Interviewee: Alphonzo Holland, Sr.
Interviewer: Arlene Ollie
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

Today is October 19, 2006. We are located at the Gainsboro Library.

AO: How are you this morning?
AH: Quite well. How are you?
AO: Just fine. Our first background question is when and where were you born?
AH: Roanoke, Virginia. December 27, 1916.
AO: How long have you lived in Gainsboro?
AH: Gainsboro/Northwest section?
AO: Mm mm.
AH: Roughly off and on all of my life. The only time I spent out of here was when I was in the military. I went in the military in 1943 and returned in 1946. All the other time, I've been in Roanoke.
AO: What streets have you lived on?
AH: Madison Avenue, 8th Street, Staunton Avenue, Grayson Avenue and now on Kershaw Road, Northwest.
AO: Tell me about your parents and your brothers and sisters.
AH: My mother and father – My father was Gus Holland and my mother was Doris Saunders Holland. It was 10 of us children, 6 boys and 4 girls. We had a very, very strong life. We were very, very close. We were members of High Street Baptist Church for quite a few years. My father was a member there. We all went to High Street Baptist Church and so my mother and father passed on and all my brothers and sisters are gone and I'm the only one left out of the 10.
AO: What was your relationship? Youngest, oldest, middle?
AH: Number 4.
AO: From the top?
AH: Number 4 down. Mm mm.
AO: Did you have extended family living nearby?
AH: Yes, I had a brother – When my oldest brother got married, he lived on Rutheford Avenue and he moved over on 8th Avenue – He ran a grocery store on _____ a number of years and he moved up on 8th Avenue in the short part of Gainsboro area. So he's gone on to glory also.
AO: What about aunts and uncles?
AH: They're all gone. See, I'm a young man. I've outlived all the rest of 'em. (laughing)
AO: I'm just curious. Did you have that kind of family support when you were growing up? Did you have aunts and uncles here?
AH: Yes, yes, yes. My Aunt Martha lived over on, they called it Lynchburg Road then, its on Orange Avenue now. But it was called Lynchburg Road. I had an aunt that lived over there. So we used to go over to her house and play around and you'd come back home.
AO: Was that on your father's side?
AH: My mother's side.
AO: Would you describe your house for us, the one that you grew up in? For instance, was it brick? Did it have a garden?
AH: No, it wasn't brick. It was a weatherboard house and it was over on 8th Avenue there. We called it 8th Avenue then. Its Madison now. And the house is still standing. When my father passed on, my brother Theodore took over the house. When he passed on, he left it to his daughter. His daughter is living in the house that they built up on short Madison here. And the house is still standing and they're renovating it now so somebody's doing it. I know Barbara sold it to somebody. So they're renovating it

now but it still stands. It was a 5 room house and when we bought it, when my mother and father went into it, it didn't have a furnace in it. It didn't have a basement in it. It was just a straight house just the way that they built them at the time but we all grew up in that and it was a lovely family. 'Cause the girls had to share a room and the boys shared a room. We were very close.
AO: Did you have a garden?
AH: Yes, we had a garden next door. My father bought a lot next door and so that was the way we supplemented the family groceries. He would get it plowed up and then he'd plant corn, beans, tomatoes and so forth. During the summer, he'd give each one of us boys a jar and we'd have to go over there and knock the bugs off the beans into the jar. And when he'd come in from work – He was a blacksmith up on the railroad there – He'd come in and he'd want to see that jar, see how many bugs we'd knocked off the beans so. (chuckling)
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AO: That way you could tell who'd been working and who hadn't.
AH: Mm mm.
AO: As a child, what kind of activities did you participate in?
AH: Well, as a child, we shot marbles and spinned tops, spinning tops you know. Played a little baseball around in the yard there. Then as we came into school activities - played baseball. And as I got a little older, Mr. Lee come into Roanoke as the first YMCA we had over on Wells Avenue. If you go over there now, there's a plaque right down in the sidewalk stating that that was the first YMCA for Negros. So he would have marble tournaments at each one of the schools, Gainsboro, Harrison. At the two schools there. We had many days of activities on the schoolyard.
AO: You said Mr. Lee. Do you remember his first name?
AH: L.A. Lee. He was the Executive Director of the first YMCA we had here.
AO: What kind of work did your family do?
AH: My dad was a railroad man. He was a blacksmith on the railroad.
AO: Did your mother work?
AH: No, she stayed mostly at home.
AO: Tell me some more about your school life. Did you walk?
AH: Oh, yes. I first went to school at Harrison Elementary School there where – The Harrison Museum is there now. That is where I started school. I started school in 1922 and my birthday was in December so school started in September and so I went in school at 5 years old and so I often tell people, I went to school in 1922 and they made Harrison a high school in 1923. So, I went to high school at 6 years old.
AO: (Chuckling) Where'd you go after Harrison?
AH: Addison School. I came out in '33 and went down to Hampton Institute. Its a University now but it was an institute then. I went down there on a basketball scholarship. I stayed down there 18 months and so things were a little tight in the '30s so I came out and went to work at People's Drug Store. And then soon after that, I got a job on the railroad as a janitor and then in '43, the draft got me. I had married by that time. I had 2 children and I went in in 1943. So I stayed in the military 'til 1946, came back and went to the freight station on the railroad. And when Korea broke out, which it looks like Korea is trying to raise sand again, and I went home that day. I didn't have an automobile. I walked to work all the time. My wife said, "There's a letter here from the War Department for you.". I said, "The War Department? What are they writing me for?". I was curious. Then I looked at it and they told me, "You are to report to Fort Gordon, Georgia, in the next 14 days.". So, I had to go back into the military. My MOS was basic combat training. So I went down there and I stayed 18 months down in Fort Gordon, Georgia and when Korea started simmering down a little, then they allowed me to come away from the military to come back and work on the railroad. So I said, "If my MOS was that critical, they would've called me.". So I joined the AS (??) Division here in Roanoke. I stayed with the AS (??)

Division altogether in the military for 33 years. I retired in 1976. I was a Master Sargent.
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AO: For clarity, what is MOS?
AH: Military Occupation Specialist.
AO: Could you tell us a little more about your home life? For instance, did you gather around the radio in the evening? Do you remember when you got a phone or a refrigerator, all that?
AH: Well, startin' there, there wasn't any radio at that particular time. You got the newspaper. Then we finally got a radio back in maybe '29 or '30, something like that. We'd listen to the radio. And so, a Frigidaire, no, we had a refrigerator – Ice – The ice man would come down and we'd buy ice off the wagon, most of the time horse-drawn. And the refrigerator we'd put ice in there, put the food in there. So that was the life. Momma did most of the canning. Most people don't can anymore. The supplest food that we had over in the garden, she would can that. Canned tomatoes, canned beans, canned corn. So when winter come around, you can always open up something and start a meal.
AO: Instead of going to the grocery store and getting it off the shelf.
AH: Mm mm.
AO: Did you sit on the porch in the evenings?
AH: Oh, yes. Played in the yard. See, every house, you'll notice the old houses have a front porch to it. And people would sit on the front porch in the evenings because there wasn't any air conditioning. And we'd keep the house open at night. Let the house cool down. And you'd be out in the street playing and everybody sittin' on the porch saying, "Now where you going boy?". You didn't give them any question or answer, you'd just get back in the yard. One thing poppa would always say, "When that light come on down on the corner, I want you in the yard, not coming in the yard, I want you in the yard.". You obeyed your parents. Now, sometimes I see some of these kids where they're out without a parent, I couldn't – My parents wouldn't have stood for that.
AO: Do you do any chores around the house or the neighborhood other than the gardening?
AH: At that time, practically everybody had chickens in their yard and you had to clean the hen house out. Make sure the yard was swept. There's wasn't any grass in the backyard 'cause the chickens were back there. You'd have to sweep that yard and keep it swept up and so on. And it was going to be done. Wasn't no ifs, ands about it.
AO: Did you have any stories that were passed down from generation to generation?
AH: Oh yes. We used – That's what we used to do in the evening mostly in the wintertime. We'd sit around the stove and momma and poppa would tell us both their activities when they were boys and girls. They came out of Franklin County over there. They would tell – My mother's granddaddy was a Cherokee Indian and he lived over there in Franklin. And one incident, see by my daddy working on the railroad, would take us over and visit her momma over in Franklin and get off the train, go down by the railroad and go up there. This one particular time, I guess I was about 6 years old, maybe 5 or 6, going down there. I heard him come down off that hill over there, making that Indian sound, whooping and hollering. And I said, "Momma, who's that old crazy man coming down across the hill hollering?". She snatched me up. My feet didn't touch the ground until I got down to grandma's. She said, "That's my granddaddy boy.". I learned that in a hurry, you know.
AO: Do you remember his name?
AH: Fred Hurt (??) That was his name. And he had over there right where Ferrum College is now, he had the majority of that bottom land down there that he owned all of that. All of his children, as far as I can remember, I heard momma talking about it, he gave 'em so much land each time they married. So they had a stake in the elements see. I think it was about 75 acres over there that my cousin has that's broken down. She has that over there that was given to her out of that. As I started to say about sitting around talking, what we were doing, so my granddaddy, Jessie Saunders, that's my momma's daddy, he'd come over and sit around and he'd tell us about – See, he was old enough to know something about

the Civil War. So he said. I don't know. He said that General Lee and General Grant were brother-in-laws and so he sat there and talked and said Grant would tell Lee, he'd say, “Lee, you better surrender.”. “No, I'm not going to surrender General Grant.”. He said, “I'm coming tomorrow and I'm gonna swallow your whole army up.”. I don't know whether he was making it up. But we listened to it. But he was old enough to know about the surrender of General Lee and General Grant.
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AO: That's interesting. Did you have any family recipes that have been passed down through the generations.
AH: Just cook a pot of beans and go on and eat 'em. You never was hungry. I never shall forget one day, I came in from high school and I said, “Momma, what we got” - We didn't say dinner then - “What we got for supper?”. She said, “Turnips.”. I said, “I don't like turnips.”. She said, “You don't?”. “No, I don't like 'em.”. She said, “Have you eaten any?”. I said, “No.”. “Well, you don't know whether you like 'em or not.”. She said, “That's all that's here and you're gonna eat it.”. I ate 'em and liked 'em.
AO: Learned to develop a taste for 'em.
AH: Oh yeah. I cook 'em now and eat 'em.
AO: What businesses or shops did your family go to?
AH: Well, N.W. Pugh was one place right there at the corner of Campbell Avenue. Where Grand Piano was. And then MacVein's (??) was right across the street where Miller and Rhoads was. And then they had Gilmore was down below Jefferson Street. That was a dry goods store. Those were downtown but then the majority of things that you had were neighborhood groceries. And we had Pettisi's (??) Grocery store up there on 7th Street. Miss Basket had a store right there on 8th Avenue on the corner just where you go up to 6th Street to Burrell Hospital and we worked out the grocery stores. And then most of the time on Saturdays, momma would go to the market, walk up and down the market. We had to go with her to carry the shopping bags. Walk from one end of the market to the next. “How much your snaps, green beans?” She'd look at all of 'em. “I don't like these. I'm going somewhere else.”. 15 cents a gallon, not 15 cents a pound, 15 cents a gallon. You'd come back home and string 'em and cook them and potatoes, you'd get a gallon of those for about 25 cents. When you'd come out of the market, you had 2 bags and you spent about 8 dollars altogether. Had enough to feed you for the rest of the week.
AO: What's your fondest childhood memory?
AH: I believe momma went to town one day and she bought a little wagon, a little metal wagon, little black mules hooked to it. And I named him Rubin and I'd go out on the back porch and make me a road all the way and Rubin and I'd go up and down that little road I made up under the back porch in the dirt. What I can remember, I said, “I'm gonna bury Rubin so won't nobody else have him and nobody can get him.”. And I dug a little hole under there and Rubin disappears. “I don't know where Rubin went. I think the guy next door got Rubin. (laughing) I was playing next door. I believe he got Rubin. Anyway, Rubin disappeared and I've haven't seen Rubin since.”.
AO: That's a shame. (laughing)
AH: (laughing)
AO: Did you go on vacation?
AH: What kind of vacation back in those days, you ask me. (laughing)
AO: Well, you talked about going to visit Franklin County.
AH: That wasn't no vacation. That was routine going to Franklin County, running up and down the hills over there. And in the summertime, I'd go and stay with my granddaddy and fool around with him. He had a steer – Do you know what a steer is? - Its a bull that's been cut. So anyway, ole Ruff. He'd would plow with old Ruff. One day, it was hot and I'm just sitting around and old Ruff decided he wasn't going to work. So, my granddaddy was a very tall man, he walked around and hit old Ruff up the side of his head with his fist. Old Ruff (mooing sound). My grandmother was very sedate. “Jess,

why do you treat that animal like that.". He said, "If I feed him and he won't do what I say, I'll kill him.". He looked at us and she went on back in the house. (laughing)
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AO: When did you start coming to the library? Or did you? Was it here?
AH: Across the street. Mrs. Lee. She was Miss Young at that time before she married Mr. Lee. Mr. Lee came to town, that's Mr. L.A. Lee was Executive Secretary. She was Virginia Lee. She lived up on Harrison Avenue then and the library was across the street. And we'd get assignments. They didn't have a library per se in the school at that time and they would assign a book or something you have to have. You'd come down to the library and if it wasn't in that library over there, she would have to get it for us. 'Cause we weren't allowed to go downtown to the library downtown. So she would get the book and bring it back over here and then we'd finish it and she'd carry it back downtown. So that was about '28 or '29, in that length of time. And so, we were – That was our library across there until 1942 when they built this library. The Catholic Church gave the land – First it was Shank's Foundry here on this corner. So when he went out of business, the Catholic Church gave this land, this spot of land, to the city to build a library for the Negros here. So this is contracted in the city even now that this land was dedicated or given to the city to build this library for the Negros.
AO: Were there any strong community leaders that you remember during that time?
AH: Sure. C. C. Williams was the undertaker. He had an undertaker's shop right there where surrender (??) is. We had Richard Burks. Abe Reynolds who was the President of the NAACP during that time. Mrs. Spencer who was a school teacher who was the Secretary in the NAACP. That was right down the street there. Right straight down Gainsboro. Dr. Dudley and the Downings were – There was Reverend Downing. His picture is on the wall out there. And all of his sons. There was E.D. & L.C. & Gardner (??). He had 3 boys. They were all doctors. Dr. Jeb E. Claytor across the street over there, Sr. Strong leaders. Reverend James was a strong leader. He got quite a few things accomplished in this neighborhood. But the main thing that they stressed, vote. At that time, in order to vote, you had to pay what you call a Capitation Tax. We called it a Poll Tax, $2.50. You voted at 21 years old. You didn't get to vote at 18 years. You had to be 21. And my daddy, each time we reached to get started getting or reached 20, he kept up with your birthday. "Boy, you're gonna be 21 years old at such and such a date now. If you don't have any money, I'll go down and help you pay your tax so you'll be ready to vote.". And that time, we voted right where the Coca Cola plant is now. It was on Park Street there at Sicles (??) Store. You'd go in there and vote. You had a big can with a lock on it, a garbage can. You'd have your vote and stick it down in that can and you'd vote. I've been voting ever since.
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AO: Who were your role models?
AH: My daddy.
AO: How has Gainsboro changed over the years?
AH: Well, you can see that things have changed because the street wasn't this wide and the library was on that side and all the way down to Gilmer Avenue it was stores on this side. Gainsboro Pharmacy which the Claytor's ran. It was right across the street there. So clean on to the bridge, it was businesses. You had grocery stores. You had a theater there. Right where you call it the Morocco but that wasn't the Morocco, that was the Strand Theater. Old man Hickey Booley (??) built that in 1927. That was before – That's the time the pictures get their sound. Sound pictures came out in about 1927 and that was where we went to the movies. Go down there for a dime. We'd walk up and down the streets and pick up milk bottles, pop bottles and take 'em back to the store and get that 10 cents so we could go to the show on Saturday. It was a close knitted neighborhood and everybody had something to do with your upbringing. Very close. Right now, you don't know anybody that lives on the same avenue or street you're on.

AO: Unfortunately, that's true. How was your life affected by segregation and the Civil Rights Movement?
AH: How was it affected?
AO: Mm mm.
AH: Well, let me back up here a minute. Segregation at that time as we came through, it was a way of life. It was the law and we were classified as law-abiding citizens so we responded to the segregated movement. When we got buses, whites to the front, colored to the rear. We paid the 5 cents to sit in the back. Just like everybody else, we paid our way and we – In other words, that was the law. There wasn't any need to say wasn't going to do anything about it but we kept looking at it until we could do something about it. We didn't have any Negro policeman, didn't have any Negro firemen at that time. Those jobs weren't for us. When the city had the mule-drawn wagons, they collected ashes and garbage and things, we drove those mules. But when they went motorized, Negros couldn't drive the garbage trucks. They could throw the garbage cans up on the truck but the whites drove the trucks. It was still the law and we complied with that. So, when we went looking for a job, we didn't go looking for a job as a clerk. We either went looking for a job either as a janitor, window cleaner or something of that nature. You could be a bell-hop. We took that and went on. I doubt if my daddy made $20 a day by the time he retired in 1930. It was around 1931 or '32. But I never lived in a rented house. He never owned an automobile but we walked. The neighborhood was constructed that you could walk anywhere you wanted to go, downtown or anywhere. We made out that way. So then when the buses came in, we rode the bus. The bus went up 7 cents and we paid it and rode the bus, still to the back. But it was during my time as the Vice-President of the NAACP when we took down the signs. And we took 'em down without incident. The first one we went to was down at the Miller and Rhoads Tea Room. Dr. Law, Reverend Sampson, myself, R.R. Wilson, we went down and talked with the manager, asked about having a luncheon there and he said, “Sure.”. Sat down and we had lunch. So that was the first place we desegregated was the Miller and Rhoads Tea Room. And then we went straight down the street to Cresses, Woolworths, Miller McClellans, Grant. At that time, Cresses had a lunchroom in the basement but you couldn't eat there. They had white and colored water and both of 'em tasted the same 'cause I drank out of both of 'em. (laughing) Then the same _____ at that time, by you being so much older than I am, you don't know nothing about the passenger station was segregated, a rail between it. We took the rail out of the passenger station and – Reverend Sampson said – He was the minister at High Street Church at that time, he said, - Roanoke had what we called “Stand up integration”. As long as we stood up, we could go just about anywhere we wanted to go in this town. And then you had the Roanoke Theater at that time. We had a place up in the balcony and you could go up there and see the same picture. But I never went down there. We got the Virginia Theater. Mr. Williams, built the Virginia Theater into being right there across from High Street Church. And we saw the same pictures for 15 cents and we enjoyed it. We had a doctor's office, a dentist right down Hill Street. We made it and I always said that we had teachers that took cotton and made silk. We knew about Benjamin Banneker. We knew about Harriet Morgan. We knew about them because they taught us. I never shall forget it. When I was instructed in the military, when they were desegregating the Army, I was given a class and I had a young white, I was going up to Tech. I was breaking down the contributions that the minority contributions. And, he stood there and he looked and he said, “How do you know all of that?”. I said, “I was taught.”. I said, “You know, segregation is a funny animal. You were deprived too. See, you don't know about these contributions, the real McCoy of all those people. You were deprived of that. But we were taught that.”. See, I know about the contributions that Daniel Hale Williams made the first successful heart operation up there in Chicago and he later on founded a hospital there in Washington D.C. Benjamin Banneker, as I mentioned earlier, he was the grandson of Molly Walsh. She came over here as an indentured servant. She bought 2 slaves. She married one and freed the other one. Benjamin Banneker was a product of a black and white movement. But he was

with Lafayette when he and George Washington were surveying Washington D.C. Lafayette took all the blue prints and went back to France and he laid Washington D.C. Out from memory and he invented the first clock. He made a wooden clock. I was saying this – This is kinda funny (chuckle) – I was telling them that Benjamin Banneker laid out Washington D.C. And one smart white guy said, "That's the reason you can't get out of Washington, a Negro laid it out.". I said, "OK. You see how long you can run around that field for me out there and come back and tell me." (laughing) As long as you can run around that field for a while. Its just been quite an experience coming – I'm glad that I lived this long that I can see all these changes. Gainsboro has changed and so you've got to – I was – One person was talking about Henry Street and they said, "I thought Henry Street didn't go any further than right down to the bottom of the bridge.". I said, "You did? What about Jefferson Street. Henry Street runs the same way.".Henry Street run all the way over to Maple Avenue. You had what's called 3rd Street which is Commerce Street now. No, 2nd Street is Commerce Street and you had 3rd Street which was called Roanoke Street. They changed the names I guess because they, when they put up signs for it, they didn't want to write Roanoke all the way across or Commonwealth so they made 'em 2nd, 3rd and 5th Street. I love this town and I don't think I'd want to live anywhere else. I've been to New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and I like this here. Been over to Australia, down into the Philippines and Japan. But Roanoke is my home.

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AO: We've just about covered actually all the questions except one. Do you remember the closing of the silk mills.

AH: Yes. I don't have quite an exact date but it was called Viscose and down there they had roughly around 2,000 or maybe 2,500 employees. They had a dormitory there right on 9th Street that the young girls that worked in the silk mill, in the silk spinning room, they had a place that they lived right beyond the – right there at the silk mill or at Viscose. And the employment house is still right there. A little house just as you go down, just before you drop over into going over into River Road. There's a little brick house sitting right down there. That's where the employment office was. I went there on several occasions looking for a job and I was working at the drug store down there at that time. That's before I got on the railroad. Mr. Webb (??) would come out, call so many to go. I'd walk down there and kept that 7 cents in my pocket so I could get back in case I didn't get hired, I could get back to the drug store in time for my -. ButI'm glad I didn't get the job because later on I got on the railroad and the railroad, N&W has been the family for this town because this was a railroad town. I think the closing of the silk mill completely closing was in the early or late '40s or early '50s when the silk mill closed.

AO: I'm curious. Were there many blacks working there because you talked about the dormitories?

AH: No, no, no, sweetheart. (Chuckling) That's wishful thinking. It was those white girls that lived in the dormitory and if they hired any Negro women, they were maids so they weren't up there. They were at home. And they worked a lot of Negros down in the silk mill. They worked on the yard and yardmen and they worked around in the building as janitors and so forth. It was a job. And they sent kids to school from down at the silk mill with their 35 and 40 cents an hour job. At that time, you could buy a loaf of bread for a nickel. As I said about your snaps and things, you give 'em 15 cents a gallon and so forth. I'm glad I came through it but I wouldn't want to go back through that again. You see, as Booker T. Washington said, "Lay down your buckets where you are. There's a wealth of salvation there.". That's what he meant. You can go right out there in the middle of the street and start digging and if you dig deep enough, you'll strike water. There's always a place if you dig - I never shall forget I saw a professor down at Hampton he said, "Now look. I'm gonna tell you boys something. You don't want to walk around here and go out there in the community with a $20 hat on a 2 cents head. Get something in your head.".

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AO: Ain't that the truth.
AH: Its more so now than it was when I came along. If we decided to – I told somebody one day we were talking about drop-outs. I said, "We weren't geared to drop out of school because the teachers would make some concessions for you and even teach you at night. Even if sometimes the families' finances were so that some of the boys would come out of school and go to work doing something. But our dropouts could count and could read and write. I find that some of our students coming out of school now, they have a rough time filling out an application.". I'm not critical of the SOL but I think they are pushing so much now for the SOL that they're not looking for the other SOL, Standard of Living. Standard of Living comes first. And I read an article in the paper about some teacher up in Chicago, or up in Indiana somewhere, it said that by pushing that SOL said some of the kids are missing geography and so forth. You can ask some of these kids in high school, "Where's the Pacific Ocean?". They don't know. They don't teach Geography like they did. See, we had to know all of that. We had to know the capital. When we'd come down through there, we had to take that Geography - every time you see a star, that's the capital of that state. We had to learn the capitals of the states. We had to learn our _____ numbers. We had to sing 'em to the teacher. Sing our times tables to her. You take a calculator away from some of these kids and they're lost.
AO: That's true.
AH: So I hope that we can – And they told us in the military, said, "If Private Joe don't learn, you have failed to teach. You got to teach him.". SOL – I don't know. I'm not that much on educating or know what the SOL is really going to entail down the road, but I understand that they're pushing for to get that score but then sometimes they look like they're having problems. No child left behind, don't wanna be. I failed the 4th grade. But I made it up before I got out of high school. (laughing) I told my grand-kids. She's in the 4th grade, I said, "That's a tough grade. I failed the 4th grade." "You failed?". I said, "Yeah, but I made it up before I got out. You see the 4th and the 7th are two of the toughest grades you're gonna come through. If you get the 4th through the 12th grade you can get out of high school.". (laughing)
AO: I thought about the 7th but I have never given a lot of consideration to the 4th.
AH: Yeah, its tough. That's when you start getting common denominators and so forth.
AO: That interesting. Well, I truly appreciate your time and your interest. I am honored to have interviewed you.
AH: I hope I said something. (laughing)
AO: You did. You said a lot of things that I think are valuable not only for today but in the next 150 years, it will remain just as valuable. And I really appreciate you taking the time to do it.
AH: Well, you see, we've got to take time to talk to our grandchildren and our great-grand kids and let them know that life hasn't always been like this.
AO: Let 'em know what you expect. I guess I can say this. My thing is in order to get where you're going, you need to know where you came from. You need that inner strength of knowing what your ancestors did to give you some self-esteem, self-awareness that will help you through your difficult times when you realize the times that you have that are difficult today mean nothing to what happened to, say, 200 years ago.
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AH: No, One thing I'm looking at right now and I'm not a minister but I am a Christian. Its a movement out there now to take this country away from us through our belief. You take, I believe it was 52 men who signed the Declaration of Independence. They weren't learned men but they were Christian men. And they founded on Christian principles. If you go and look at the breakdown of the Supreme Court Building. In that building, its etched on the wall, its the Ten Commandments right over where the Chief Justice sits is a bible and there are bible verses all the way up those stairs in there. I think there are about 12 stories I believe is correct. When kids came through, they'd quote some bible

verse going up those steps. That didn't happen yesterday, that was way down there. But it bothers me a great deal when we got 9 jurists _____ sitting there. When they allowed Madelyn Ohara to come there and take prayer out of school – And they allowed it – I hope that we can remedy that one day and night because Islam and all these other religions. You see this is the melting pot. "Bring me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free. I raise my torch beside the golden door." That's the Statue of Liberty tellin' 'em to come, come. But my thinking is if they coming, don't pack your suitcases and bring what your runnin' from over there and bring it over here and think they're gonna set it up and then bring and start making new laws for us to go by. I like what Australia says. "You're welcome to come here but you're gonna live according to the way we're living. You're not going to change our way of life.". I hope that being nice is alright but nobody can take from me what I am inside of me. Nobody can control my destiny but me. He might keep me from going through that door but eventually I'll find a way out of here.
AO: And that's the drive that we're missing. We'll try one or two doors and once it gets hard its like, "Somebody come and open it, please.".
AH: But you see, I never shall forget when I was young, I took some time and got into fighting, come in with black eyes. My mother said, - She'd come in and put some salt on it or whatever and she'd say, Alphonzo, there's always a bigger cat out than tom. You're not going to beat everybody." That's what I try to tell – You see there's no need in this time right now, see – And I'm not critical of 'em 'cause I -
AO: Been there, done that.
AH: Yeah. And so I look up here at Tech, these young boys getting these scholarships going up there and going out messing it up, getting drunk, fighting, doing things, messing up the scholarships. They got it. They got it going. Got it made. Got a chance to maybe go on to the big leagues. See, when I was down there, the only school I could go to and I was proud that I went there. You went to either Virginia State or down to Hampton. And those were black colleges like Bluefield but they taught. They taught us and they taught us well. Now these youngsters, they got great scholarships, going to Tech, going to Virginia, going to University of Virginia, going to North Carolina at Durham. They can go there. I never shall forget when we desegregated Durham, they sent kids in there and some of the girls in there wanted a separate dormitory. (chuckle) Lord have mercy. I stayed President of NAACP about 9 years. I don't envy them right now. But see at that time, it was almost like you signed your death warrant saying you were a member of the NAACP.
0.50.07.5
AO: Mm mm.
AH: But, we've come this far by faith and we can make it but we – Its just running a relay race. Run so far and give it to somebody else. "You take it on.".
AO: That's a good analogy of life.
AH: Yep. Be the best at whatever you are.
AO: Right.
AH: See, everybody's not going to be a brain surgeon or PHD because the whole world is run just about on average. Run on average. The average mind just about runs the world.
AO: That's probably why its so scary.
AH: Huh?
AO: I probably shouldn't have said that.
AH: Say what?
AO: I just said its probably why its so scary.
AH: No, its not that. The average man. The average man you meet in the street. A mail carrier -
AO: The average man 50 years ago and the average man today, I think there's a difference.
AH: I don't know. There's always going to be an average.
AO: Mm mm.

AH: You're not going – See, not everybody's gonna be a PHD. Everybody's not going to be a doctor. Everybody's not going to be a lawyer. Everybody's who's average gonna come in.
AO: Just think of how ineffectual this world would be if everybody had a PHD.
AH: Wouldn't nobody sweep the floor. There's nothing wrong with being a janitor because if you didn't have a janitor, you wouldn't be able to get in here.
AO: That's the truth.
AH: But that janitor will take what he's making and he makes a contribution outside.
AO: Mm mm.
AH: In other words, if he has to go to a dentist, he has to pay that dentist's price from the money he made cleaning this floor. Average. It'll average out. Man up here making $150,000 a year and this man is making $50,000 a year. Its gotta meet somewhere in the middle.
AO: _____ upper end of the money problem,
AH: No, sometimes, somebody say a million dollars. Well, if they gave me a million dollars right now, I wouldn't know what to do with it. I'd have to give it away because I _____. (laughing) I'd give it away 'cause – What would I buy with it? I got a house. I got a car. I got a truck. So, what would I buy.
AO: The American way. More houses and more cars.
AH: Yeah but that's the problem. I read an article about a basketball player. Like he's making at that particular time I think he was making about $15,000,000 a year. He bought him a house. 17 bathrooms. 3 motorcycles. 2 or 4 cars now. You can't ride but one. How many people you gonna have in this house to use 17 bathrooms. My thinking is, and I'm gonna still say it, mostly I'm talking about the black man now. I was sitting there one Sunday morning before I went to church and Toby Brown and John Thomas was on the television and they was talking. And I was thinking, "All these big schools, these Negros on the team, how many are going to the big league?". And they sat there and talked that morning to come to the average. Are all these schools, these boys running up and down the field, - Bring 'em all up and maybe 3 of 'em make it to the big league. That's the average. I was thinking it looks like it ought to be a _____ of going to the _____ but about 3 will make it to the big. 15 million, 25 million. If 30 of those men would say, "Honey, we're making 15 million and I'm gonna live on 14 million and I'm making 9 and we'll live on 8 million.". And take a million dollars and put it in the circle. That's 30 million dollars. We gonna buy a team. We gonna buy a _____. We're gonna buy a franchise. But the majority of them are not doing that. Stuff. Everybody see what I got and one player will put you out of business. My stepson played for the Los Angeles Rams but if he hadn't gone to Eastern Illinois and finished up, he wouldn't be working for Pepsi-Cola today 'cause, you see, he'd had a $20 hat on a 2 cents head. (laughing)
AO: Again, I thank you for your time.
AH: Its been a pleasure sitting here talking to you. Me up here running off at my mouth. I hope I've said something.