boys, I think, attended. The father was in the excavation business and the boys went to Rutgers Prep and, whether they went to college or not, beyond prep. I don't know. But I think I was about the only one in my neighborhood; I'm trying to think. The Zenzantos, one of them was a letter carrier, ... I don't know whether Connie went or not. I think he went to college for a while, but I was about the only one in the neighborhood, white or colored, who went to college.

KP: You must have felt that this was quite a privilege, to go to college?

AJA: Well, my aunt was very, very practical minded. She came from a settlement in South Jersey called Gouldtown, and if you're familiar with Gouldtown-- they have a book on it and so forth; they may even have one in the library. Most of the people there were Goulds, Cuffs, Stewarts and Pierces, and they sort of intermarried among themselves, and they were all light, like my aunt. There were very few of my complexion, and they sort of, well, they were like a clan; they just existed among themselves. Well, the people from Gouldtown--most of them were interested in higher things, education and so forth--and, since my aunt came from there, she, too, sort of instilled in me a love of books. I know she used to tell me as a kid, "stop talking and go read, find something to read." Well, at the time, I guess I thought she was pretty tight, but I'm glad she did, because, you know, there are a lot of people today who can't go down the corner without company, and I can go anywhere and enjoy myself, even though I love company. But if I don't have it, I can go to museums and places and see things of interest and enjoy myself, but some people, if they don't have my buddy along, they can't move. So I thank her for that.

KP: What was your favorite subject in elementary school, high school?

AJA: Well, I liked history, and I was very much interested in that, and I liked some science, but I'm not the best science student, but I took the scientific course in high school. ... I wasn't particular about working with bugs and things like that when we got into that form of science and so forth, but anyway. ... I got through.

ES: What did your position as class historian involve?

AJA: Well, I was co-class historian. I have the book somewhere with the class history written. I don't know how they happened to put me on the committee, but they did. And we wrote it, and I was class salutatorian. So, we were the second mid-year class of New Brunswick High School, and there were 39 in our class, and we were all accelerated students, but I think one, one was left back, but the rest of us had been accelerated, so, we were all ...

KP: How, how many years did you spend in high school? Did you spend a full four years, did you?

AJA: Well, let me see. I finished in '23, January of '23. I guess it wasn't quite four, but I did so ...

KP: Your teachers, what sort of expectations did they have for you in elementary school and high school?

AJA: I don't know. They were sort of, they just took you as a matter of fact-- the ones that I had. Now, I had one teacher in high school that I remember very well, Miss Josephine Masso, who taught math. She had quite a bit of influence on me, and she wrote a very nice letter of recommendation, which I have in my file somewhere, but she was, she really inspired me to want to do and be. I had one teacher in high school who came from the deep South. It was his first experience with a colored student, so ... I remember I took a test and he gave me [a] "C," and the class felt I should have gotten an "A." So my aunt came up to see about it, and the class spoke about it, so I got the "A." Now this was my first experience with a teacher from the South, ... but my classmates rose to the occasion and my aunt, so we got over that.

KP: Growing up did you ever experience any other prejudices that you remember?

AJA: Just no. Usually when you went places to get something, you didn't have that much money that you had much chance to do much in the way of the experience, much in the way of prejudice. Because you didn't go to that many places, you didn't have that much money to spend.

KP: What about at the movie theaters in New Brunswick?

AJA: Well, the movie theaters were kind of prejudice[d] in that they wanted to send you ... of color, up to what they called the "peanut gallery." Well, some of the theaters were like that. The Strand, particularly, on the corner of George and Albany, was a little cheap theater, and they were one of the most rigid as to where you might sit. The dirtiest and the crummiest and the most particular. [laughter] But I didn't go to the movies that much, so. The few times I went,

you know, sometimes when you don't know prejudice as existing, you don't dwell on it, and at that time people weren't always aware of prejudice, or if they saw it they just paid no attention to it, and you just ignored it, and went on about your business.

But where your prejudice came in was when you tried to get a position in the school system. Then you found out you couldn't get in because of your color. And there were cities in the state where there were quite a few. Well, they had colored schools in Trenton, Asbury Park, Camden, a number of other places, but, of course, there were a lot of young people around there of color who graduated, so they filled in the positions, so there was nothing available. They had colored schools in Atlantic City. So, when I graduated, there were no colored positions available, so I went south.

I went to schools that were operated by the American Missionary Association. I went to Parmele Training School first-- Parmele, North Carolina, and there I experienced my first experience, definite experience with prejudice. When I got down the train station, I wanted to go to the ladies' room, so I started towards the ladies' room. So this porter cleared his throat, cleared his throat. Well, I just thought he was trying to be cute or something. I didn't pay any attention, at first, but eventually I looked in his direction, and he glanced up, and I was going right for the ladies' room for whites only. Now, that was my first experience in North Carolina with prejudice such as that. And it always remained with me because I wasn't even thinking about it; I was just going to the women's room. So, I didn't notice whether it was white, colored, or what not, Women's Room, but while he was clearing his throat, clearing his throat, something said, "You'd better look." And I looked, and he glanced up, and I glanced up. I was headed right for the-- so that was my first experience with racism per se. ...

KP: Why had you selected Howard University? Had you thought of other schools? Had you thought of, say, New Jersey College for Women?

AJA: Well, I had thought. I had always gone to white school[s], and I had thought it would be a good experience to go to a colored school and see what they were like, and Howard University was one of the higher-rated schools among colored schools, and it was in Washington, and I thought, "Well, I could combine two things, go to Howard, and go to Smithsonian Institute and see ... all the things there." ... So I did, and I was very glad I did because this was my first experience with Negroes who really had money. And I mean money-- the Spauldings in the insurance business from North Carolina, the Neeleys from Oklahoma who owned oil wells and had all sorts of money. And it was such an education that even today whenever I talk to young people, I say, "If you're going to Rutgers, Yale or wherever, spend one year in a colored university." I said, "It will really open your eyes, and help your understanding of your race and in dealings with others." Of course, things may be, I know things are different now, but I don't think that they're that much different that you wouldn't experience something. I don't know; with all these millionaire ball players and so forth, I don't know about today.

KP: What did you learn at Howard? You mention that this was a new experience to go to a black institution?

AJA: It was.

KP: What surprised you the most?

AJA: Well, I was just surprised in that, as I said, I came from an average hard working family, Mr. and Mrs. John Q. Public, where we hadn't been exposed much to a lot of Negroes with means. Oh, we had a doctor or two here and a dentist, but I mean where you met a whole group of people who, from all the states, who had means and so forth. And it was a very enlightening experience because it said to me: see, if you try, get there, you know, be there yourself. And it showed that there were opportunities, even though prejudice did exist, there were opportunities where you could better yourself if you tried-- just a matter of having a vision and going ahead and pursuing your dreams.

KP: At Howard, who was your favorite professor? Do any stick out?

AJA: Well, ... my favorite professor was Professor Charles Thompson. He was my professor in education and he recommended me for an 800 dollar fellowship to attend the University of Cincinnati, to get a bachelor of education degree. I had a B.A. from Howard, and he recommended me to the University of Cincinnati--an 800 dollar fellowship--so I've never forgotten Dr. Thompson. 800 dollars, big deal! [laughter]

KP: Well, then 800 dollars was a lot of money.

AJA: Oh, 800 was a lot of money, yes, and so I have two bachelor's, one from Howard University, A.B. 1927; I graduated cum laude. And 1928, I have a degree from the University of Cincinnati. Then summer sessions, while I was working, I attended Rutgers University, and received my master's in 1938. And, so far as I know--I qualify the statement--so far as I know, I'm the only person of color from the New Brunswick area who has a graduate degree from ... Rutgers at that time, 1938, so.

KP: You are probably right.

AJA: Well, you never know. You know, I was reading recently about Jackie Robinson, and they had been hurling all sorts of accolades in his direction, but somebody wrote a column and said there were colored players who had played in the major league and minor league. ... I got the column somewhere, somewhere back there, so I said, "That's why you have to qualify your statements, you never know, because there's always someone who comes up and says well so and so did so and so." So I qualified my statement. So far as I know, I am the first one of color from the New Brunswick area who got her master's from Rutgers. And, an interesting thing, I was in one class where there were about 200 students, and, the second day, the professor knew my name. [laughter] I always remembered that, I always remembered that.

KP: You mentioned that you were drawn to Washington partly because of the Smithsonian and it being the nation's capital.

AJA: Yes.

KP: What did you think of Washington D.C. in the 1920's, what are your memories of it?

AJA: Well, my memories were you know, mostly around the campus and riding in town [and] what not. I think at that time they had some sort of a system on the trolley line where you could ride out in the suburbs and ride all day on weekends for a nominal fee, and I used to get on the trolley and ride around and see, you know, different places, and, at that time, there was a lot of prejudice in Washington. I remember they didn't want us, they didn't want to wait on us in some of the stores downtown, but a couple of girls went downtown, about my complexion, speaking French and so forth, and they waited on them because they thought they were from Africa. Now, isn't that ridiculous? I mean, there's some things that are so ludicrous it just, well, I won't even speak about it. Just so ludicrous, it's just ridiculous. So many foolish little things that people do, that to me are-- we're only here a short time and then we go off to seed, and we don't take a penny with us. People are scratching and grabbing and biting and so forth, to get a whole lot of money and then, when you close your eyes in death, and then you leave it all here.

KP: Were you disappointed at how segregated the capital was?

AJA: I was disappointed, and I'm still disappointed. I'm disappointed. I think one of the things that upset me so was that they had all of these beautiful buildings and then, within a stone's throw, you looked out your window and saw all this poverty, and ... I couldn't see how people who had means could stand to see people around them living like that. I didn't expect them to, you know, build a mansion or anything like that, but I would have thought they would have tried ... to do something. I think that discouraged me more than anything, and I'm still wondering how Washington can exist in a situation like that.

KP: In going to college, did you plan on becoming a teacher, or did you think you might try another career?

AJA: Well, I was more interested in teaching. ... [At] that time, I don't think we had that many careers available. Now you've got the corporate world. I never heard of the "corporate world" until more recent years, and people going into it. My nieces are in it, cousins are in it.

KP: So you really felt like it was only teaching?

AJA: Well, I felt teaching was what I wanted to do. I didn't want to be a nurse or something like that. Of course, there were nurses. Freedmen's Hospital was in Washington at that time and ... some of my friends became pharmacists, nurses, and so forth, but I always felt that I liked to teach.

KP: What was the social life like at Howard when you were there? Because you mentioned that you had some very wealthy classmates.

AJA: Very wealthy ... [classmates]. Well, we had a number of things. ... Of course, they had sororities and fraternities and social clubs, and we had some girls who were going to start a Blue Veins Society. If you looked at the veins in your hands and you could see them, you could join the group. In other words, you had to be fair to see the veins in your hands. Well, the dean

broke that up in nothing flat. But, I remember that, because it was so ridiculous, the girls who were trying to start it were not that fair that they needed to start a Blue Veins Society, so that was out.

KP: Did you see the student body fragment? It sounds like one of the divisions of the student body was light skinned and darker skinned? Was that the case?

AJA: There was some of that, but ... the Dean, Lucy Slowe kind of kept things pretty well leveled off, so there wasn't too much of that. But there was definitely, ... if you were fair, you definitely had some better opportunities than some of the darker ones, but it didn't rate where your marks were concerned because there were a lot of people who were outstanding students who graduated *summa cum* and *magna cum laude* who were darker than I am and all, but ... they did their work, and they got the grades. But, those who had color really were able to get further many times than those who were of a darker hue.

KP: You mentioned the Blue Veins Sorority.

AJA: Blue Veins Society.

KP: What about the fraternities and sororities? Were there fraternities that were all light skinned?

AJA: No, they weren't that way, but it was more or less who you knew. ... If you knew, if you had connections and what not, that all counted as it does today. It's many times, in many things, it's who you know. So, if you don't know anyone, sometimes ... you're just left out in the cold, but you get there just the same.

ES: What was the intellectual climate like at Howard? Were you involved in the Women's League or the National Urban League?

AJA: Well at that time, not so much that, but they were active in the YWCA and language clubs and things like that. The NAACP and things like that; Urban League came later because I used to work for the Urban League, but that was quite a few years after that. But at that time it was more the YWCA and Christian groups and things like that.

KP: What clubs and organizations did you join?

AJA: Well I didn't belong to many because I didn't have the connections per se, but I was active with the Y and some religious clubs. I always liked to go to chapel, and that's one of the things I miss today, the chapel hours that they used to have on Sunday afternoons. I really enjoyed them, and the choir and things like that. ...

KP: Growing up, and at Howard, what did you think of some of the black intellectuals? I guess, starting with Booker T. Washington, what was your attitude and the attitude of those you knew towards Booker T. Washington?

AJA: Well, my attitude, there was always quite a bit of discussion between Booker T. Washington and, oh Lord who's that other one?

KP: W.E.B. Dubois.

AJA: W. Dubois, because Dubois wanted to educate the people highly and Booker T. Washington was of the mind to put your buckets down where you are and then build yourself up. Well, I thought, in a way, Booker T. had more sense than Dubois, because if you've been in slavery for years and years and haven't done anything beyond that, how are you going to suddenly jump from that into professional work without something in between. So I could see Booker T. Washington's idea, putting your buckets down and prove yourself there, and then go into the higher things, but a lot of people didn't feel that way and there's still quite a few. People discuss it to this day, which you should do. But if you aren't prepared, you've got to get prepared, I feel, before you're ready to launch into something, but some people want to just, well, we haven't had this, I want it N-O-W, now! And you can't always get it now; you're just not always prepared for it so, ... we had those discussions and what not and we had a lot of ...

KP: Sounds like you had some real long discussions.

AJA: Oh yes, we had long discussions. I stayed in a dormitory in the years I was there and I enjoyed it. It was, well, as I said, an experience. My roommates-- I had one roommate who was a minister's daughter from Cleveland, and that was where, I shouldn't say this, but that was where I found out that ministers' children, like everyone else, would do anything they were big enough to do. [laughter] I shouldn't say that, but that was, that was ...

KP: It sounds like you were a bit surprised.

AJA: ... I was, because I had thought that she would be different, but we got along well. Then I had another roommate who was from La Junta, Colorado, and her people evidently had gone out there with the miners and so forth and had prospered well. And she was an interesting person, but she was kind of sickly. And one of my best friends came from Louisiana. And my boyfriend was from Houston, Texas. And, I guess, if I had, you know, if I had continued there and whatnot, but he dropped out one year to help his brother go to school. Now that's what a lot of the southerners did; you started the school, you were the older you went to school, then maybe you dropped out and worked to help the next one get in school, and the chain went on and on. So you would find families that were no better off financially than we were, where all of them went to college. And, I think ... that was something that I marveled at, that no matter how poor the people were they were interested, they could see the value of education, and they made every effort to see that they were educated. So that was one thing that I observed. Well, what's on your mind?

ES: I was just wondering what you remember about the first black president, Mordecai Johnson, and the difference between the first black president, and having a white one?

AJA: Well, at that time, you know, ... I don't remember noticing too many things, except that we were glad we had one and so forth, and he was very nice. But I don't remember too much about

him other than he was a nice president, and we were glad he was there. And, of course, when we had vesper hours and so forth, he would speak and so forth. We were always glad to hear him speak, and things of that sort. You know, when you try to go back that many years, sometimes it's hard to recall just what you were thinking. You know, its been about, let's see, ... I finished Howard '27, that's 70 years ago, isn't it, yeah, well.

KP: I hope our memories are as good 70 years from now.

AJA: My goodness. I mean a lot of things that I should remember, I guess, I don't, because of time and, all that.

KP: What did you think of Marcus Garvey and his movement in the 1920s? I am sure that also was a hot item of discussion.

AJA: Yeah, well ... I wasn't for going back to Africa, but I could see his point in thinking that, well, if we can't get justice here, maybe we can settle a nation over there. But then, how many of us who are of African descent know where ... we came from, and with all the tribes in Africa, how do you know where you're from? I know my uncle used to say he thinks a lot of the people in the West Indies came from where we came from, but we have no record of it, we don't know, so if you don't know, it's pretty hard to. But ... I'm not a radical person, I don't believe; I'm more of the Urban League type of person. I believe in sitting down with people and trying to work things out in a peaceful manner. I don't like somebody browbeating me to do this, that, and the other, because then I get stubborn, and I don't want to react. But if you, you know, sit down and say, well so and so, let's try this and that, I'll go along with that, but we have, but there's a place for the radicals. I have a niece who swears by Reverend Sharpston, and I feel he's too radical, but she says you've got to have them and I guess she's right, but it's not my, that's not my cup of tea. Paul Robeson tried to do his bit, but you see what happened. They labeled him as a communist and blackballed him for years and years. But I wondered, sometimes, if he had not been colored, if they would have done the same with him when you consider what an outstanding student he was at Rutgers, in athletics and in education and so forth, well.

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE-----

KP: You grew up in New Jersey in the 1920s and 1930s and my stepfather had memories of Klan activity because he was from a Catholic family. I have read that there was a lot of Klan activity in New Jersey in the 1920s.

AJA: Well, I have heard about it, now they say around the Jamesburg area there's ... are a lot of Klans, but I never had any direct experience with any of them. But I, just through hearsay, have said that there are a lot of people in that area who were members of the Klan, so I don't know. I really don't know. And it's just like my aunt's people came from Gouldtown, which is a settlement of colored people. They might have said, well, that's a clan, but it wasn't a clan, it was just a group of people who just decided [that] they wanted to stay together and just mingle among themselves, intermingle. But everyone was not so disposed; but I don't know. ...

KP: You never saw the Ku Klux Klan march in New Brunswick?

AJA: I never seen any signs of the Klan around, and I've heard, but I've never seen any signs of it. But you ... do experience sometimes, I think one thing ... [that provokes] a lot of Afro-Americans ... is, you go someplace, like, you go in a store sometimes, like Macy's or Lord and Taylor's, sometimes you go in and just look. You're just looking around and a clerk will trail you like they're a member of the Secret Service or something. A lot of people don't like that. Well, I don't pay any attention to them. I just say that if I want something, I'll call you or what not, but some resent it; they feel right away, well, they think because I'm colored, they think I'm going to take something. I don't always feel that way, but sometimes they can be annoying. I mean, you go in a store, you don't know what you want sometimes, and you're looking around only to have someone tailing behind, trailing you, you know, just like you were going to-- everyone isn't a thief, ... and some resent it, they really get provoked because of it.

KP: What about the police in New Brunswick, because you have been very involved with the city?

AJA: Well, the police, I know some of them. They're colored ones as well as white, and I know some of them are just like other human beings. They have the wrong attitude; they think they have to approach everyone in ... a rough manner, and that's not always the case. And sometimes ... they rough up the wrong people, and when I say the wrong people, I mean sometimes they rough up some people who are belligerent and [are] just looking for someone. I have a nephew who is a Muslim, and he has a chip on his shoulder, I told him he's just waiting for anyone who comes along to knock it off, be they white, colored or what not. Well, you have some who are like that, then you have others who say, "Give him a chance and find out whether they're really that way off, or not." Now some of the people in town feel that the police are very rough as far as the Afro-Americans are concerned. I think, I personally think it's a two-way street. Some of the Afro-Americans are too belligerent and they, they antagonize you right away, and then just assume [that] because you return that antagonism with antagonism that things are a bit different than they are. I admit some of them are not what they ought to be, but they have an integrated police force, and some of them are all right, so, of course, what they do, I don't know. This Addams case is quite prominent now, and I don't know, I don't know what's involved in it. I think or I heard so much, but I wouldn't repeat the things I've heard, so I don't know. But they ought to have a system of regulating the attitudes and so forth of police personnel. I don't think you should be in that job if you can't keep an open mind about things and not jump to conclusions just because.

I have come in contact with people who, just because I'm colored, assume I'm a certain way, and I resent that, and I would resent it. I know any person who was Jewish, Italian or what not would resent it if you thought they were such and such a thing just because they were Italian, Jewish or what have you. So I resent anyone just assuming that because I'm colored, that I would do certain things. There were certain things I'm like everyone else I was born, brought up properly, and I know the right things to do and I don't want someone to assume, because I'm colored, that I'm going to do such and such a thing. It's ... when you're dealing with community activities and with the public you have to almost, I say, handle the folk with kid gloves because you don't know just where you may touch a sore spot, and I think a lot of these talk shows on the

TV indicate a lot of things that have happened to people who have touched a raw nerve somewhere and things can get way off.

KP: Going back a little bit, back to college again. You graduated from Howard and your professor had written a very good recommendation for you to get a fellowship to go to Cincinnati, the University of Cincinnati. What were the differences between Cincinnati and Howard?

AJA: Well, Cincinnati, I was just there a year and I stayed in a YWCA. I had an interesting year there. I went to the University, I stayed at the Y and I remember I collected, I had collected-- you probably don't remember the time when the *Ladies Home Journal* used to publish prints of masterpiece drawings and so forth. Well, that was before your time. Well, ... I had a collection of them and a teacher that I took some practice teaching under liked the pictures, so she claimed she lost them. I don't think she lost them at all; I think she, it was just a good collection and she kept it. But I enjoyed my year there. I met some people from the Ohio area. That was another place where they had that public service system where you could ride on weekends, all day for a small fee, and I used to ride around, see all the sections around Cincinnati. And I enjoyed it. It was a year-- I enjoyed my year there. It was a busy year, but I guess I wouldn't take anything for it, but it was an interesting year.

KP: Where did you get your first job after graduating?

AJA: The first job I got after graduation was at Parmele Training School in Parmele, North Carolina. That was a job that I got through the American Missionary Association, and I think when I wrote to Howard and different places, they suggested that I write to the American Missionary Association. ... I had been interviewed before by a minister or so. An outstanding minister in the New York area had interviewed me, and I think of today, of sexual ... harassment. I went to see him about a job, and he propositioned me. So I said that I'd never get a job that way. So he wanted to know ... how'd I think a lot of the teachers got their job. I said, "Well I don't know how they got their job." But I said, "I'll never get one that way." And I remember coming home, and I was bitterly disappointed, almost in tears until ... [I told] my aunt about it. Well, she said she thought it was a good experience for me, because then I would know some of the things I'd be confronted with when I sought a job.

So, I got a job later, really, through the American Missionary Association. I went to Parmele Training School, which is in North Carolina, and that was where I had this experience with that porter. I got off the train in Rocky Mountain, and I wanted to go to the women's room and so I saw then what I had to do. And this Parmele Training School was located in a country town, and we used to have to go to a store to buy things, you know, a country store and what not and so the store owner said to me one day, "Where are you from?" I said, "Well, I'm from New Jersey." ... He said, "I thought you were a bloomin' Yankee." [Laughter] Well, I never forgot it, I mean, it's funny how some things stick with you. Well, that was one of the things I remembered, "I thought you were a bloomin' Yankee."

Then I taught at Brick Junior College which was in Bricks, North Carolina, and there ... I taught student teachers, and taught a course in children's literature and something else, and then I taught

also at, and, oh Lord, I can't think of the last one-- Dorchester Academy, ... Macintosh, Georgia. I taught the grammar grades there, and then some of the students that I had there later fought in the Second World War and were mustered out of the service at Camp Kilmer and resided later in New Brunswick, and joined Mount Zion A.M.E. Church.

KP: Really?

AJA: Right.

KP: How many? Do you remember any of them?

AJA: I remember all of those. They were the Morrisons; they were a very prosperous farm family that was near the school. I remember, also, at Dorchester Academy there was a man named Quarterman who couldn't read or write, but you couldn't beat him with anything, and he had all sorts of money. He was a farmer, but he couldn't read or write, but he was very intelligent and so forth. And this was a place where I saw a lot of boys and girls who came to school from the kindergarten up, had to pay for everything, even pencils, paper, and all of that. And I thought of how the children up here wasted their supplies and so forth, and the children there had to work for everything, and how they had a vision of education and all inspired to go to school and be, and up here all some of them wanted to do was get out and work in industry and thought that was all there was to life, that's where the big money was. It's interesting, you know, to compare the way the attitudes of a lot of people and to see how they feel about things. Of course, if you've never experienced it, that's different, but if you have it's an eye opener. Course things, I don't like to compare them with today because things are so different. You have so much more to work with, I mean when you think of ... [the internet], ... I don't know a thing about it, but it sounds to me, like it's a little too much. A little too much.

KP: We have to arrange a demonstration for you.

AJA: I think from what I hear about it, it's too personal. And ... it might be detrimental in some respects, I don't know, I won't touch that, I'll leave that for my nieces and nephews.

KP: How long did you stay in the South? It sounds like you were there for a number of years?

AJA: I was there for a number of years, for ... between eight and ten years or something like that, and then my aunt got sick around, let's see, oh in her 70s or somewhere around there. My aunt got sick and I came home to take care of her. And I was taking care of her for seventeen months when she died, and it was in that period, after that, that World War II came along, and I'd have to look at my years and so forth. World War II came along and I worked at the Raritan Arsenal as a completion clerk. That's when I was the Air Warden. And, of course, the Air Warden, I think that hat seemed to strike everyone's eye, so forth, when they went up to the Senior Center and the showcase it was showing a lot of old relics, old gas stoves and ice tongs, and so forth, and they saw this Air Warden hat and they wanted to know whose was that. Well, it belonged to me, so that's how you saw me in the *Targum*. So ... you know, I did my bit during the war, being an Air Warden and what not, when everything was rationed, what not.

KP: Going back to your teaching in the South, you mention it was very obvious how much you had up in the North in the public schools in terms of resources and so forth. What was the most difficult about living in the South? I mean, the South was very segregated when you were teaching down there.

AJA: Well the segregation bothered me, but ... since I was in a school setting where we were on a campus, and you stayed in your rooms, everyone with the little pittance that you got in the way of pay, 800 dollars a year, with your transportation to and from the school, that was what you got. And then out of this 800 dollars you were supposed to have a student come and clean your room and do little errands for you so they might get some spending change. [laughter] So that was an experience, but it was nice.

KP: Were you able to vote in the South? Did you try to vote?

AJA: No, I never tried to vote down there.

KP: Because you had voted, had you voted up North?

AJA: Yeah, I voted here, but I never bothered down there. I got away from there as fast as I could. I mean, the school, I met some nice people there, and I still have friends from there but, not for me.

KP: It sounds like you took a job in the South mainly because it there was a job there.

AJA: That's right, I did, because I couldn't get a job around here, and I wanted to get a job, and I wanted to use my education. Then I thought, too, well, I might as well go someplace new, and see what it's like there, and so I did. So, I wouldn't take anything for my experiences there, because it was different. And I saw how a lot of people were so poor, they lived out in the country and a lot of them didn't even have bathrooms, didn't even have outhouses, just went out in the fields. And yet, with all of those hindrances and having to walk to school and all, Christmastide they had to do their baking in the school lunch room, dining hall, kitchen, what not, because they didn't have facilities at home. All they had for heating were the fireplaces. But, remarkably, these people lived in houses that were, much of the wallpaper was the pages from the Sears-Roebuck catalogs, but the floors and the grounds were so clean you could eat off them. And when I see how the people up here throw paper down on the street, you know, I think of that. The people there, with the little bit they had, they kept it clean, and they aspired to do things, and they did. With their few pennies they sent others to school, and they really, they had the vision and many up here did not have it at that time, but a lot of them have it now. But I don't like to compare it with then, because that was so many years ago.

KP: Growing up, your parents and your aunt and uncle-- I guess the first question is how did your aunt feel about women's suffrage?

AJA: Oh, she believes in it.

KP: She was old enough --

AJA: Yeah she believes in it.

KP: She was for suffrage.

AJA: She believes in it, yeah, and she was ... interested in that and interested in politics. At that time she was a Republican, of course.

KP: Was she active in any clubs, any organizations?

AJA: Yeah, she was active in the Red Cross. Her picture is in that book, that blue book, with the first group that formed a Red Cross chapter. I think that was in the '20s; there's pictures of the Red Cross in there. She was in that group and she formed a black history club so that students coming out of high school and college would be honored or recognized for their achievement. She was in a lot of things, ... she was a very active person. ...

KP: Did your aunt or your mother, did they do any war work during World War I?

AJA: Let's see, well, my aunt was in the Red Cross.

KP: So that was during the war?

AJA: Wait a minute, was that near I or II? I think she was in World War I. I think it was I, ... those wars ran together pretty close, didn't they? ... Oh yeah, Red Cross Unit of Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, World War I. Now where is ... Gertrude Titus ... here she is right here, World War I.

KP: Your aunt was a Republican. Was the rest of your family Republicans?

AJA: For a while, they used to think that was the party of Lincoln, but we changed quite a bit, most of us are Democrats now. We feel that the Republicans are not in sympathy with the average man as much as the Democrats, but I think it's nip and tuck now, whoever has the most bucks seems to be the one. [laughter] There isn't much difference, that much difference, between them now. Oh, I shouldn't try to, that's just my opinion.

KP: Oh that's okay. When did you make the switch from the Republican to Democratic party?

AJA: Oh, I did long time ago.

KP: Was it in the Roosevelt years?

AJA: It could have been back in his time because we thought a great deal of Roosevelt and what not, but the Republicans seem to have always been more or less favoring the people who had, not the have-nots, and, since we were one of the have-nots, we sort of went along with the Democrats. And Roosevelt had, but he had sympathy with us, who didn't have, so. Did you see

the write-up recently, because somebody was fussing because they didn't show a picture of Roosevelt in a wheelchair?

KP: Yes.

AJA: Now what difference does that make? I mean, that people who were disabled felt he should have been shown in a wheelchair; well, what difference does it make? We know he had, couldn't get around, so ... do you have to have visible representation of everything?

KP: Well, I'm just curious. In the 1930s were you aware of FDR's handicap?

AJA: I was aware of how handicapped he was because I remember I was teaching down in north Georgia, and there was a girl there who was crippled, and some of the children were making fun of her, and I said to them, ... "Do you know the President of the United States is crippled, and look at what he has done?" So I said, "No matter how crippled you may be, ... you can still be, what you want to be, if you tried." But, you know, children are the cruelest persons in the world for other children who have defects and so, it's sad, but true. And it takes a lot of doing on the part of parents to really bring them up and teach them to appreciate persons for their worth. But a lot ... has been done in more recent years to accept those with disabilities because I can remember, when coming up, anyone who had a retarded child usually kept them in the closet and hid them from view and everything like that. But now they bring them out and let them perform and do everything they're capable of doing. But it wasn't that way when I came up; you felt that it was a disgrace. It's not your fault, I mean, anything can happen to anyone, sad, but true.

KP: You mentioned you were glad to come back North?

AJA: Well, for money, for one thing. Is that a good reason? [Laughter]

KP: And was the Raritan Arsenal your first job, or did you teach before the Raritan Arsenal?

AJA: Oh, I had little summer jobs, you know, like running an elevator or something like that, or I worked in an ice cream/coffee shop or something on George Street where they served ice cream, so forth; little jobs like that. But that was [my] first job, I guess, that I had of any length and what not.

KP: Did it frustrate you that you had a B.A., a full B.A., not just a normal school education, and you could not get a job teaching?

AJA: It did, yes, it did. And it frustrated me to think I had to go away from home, whether I wanted to or not, when one of my classmates who wasn't as good a student as I was, was teaching in one of the schools here. Now that bugged me at the time, but then I got over it. She taught here and she taught for years, and I felt I could have done as good a job as she did, if not a better one, but I was colored, so. And, in later years, a nephew of mine graduated from Boston University with a music major, and they wouldn't hire him here in New Brunswick. He wanted to teach music in the elementary grades. The superintendent said he didn't think the children were ready for a male teacher in the elementary grades.

KP: What year was that?

AJA: Let's see, my nephew is some years, naturally, younger than I am. I guess, it must have been about the '70's or somewhere thereabouts. Somewhere thereabouts I may be wrong with the time, my nephew's a bit younger, than I am. But that was such a foolish excuse, you know, "The children aren't ready." Now the children have parents, so what would it matter whether it was a mother or a father or what not teaching them? Well, you can write a book about some of the excuses they give you for not hiring you.

KP: Did you apply to the New Brunswick schools?

AJA: I think I did at the time. There was nothing available.

KP: And they just said nothing?

AJA: Nothing available.

KP: When did you start working at the Raritan Arsenal?

AJA: Well, that was during the war. Somewhere, no I can't, was that in the '40's?

KP: Was it before Pearl Harbor or after Pearl Harbor?

AJA: Before Pearl Harbor; somewhere in through there.

KP: Do you remember how you learned about the job?

AJA: Well, I guess they were advertising everywhere and, you know, and everyone wanted to do his or her bit at the time. If you weren't going into the service, you wanted to do something, so I got a job at the Arsenal. Some of my friends were there working in the Arsenal, and so ... I went there, too. And I was a completion clerk. It wasn't hard, but the thing I thought of then, and I think of it now, what a waste it was. If someone at a camp wanted a screw, you had to write a whole requisition for, type up a whole paper with one little screw item on it, and mail it out. That was your government, and I thought, "No wonder, no wonder we're in such debt." Yes, indeed, send out one screw and ...

KP: And you had to do a whole form.

AJA: Whole form and everything.

KP: How many other black workers were at the Arsenal?

AJA: Oh, there were quite a few.

KP: How many were in your department?

AJA: I don't know, I would just say a few. We were not in the majority, but we were in a goodly number and that's about all I can say. It's been such a long time ago.

KP: What did you think of the NAACP's call for double victory in World War II? Did you think the war might improve conditions?

AJA: Well, I hoped it would. I had hoped any war would improve conditions all over, although it doesn't seem to. In the Far East, ... I don't understand those people, what they're fighting for is beyond me. And the folks in Albania, I don't know what's the matter with them, what do they want. And when I think of the Holy Land, and people going over here to visit the Holy Land and then you read about the fighting over there between the people of Jordanians and the Israelites. So ... you say, "What is wrong with them, what do they want?" Then you've got your people like (-----?) who have all this money, and have these lavish homes with gold chandeliers and all of that and then people suffering around them who are starving almost. Man's inhumanity to man, well, I mean, it's disgusting.

KP: You had worked in the Raritan Arsenal, but you had some family members who were in the military?

AJA: Yes, I had brothers who were in the service who went overseas and so forth.

KP: Where did your brothers serve?

AJA: Where did they serve? Well they were over in Germany and what not-- European theater. ... Let's see, Tom, Leon, Jimmy-- three brothers were in the service, nephews were in the service.

KP: And did you write to them often?

AJA: Oh yes, I wrote. I was a great writer, I came across one of the letters recently that I had written my brother. I have always been the one who communicates. My sister does too, my younger sister, but the older one was the one who would wait 'til the last minute, before he came home, to write you, so you couldn't get after her for not writing. [laughter] Well.

KP: I guess one of the questions that we've asked a number of people is what was the impact of Camp Kilmer on the area, and you saw the impact in both world wars?

AJA: Well, Camp Kilmer really had a great impact on the area because ... I had friends who worked in the PX and like that, and a lot of the people, as I said, liked it in the area and settled in the New Brunswick area after Camp Kilmer. We had a number of students who did that, and, of course, you had the USO in town, and I belonged to church groups that used to go to USO weekly and entertain the fellows, and like that, so. And we used to see the fellows downtown. Those were the days when you used to go downtown nights and not have to worry, but you can't do that now.

KP: You did not worry, I mean there were a lot of single men.

AJA: Oh yeah.

KP: There were not any problems?

AJA: No, no problems. No, there were no problems. They were, I mean, they were congenial, they would mind their business and what not. We didn't have any problems with them.

KP: At the USO was it segregated? Would you only entertain black troops?

AJA: It wasn't segregated, but mostly the black ones went there. You know, there is a tendency, I guess, even here at Rutgers, you're not segregated, but there's a tendency for likes to go with likes because they feel that they have more in common, ... which is no way to integrate, because you'll never integrate if you always go with your own group. That's one reason why I belong to the Senior Center in New Brunswick, which is integrated on Huntington Street. Now, there are a couple of black seniors groups around, but I don't belong to them because we have a colored church, which is enough. But if you want to integrate, you got to get where people are to integrate, otherwise you can't do it. So, I found out that in recent years, when I come to affairs at Rutgers, there is a tendency--I don't know whether it is so now--but there is a tendency for the Afro-Americans to gather together and I don't know whether the Jewish gather together, but that doesn't develop integration at all.

KP: It sounds like you have always embraced integration?

AJA: Well, I do feel that, after all, we're here for one purpose. You're born to be exposed to ... people who can get along well together, and when you're dead, you're gone and that's it. So why not enjoy yourself here? And just don't, you know, when I meet Eve, I don't have to say, well, she's white I can't do so and so. If she's a nice person, we have something in common; let's go on, you know, that's my feeling. I mean there's too much of, we have too many segregated churches and what not. They say Sunday morning is the most segregated time in the country--you have your separate churches. But more churches are integrating and getting away from, you know, one idea. But life is too short to worry about it. I mean, when you lay down and die who cares what you were and what not.

KP: At the Raritan Arsenal did you have any contact with any prisoners of war that were working there?

AJA: No.

KP: It sounds like your typical day at the Arsenal was, in a sense, doing paperwork.

AJA: Yes, it was mainly paperwork, there and out, there and out, what not, and Air Warden in the neighborhood, you know, do your bit there, and food was rationed and people got it sometimes, but always people who always get what they shouldn't get. There were those who did.

KP: How prevalent was the black market in New Brunswick? Was there a thriving black market?

AJA: I don't know too much about that. I wasn't aware of too much of it, but there was something I knew there was ...

KP: You knew there were people who were doing it.

AJA: There were people who were getting things who had no business to get them. I guess like food stamps and things like that. Today, I imagine there are people who get them who don't need them.

KP: When did you become active in the Urban League?

AJA: Oh golly, when did I become active? Let me look in here, I can't remember all these things. I began working with them after World War II. ... In June of 1946, I joined the staff of the New Brunswick Urban League as assistant to the executive director.

ES: Were Rutgers and New Jersey College involved with the Urban League at that point?

AJA: Not that much, no. The Jewish women, the League of Women Voters and the YWCA were involved with the formation of the New Brunswick Urban League, locally, and Rutgers and so forth wasn't particularly involved in it per se. Paul Robeson gave a concert and I think they realized about 1500 dollars from that benefit concert. That's the funding that started the New Brunswick Urban League in 1946.

KP: So you were part of the beginning of the Urban League?

AJA: Yes I was. Yep I was Mr. Shivery's assistant, and then, when Mr. Chandler became executive, I was his assistant and then, later, I left there and went to the employment office as a counselor, and I retired from there in '70, '72, so I've been out quite a while, '72, '82, '92, 25 years. ...

KP: You, also in 1946, you got married.

AJA: Yes, I did. I met my husband through a girl I used to teach-- a girl at Brick Junior College, and she moved up to New York before or during the war, and she and her husband were there and they were matchmakers, I wasn't married, and my husband was not married. My husband was a friend of her husband, so she said, ... "I have a good friend who's not married in New Jersey." And so we met, and we had a courtship of a year and got married. He had been engaged to a teacher who lives in Atlantic City and worked there, and she asked ... him one time, what did he think of her, and he said, "Oh, you'll do." She said, "Oh, you'll do." So that ended that. He was through there, for all he was, he'll do. He just dropped her. So, see how you have to be very careful. Women are very sensitive about things; men are too because when she told him that, "you'll do," boy, that was it. So we had a courtship of about a year and got married. We were both really, technically, beyond the marriage age, because I was 40 when we got

married and he was 50. ... But we did very well. He's been dead now for, let's see, what is it, nineteen years now. But we had quite a few years together, so we did well. I had a sense of humor, so that's what made it last, because if I had been, you know, rather otherwise, I don't know whether it would have or not. [laughter] But you have to have a sense of humor in life or you just won't make it, as I see it.

KP: You mentioned that you had a boyfriend at Howard. How much was it a conscious decision not to get married?

AJA: Well, at that time, what happened was, he was in one of those situations where he was the oldest son and he was supposed to get out and work and help the next son in school. So, of course, with his living in Houston and me in New Brunswick, we were separated. So in the interim I went elsewhere, and he had to go home and help this other ... brother go to school. Since he helped his sibling in school, we lost touch with each other and that was that, but he was a very nice person.

KP: So it sounds like he was quite a love of yours.

AJA: Oh, he was a very nice person. We were quiet, they used to kid us 'cause we were both rather quiet, conservative and all, but it was interesting, very nice.

KP: Were you surprised you got married at 40?

AJA: I was surprised, I didn't, I wasn't even, ... well really ... hadn't mattered to me, one way or the other, much.

KP: One of the things that intrigued me was that your late husband served in the English Army.

AJA: Yes, he did.

KP: And he was also from the Islands. What did he ever say about his experiences in the English Army?

AJA: Well, he had experiences which were, I guess, somewhat similar to ours, some bits of prejudice and so forth, but ... he didn't have to serve too hard or too long or what not. ... I had a picture of him in uniform, but I gave it to one of his nieces so they might have it, but he was quite a person. ... He originally, he went to Morgan State College in Baltimore and he originally wanted to become a dentist, but his funds ran out, so he, as many West Indians were, he had a trade to fall back on. So he was a union carpenter, so ... he was able to make it that way, as a union carpenter. But he originally wanted to be a dentist, but his funds ran out, he didn't have anyone to help him, so that's what happened. So when I met him, he was working in a shipyard with my girlfriend's husband, and that's how we met, and we went together for about a year and got married, and, [of] course, everyone thought we wouldn't make it, but we did for about 30 years before he passed away. So you never know.
[laughter]

KP: What shipyard did he work in?

AJA: Somewhere around Elizabeth, Elizabeth Port or somewhere in that area.

KP: Going back to the Urban League, what were the initial goals of the Urban League?

AJA: Well, the Urban League, originally, at that time, there were a lot of things that were not being done for people of color. There were a lot of people who needed housing, coming out of the war and what not, a lot of people needed housing, a lot of people needed jobs, a lot of people needed education, so forth. So the Urban League was instrumental in getting the first colored person hired at J[ohnson] & J[ohnson].

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

KP: This continues an interview with Mrs. Alice Jennings Archibald on March 14, 1997 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler

ES: And Eve Snyder.

KP: You were saying that one of the goals was to hire the first black person at J & J.

AJA: At J & J--I don't remember the exact year; I've got it in this pamphlet, but I can't get the year right now--but he was the first black (-----?) ... at J & J. We were interested in getting people in jobs, helping children to get more education, encouraging them to get more education. We were helping people get housing. At that time Major Dries was at the Salvation Army, and he'd work closely with the Urban League helping people get housing who wanted to settle here from Camp Kilmer and other places. And I worked a lot with young people and encouraging them to go to school and so forth and so on.

KP: What was some of the obstacles that the Urban League faced? How tough were things?

AJA: Money, for one thing. Money was an obstacle, but we were very fortunate in having a very liberal board. The board members were the type who really wanted to work ... and integrate, and we had a lovely board. ... I don't know anyone who would want a board that was any more liberal in anything than that Urban League board. They were all fine people and [there] were ministers and businessmen and ordinary citizens among them, men and women. They were really a fine group. I don't know of any group that I've ever worked with that I appreciate any more than I did that board. And, as assistant, I did what an assistant does, which was assist. When the executive couldn't function, I did. You know, you did all of the other work that came along, so I was assistant to Eric B. Chandler after Shivery left.

KP: Historians have been looking back at how segregated housing was, and you mentioned that you grew up in an integrated neighborhood.

AJA: Yes.

KP: Did it ever disturb you how residentially segregated New Brunswick became?

AJA: It did bother me in later years. Now there ... [were] certain areas, like a block down from me on Handy Street, a few blocks through there that seemed [to have] a preponderance of colored people living in those blocks, but they had nice homes, average homes and what not. But, I think in recent years, what has bothered me a lot is, they had a tendency to put them all in certain areas, and then they didn't keep up the places. And ... what bothers me now, is I live on a block where, when I used to know everyone on the block, I only know about two families on the block. People move in and out so much, you don't know them, and there [are] four houses that are boarded up that should be repaired and put into service. ... I've mentioned it to the mayor, but, of course, he can't do it by himself. You've got a lot of absentee landlords who live in Florida or California and places, have these houses, ... and just don't care about them, or, if they rent them, ... they don't care who they rent them to, and they don't take care of the property, and it makes the neighborhood go down and that's hard. ... If I want to sell my house, if I want to leave it to my nieces and nephews, I don't know if it would be worth the value that it's assessed [for], because of the way the neighborhood is going down. So that's disturbing to me, but what can you do about it?

KP: What about public housing and the Urban League?

AJA: Well, the Urban League was instrumental in getting some of the first public housing here, Robeson Village which was made up of-- I forget how many. It was established during the Urban League days. They were instrumental in a lot of things, housing, jobs and so forth, and making people aware that we were here as well as others, and that we were going to do our part.

KP: You mentioned J & J employment. What about employment in terms of public schools and the civil service?

AJA: Well, we were instrumental in getting the first colored teacher in the schools, that teacher of Health Education and Physical Education in one of the schools. We were instrumental in ... doing that. ... We established a lot of firsts. We were the first ones to get girls to stay in the dormitories at Douglass College. Prior to our helping Emma Andrews and Evelyn Sermons stay in the dormitories there, no other colored had stayed in the dormitories. We didn't want a precedent to be established that maybe no colored were going to be there, so we helped underwrite their staying there, so that there wouldn't be a bad habit established, a precedent that we wouldn't want to continue. So the Urban League was right in there plugging all along for all of them. But, here again, like many agencies in the United Fund, we didn't have much funds to work with.

KP: What about the relationship of the New Brunswick community with Rutgers and Douglass?

AJA: What had always bothered me I told people--now maybe this is my personal opinion--I always felt that Princeton University had a great influence on the people in the community, people of color, as well as the others. But in New Brunswick, Rutgers had no impact, it was J & J and all these, Squibb and so forth around here. They seemed to have the influence. It's only in

recent years that I really can see the influence of Rutgers on the community, but even when I graduated, there wasn't that much; it was J & J and the factories. We were a factory town; Princeton was the college town, and ... that was my reaction. Now that might not have ... been yours, if you had been here, or someone else, but that was my reaction.

KP: I'm curious. The name General Johnson, comes up a lot. A lot of people who are from this area talk about General Johnson and how good J & J was.

AJA: That's right. Well, they had the money. People came here, and they worked there. The Hungarians came here, settled here, got jobs at J & J and practically built it up. Then you had Squibb, you had the rubber factory, you had Rickitt's Blueing, United States Rubber. We had a lot of big plants here and people worked in there, and we had young people tell us; "Why, why work with the Urban League, why don't you come here and work with us in industry?" They were making 92 dollars a week or something, and I don't think the executive was getting that much, so, this is what you encountered. People did not see the value of education a number of years ago, but, [of] course, now they do, but now with all this downsizing and everything, I feel sorry for you, going out today. What's your classification, are you a senior?

ES: I'm a junior.

AJA: A junior.

ES: History and English.

AJA: Are you planning to do graduate work right after?

ES: Yes.

AJA: You are?

ES: Well, maybe not right after, maybe I'll get a job first.

AJA: Well now, I'm just thinking about getting a job today, with all the hazards that you have. I mean, you get a job, pays excellent money and so forth, you get a home, get married, get a home, mortgage to pay and so forth. Then suddenly they drop the thing on you. "We're discontinuing this or we're combining with someone else." I mean, ... it's terrible; I don't know what you can do now. Someone was saying in investment, "If you put 20 dollars a month away for so many years, and invest it properly, what you'll have ..." Well, for the average person with the amount of money you had, you couldn't afford to put twenty dollars a month away. If an emergency arose, you had to use that twenty dollars. So, where are you going? And ... that's a basic fact. You just didn't have the money, period. And when you think when I first worked, I got 800 dollars a year, I got my transportation to North Carolina and back, North Carolina and back, and that was it. So you had to make it on 800 dollars, plus help a student. That's right, and so forth, but you did it, somehow.

KP: I have interviewed a number of people regarding the regionalization of the New Brunswick schools, because New Brunswick used to be a regional school for Milltown and other towns.

AJA: Yes, they used to come from those areas.

KP: And there was a real debate over whether New Brunswick should remain a regional school or whether Milltown and East Brunswick should be allowed to set up a high school. Do you remember any of the debates from the 1970s?

AJA: No, I don't remember any debate from there. I couldn't see where it made much difference because most of these smaller communities--of course, they're larger now--but at ... that time, they weren't large enough to really have need of a high school. They could send them here, no problem, as I saw it at that time.

KP: There was a big debate-- a lot of people said that basically it was segregating the school system when these other schools created their own high schools. Do you remember any discussion at the Urban League over this issue?

AJA: No, I don't remember any discussion back then. What has surprised me, I never thought I would see the day when New Brunswick High School was practically Afro-American and Hispanic. I never in a thousand years would have dreamt that it would be like that, ever. And it has shocked me, but so be it.

KP: Does it surprise you in the fact that you were so few in your day?

AJA: It did surprise me, yes because I was the only one in my class, I guess, I ... [didn't] know there weren't that many and it, yes, it surprises me, and I wonder if the population is primarily white in New Brunswick or larger than the colored. Where are the white students going? A lot of colored are going to the Catholic schools and some of them are going to Rutgers Prep, but then when ... I've been up to the high school on several occasions in recent years, and the student body is practically 90 percent colored and that's a shock to me. I never would've dreamed of that in my day, but that's the way it is.

KP: Were there any employers that you remember who were particularly stubborn in your efforts to try to get employers to hire more equitably?

AJA: Not too many, because of the time, as I said, we had a very liberal board, and we had some good people on there who were liberal enough ... and had connections enough that they could help, you know. This is where it comes in that if you know someone who knows someone, that helps. That's a fact of life, know someone who knows someone.

KP: New Brunswick has changed quite a bit in the last few years, even since I got here in 1983.

AJA: Oh, you did. Where were you before?

KP: I did my undergraduate work at Drew University and then I ...

AJA: At Drew, my minister went there.

KP: Oh, okay.

AJA: Theological Seminary.

KP: Yes.

AJA: Reverend Henry A. Hildebrand is my pastor, and he went there.

KP: And then I came here, and the downtown has changed, even since I've been here, has changed quite a bit. What has changed the most for you? You mentioned the high school has changed quite a bit.

AJA: Well the downtown has changed a lot, too. I guess a lot is due to the people and what not, because in coming up, for years, we all loved to go downtown on Thursday nights. Everyone you knew went downtown, you'd see them, you'd walk downtown and all. But the streets are not safe anymore, and then, what I don't like about downtown is, we don't have that many stores there to go into, if you have to wait for buses--and I travel by bus--other than Barracini's where I go in and look at their cards and buy cards, and Rich's Drugs. There's nothing on George Street, but some restaurants and there's hardly any other place to go into. Now that's what I miss. There was a time when, if you wanted to kill time, you even had a decent ten-cent store to go into. We don't even have that now, and there's nothing else. You're down there waiting, waiting, waiting, for the buses or what not and nothing to go into. And we miss that; the mayor knows that because ... we have birthday breakfasts every month at our senior center, and you have a chance to meet the mayor. We have forums with the mayor, when you sit down, talk about it. He knows these problems. But now they're getting ready to put up this four-story building on a block downtown with offices for Rutgers staff and maybe stores on the lower level. Well, ... I guess the day of the small merchant is over.

If you aren't Wal-Mart or K-mart or one of those big chains, you're out of luck, you know, ... and we poor folk, like myself, on fixed income, can't afford to go to these high-price stores you got to go to. I know when supermarkets were just starting here, the Big Bear and others, local stores would say, "Well, you don't shop with us anymore." Well, it's a matter of price, your money, your pocketbook tells you what you can or can't do and these smaller stores can't always lower their prices and make them right for people who have limited budgets, so, their businesses just went out the window. But we used to have some nice, nice lovely stores, Spadaro's and Schepp's and so forth, Susie's, I went to those places all the time, but as time went on, the supermarkets came in. You could do better at the supermarkets so your dollar went further and you went there. Now the supermarkets are trying to knock each other down, and if it isn't them it's Burger King, Wendy's, McDonald's, oh boy!

KP: You've been retired for a while.

AJA: Yes, I have.

KP: What have you thought about being old in American society? What are some of the advantages and what are some of the disadvantages? It's sort of a broad question, but ...

AJA: [laughter] It is a broad one. Well, one of the advantages of being old is, I don't have any grandchildren, but I have great-nieces and great-nephews. One advantage is, you can see them grow up and see them attain certain positions, and sit back and rock and say, those are my people, and you can enjoy that. But, on the other hand, I get the feeling that a lot of young people think too many people are living too old nowadays, and how are you going to take care of them? And then, as an older person living on a fixed income based on what I made when I retired in '72, it's very hard out here. ... It leaves you in a place where your running from paycheck to paycheck and, if an emergency arises, if we don't have Medicare and ... you're just in bad shape, in bad shape. But people are living longer, seemingly, and it's all right to live longer if you're in good health, but if you're a vegetable, no way, no, or if you're crippled up to the point where you can't get from here to there reasonably well, forget it. (Phone rings)

KP: My answering machine will pick it up.

AJA: Oh my, I see.

KP: I thought I had turned it off all the way.

AJA: Maybe your wife called.

KP: I will call her back.

AJA: Let's see, do you have any children?

KP: Not yet, not yet

AJA: Oh, you're a newlywed?

KP: I got married two years ago. No, actually now almost three years. It'll be three years in August. Well, my wife and I were married not as late as you did, but in our early 30s.

AJA: Was yours a college romance?

KP: No, no, we met after we were introduced by a friend that knew us both. We were also similarly introduced.

AJA: Oh, I see. Well, you're too young to talk about marriage and so forth. What is that?

KP: Oh, it's just my answering machine rewinding. In many ways it sounds like many of the goals you had set out for the Urban League were achieved. What goals do you think were not accomplished? What was the most frustrating part? You mentioned the lack of money; you had a lot of ideas, but ...

AJA: Yes, well, a lack of funds. I think that's one of the biggest problems that most of us have. Irrespective of race or what not, you don't have the money that you'd like to have to do the things you'd like to do. That's one of the biggest things. And, but, of course, in recent years the Urban League now is known as the Civic League of Greater New Brunswick. They do have a building on Throop Avenue, and that's very nice, and Mr. C. Ray Epps is the Executive Director, and they're doing fine things, wonderful things with young people, too. I don't know ... what difficulty they may be having with money, but when you think that the YWCA went out of existence here, it makes you think that something must be remiss or that wouldn't have happened.

KP: You mentioned earlier that you appreciated the need for radicals ...

AJA: Well, you do. I don't think you can't do anything if people are always, you know, the same ideas or something. It's just like, excuse me, you're family, you don't want a yes person all the time or you don't want a no person. You want someone who doesn't agree with you always on everything, but ... I don't like a radical approach because I don't like to be approached that way myself and I feel that a lot of other people like myself who will respond within reason. But I don't want someone saying, "You got to do this." And [they] wave a flag over your head or gun or something to do this or else. Well, then I would probably say or else, and I'd be gone, because ... I just don't like that approach, but you do need that. I don't think in any situation you need just one attitude, you need other approaches as well. Martin Luther King's was a peaceful one, but then, on the other hand, you need Dubois and others who felt like, well we got to get in there. ... But some of the radicals are too radical, the Muslims are too, I don't like their approach at all.

KP: I see you in the 1960s, I don't want to read into it, but I see you as really having some sharp disagreements with a lot of black power activists.

AJA: Well I didn't, I didn't care for their approaches, but I guess they had to do it to get results. ... I can see where you need both, but I'm not one of those who would latch onto the persons who would try to force it upon you. But I guess people won't do the right things; sometimes you have to force them.

KP: Have you ever been frustrated about how intractable racism is in American society?

AJA: Yes I have been. ... I just don't understand why some people feel that they're the favored few and what about the rest of us. I feel, I have a lot of empathy for the American Indians; they're the forgotten people, just like they were never here. They just brushed them under the bushes ... just like they ... didn't exist. And I just don't think that's right. If we're America and we're supposed to be a melting pot and all, they should be included with the others, and I don't see where they're included that much. ... I think something is wrong, because I don't know whether you get what you call a lot of junk mail, but these appeals-- I get so many appeals, I have given my name into where they said send your name so they'll take you off the list, but instead my list has increased. I think ... there are a lot of people who are suffering for things that ought to be taken care of by some agencies that exist. What's ... wrong? I mean, why are so

many in such destitute circumstances that they have to be showering you with, as my sister calls it, junk mail all the time. Some of the appeals are legitimate, but something is wrong, ... radically wrong if you get so many appeals, something is wrong. What do you think about as far as society is concerned? Do you think that they're doing their fair share for the people who need help? Now the folks who are on welfare, I'm one of these who feels that welfare is needed in many instances, but I think if a person is physically able to do something, I think they should do something. But then a union person said to me, "Well, if you have someone like cleaning some trash on the streets that hasn't been cleaned up, you may be taking a job from a union person." Well, that's another point of view. I mean, I think that if people are on welfare and they're as able to work as I am, or more so, they ought to do something for what they get, so they know the value of working. And that's where I said, "Well maybe they could get out." The men could pick up papers on the streets or something." Well, then they said, "The union would be fussing, because they'd be taking a job." Well, it's a vicious circle, you can't win, can't win at all.

KP: You worked with a lot of mayors of New Brunswick. Do you have any memories of the different mayors?

AJA: ... They're all, they've all been good mayors Mayor Lynch and Cahill are very open and so forth, and persons you can talk to well and appreciate what's your point of view and like that. And we have had colored representatives on the ... school board and so forth. There's quite a bit of discussion now about whether to have a board that's elected or one appointed, and I have mixed emotions about that; I don't know. I don't see as it would make that much difference.

KP: Do you think if you had been born today, if you were a young person today, you would still have become a teacher? Do you think you would have done something different?

AJA: Probably, probably would have gone into the corporate world today because that's where the money is. [laughter] I mean, there were no opportunities like that when I came along, and I see these young people working at Colgate, Johnson & Johnson, AT&T and --

KP: It sounds like you think that your nieces and nephews do have, in fact, more opportunities than you.

AJA: They do, they have, and I expect it. And I expect if they marry and have children, their children will have more. That's progress. If they don't have any more than I had, then we haven't progressed. And I'm for progress, definitely for progress.

KP: And I guess one question is that you're still very active in your church, Mount Zion.

AJA: Yes, I am.

KP: And that's always been your church?

AJA: That's always been my church. My family grew up in there and I grew up in there, and I'm disappointed that some of my nieces and nephews have left there to go elsewhere, but that's their choice.

KP: How has Mount Zion fared? It sounds like it's a very tight-knit church that you must feel very much at home there.

AJA: Oh, I do, because I've always been there. I grew up there, was in the cradle roll, so I'll be there from the cradle roll to the grave, so. But we were on Division Street for quite a number of years. We started there 1827. We ... didn't have the big facility we have now, but the place we have ... now is more spacious and all, but I miss the cohesiveness we had on Division Street. ... Well, it's so large now that, when you come out of service, you don't get a chance to see everyone. As the church was before, you could see everyone before you went in and out and what not, but now you see them at a distance and, you know, wave to them and that's it. I guess you think I'm nuts, don't you. [laughter]

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you about?

AJA: ... I can't think of anything. Now she's getting a bang out of this.

KP: It is also her first interview.

AJA: It is.

KP: So she's prepared very thoroughly, but as I tell the students, don't be surprised if all the questions are answered even before you get a chance to ask them. But, Eve did you have any other questions?

ES: Well, I guess, going back, I read about the celebration of 1930 that New Brunswick had, and it just seemed very interesting that it was just this huge festival that took several days. Were you in New Brunswick at that time? Do you remember anything about that?

AJA: What was that?

ES: It was called the celebration of 1930. It was the quartermillennial of settlement of 1680 and the bicentennial of granting the charter for New Brunswick, and there were parades and reenactments and they had what was called the New Brunswick Highway Pageant that lasted for two nights.

AJA: I vaguely remember that, but I don't remember all of it, you know. It's kind of hard to, when you reach my age, it's kind of hard to remember all these things. ... You do the best you can with your memory.

ES: It just seems to me when I was reading about it, that there was much more of a feeling of community in New Brunswick at the time ... than anything that I've ever seen, and that the president was invited and several prime ministers were there. It's just a different vision of New Brunswick than I have.

AJA: Well ... we've had celebrities here, I've seen Kennedy here and different ones and so forth, but I don't remember all of the details of that, so.

KP: It sounds like you might have been in the South at that time.

AJA: I'm not much help on that.

KP: Thank you very much. Unless there's something else that we've forgotten to ask you, and if there are any stories that you remember, just let us know. We can always do a follow up interview. And I hope that, when you have a final transcript, it might be something that your nieces and nephews might enjoy reading.

AJA: They probably would. [laughter]

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Eve Snyder 12/97
Reviewed by G. Kurt Piehler 12/5/97
Edited by Gloria Hesse 12/17/97
Entered by G. Kurt Piehler 12/19/97
Edited by Alice Jennings Archibald 2/12/98
Entered by Eve Snyder 2/13/98