

DEVINE, Saint Julian F.
INTERVIEWEE

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Interview #207

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Abstract: In his interview with Michael Cooke, St. Julian F. Devine (1916-2000) discusses his life and experiences in the Charleston, South Carolina area. Mr. Devine details his work with the South Carolina Progressive Democratic Party as well as various other political organizations such as the Palmetto Voters Association. He also details his political work in the Charleston, South Carolina area. Devine served on the Charleston City Council from 1967 to 1975, making him the first African American member on the council since Reconstruction. He also served as Mayor Pro Tem in 1975. Mr. Devine was a very active participant in the Civil Rights Movement and efforts to improve the lives of the black community.

* This is an edited transcript. Our transcription guidelines are available upon request/on our website.

Time	Keywords
00:00:00	<p>MC: Today is February 15, 1986 and I'm conducting an interview with St. Julian F. Devine. Who resides in Charleston South Carolina. Mr. Devine can you give us a brief biographical sketch of your life? Your birthdate, birth place, education, and occupation or occupations?</p> <p>SD: I was born in Berkley County. In the year, I just said to my insurance agency, 1916, July 5. My father worked at the railroad. Later on I came to Charleston in 1918. At first we had what you call a little private school. From there it went to public school. There I went to Shaw, then I attended Burke.</p>
00:01:10	<p>MC: Was that a high school?</p> <p>SD: Yes. Burke High. After that I took an ough. Correspondence course ough. After working for the federal government I went back to school in Bayonne, New Jersey.</p>
00:01:31	<p>MC: What kind of work did you do with the federal government?</p>

SD: I was during World War II I was chief butcher or chief cook. Later on I established my own business after coming home from the service. I went back—

00:01:53 **MC: What type of business was that?**

SD: That I'm still in, I mean I'm retired now but the transportation, moving and hauling. Grocery. I was in the grocery business. I was in the furniture business. I was in the civil station. Just a business man. Period. Self-employed.

00:02:15 **MC: So that—you were self-employed?**

SD: Right.

00:02:18 **MC: For most of your life were you self-employed?**

SD: Yes.

00:02:20 **MC: Was that—**

SD: Yes. For 40 years. [person in background] Oh yeah, I worked for hotels before but for 40 years I was self-employed.

00:02:31 **MC: Did you find that a political advantage? Being self-employed?**

SD: Yes.

00:02:35 **MC: How so?**

SD: Because I had time that I could really help people. I could travel more. I didn't have to appear to anybody whenever I so desired I could attend a convention, church convention, state convention, any political rally.

00:03:00 **MC: What about political pressure on you?**

SD: There was no political pressure on me. I didn't have—

00:03:06 **MC: I mean by being independent did it help in that regards?**

SD: No, it didn't—

MC: So as to ward off the kind of political pressures that could have perhaps been applied against you because of your role in the black community.

SD: No. I didn't have that problem.

00:03:20 **MC: That helped. That was a help.**

SD: I couldn't say. Yes.

00:03:23 **MC: Well when did you first become interested in politics? What stimulated your interest? What type of things that were going on in your life or around you in the city of Charleston that kind of made you believe that a black person could have a political role in American society?**

SD: That's a part of me from youth. My grandfather was a militant during the reconstruction era. He was always instilling in us that you are somebody.

00:04:04 **MC: Who was this relative?**

SD: That's my grandfather, Paul Devine. He was a...what you call one of these one room school teachers back in the rural areas of Berkley County. He would tell me what happened. What transpired during the reconstruction era. You know that what Negroes have and what they gave away. 'Don't you do that same so stand up for your rights.'

00:04:43 **MC: When are you first aware of his tutelage? How old were you when he was talking to you along the lines of what a black person has to do to be something in a country that's so seemingly determined to deny blacks equal rights?**

SD: Well, That was around in 1924.

00:05:06 **MC: So around—mid 1920s is when you became—**

SD: Interested and then later on I...there was a movement with Marcus Garvey. Then I was in the juveniles. I was one of the juveniles officer in that organization. Then we would organize ourselves. We had somewhere around 65 young men. Those who could teach something in order that would make these young fellows independent; you know as a shoe shine boy, or newspaper, or one a worker at a grocery store with a dream of being somebody in the future. So we would—

00:05:58 **MC: Why was that so important to you?**

SD: Because of the fact that the conditions that exists. That Negroes were looked down on wherever you go. I feel within myself that I could correct something with the support of others. So then we organized ourselves.

00:06:25 **MC: Did you ever feel that you had been discriminated against by whites?**

SD: Oh yes.

MC: Can you recall experiences that said I'm going to do something about this before I die. That my son perhaps my grandson will never have to be humiliated the way I have? Did you ever feel like that?

SD: *Yes.* Oh yes. I remember there were times that Negroes couldn't be a boy scout. So within our church, back in the '20s, we organized an Allen Lifeguard and to the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This—when I realized it wasn't the color, it was strictly discrimination. I couldn't go in the front door of a theater, I have to go around the back you see. So there was a difference. Realizing that difference from a discrimination part. There were schools that we were segregated. My next door neighbor was white and we could play together. We did everything together but going to school together. These were some of the things that I was just as good—to me I feel that I was just as important as he was.

00:07:51 **MC: You mentioned your grandfather, what about people in the community where you lived? Were there people like your grandfather in the community where you were growing up that had the same type of influence or maybe to a lesser degree of that type influence?**

SD: Same type of influence—

00:08:07 **MC: Can you single out any people that kind of stick out in your memory about who had that type of effect?**

SD: Yes. Elijah Pointsand and Fritz Branch.

00:08:20 **MC: Could you talk about these two men?**

SD: These two people, one was a [unclear] and the other a businessman.

00:08:28 **MC: Which one was what?**

SD: Fritz Branch was a [unclear] and he also was a business man.

00:08:37 **MC: Did he have any connection with the Garvey Movement?**

SD: Yes.

00:08:40 **MC: He did.**

SD: Yes. Both of them.

00:08:42 **MC: Both of them?**

SD: Yes. They were concerned about our welfare. He owned a four man schooner and also a fishing port. That was Fritz Branch. The other, when he owned the

grocery store he called it the Progressive Grocery Store. I think it was one of the first black grocery stores in our community. Of that size, you know you have those little small stores but I mean a large store in the community. He taught me what I know about politics and about organizations.

00:09:24 **MC: At what time was he providing tutelage for you about politics?**

SD: During the late '30s up until—

00:09:38 **MC: So you were about let's say 20—early 20s probably.**

SD: Yes.

00:09:43 **MC: What did you learn about politics from this man?**

SD: Well, too you know right on the streets that I lived that they vote. They were few blacks that vote at that time. They were doctors and preachers. Would come and they would have to have this poll tax in order to vote. If you couldn't present that [person in background] \$1 yes. If he couldn't present that at the polls then he couldn't participate in it. I could recall when I was a boy that seeing the sergeant riding horseback and the whites riding down the streets. It was a day that you had to stay in the house and no blacks would be...Some of them would be drinking when they'd go to the polls so therefore, I don't know for what reason, that they would take advantage of us. Saying slanderous things or hitting you and kicking you.

00:10:48 **MC: But it was a custom of black people to stay out of the way during the day that elections were held?**

SD: Right. Right. Elections. Yes.

00:11:00 **MC: What were the political conditions for blacks in South Carolina in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s? What made it so crucial for blacks to become more sophisticated about politics and perhaps maybe not sophisticated because first you have to get involved. When did you first become involved to the point that you're trying to provide some visibility in terms of being interested in politics and yet trying to encourage blacks in your community to participate as well?**

SD: Well when you read the paper and see where a lynching in Mississippi—the Scottsboro case was one things that really hit. A girl that claimed rape and was on the train with nine of our boys then that's the time that I feel unjust. Every time you pick up the paper over the year you find a total of how many Negroes were lynched. So I said well we are human beings. It frightened you whenever you want to travel that you'd have to go in the *back* of a bus, you'd have to—when you're traveling on the road if you want to go you have to go to the *back* door of a

restaurant. I didn't want my children to grow up in an environment of this nature. I said that I was going to do something about it. I'm going to organize my people in order that we could stand up like citizens. Not as second class citizens but as first class citizens. More so when Waring handed down the decision in the '40s, then this was a boost to me. This was strength. When some of the doors opened I remember I did my business, I hauled all the books for the school board. They feared that I'd give the statistics on the books and the type of curriculum going into the white schools and that of the black schools so I lost my job. They didn't accept my services anymore. So I...it's given me more strength in not giving up but continuing on the fight.

00:13:52 **MC: When did that happen?**

SD: This was in '40—in the '40s.

00:13:55 [person in background speaking. Inaudible]

00:14:01 **MC: Ok. The person, I'm not really sure it picked up on tape, but Mrs. Devine is in the background. Tell us more about your political experiences before you became a member of the Progressive Democratic Party.**

SD: When the Progressive Democrats were forming, we already had the NAACP in our area. Also the Marcus Garvey Movement among the young people that we continued after he had went and exiled in Canada. Then we started soliciting young men were we would meet in clubs so that we grew stronger by getting books and studying the political structure. I was moving one of the lawyers downtown and he was destroying most of the books. So he said 'Devine I have some books that would probably be beneficial to you in the near future. So you take these books', The Great Game of Politics, I'll never forget that, 'and you study this book and you'll know how the democratic system is set up. Of course I see that the day is coming that y'all will be a part of this Democratic society.' In the meantime we wanted to be recognized in the democratic system. So they did not recognize us in the conferences that they have over the United States. So then we—even in the state Democrat Party they didn't recognize us. So we came back home and started the Progressive Democrats and the Palmetto Democrats. I'm trying to think of the other—

00:16:21 **MC: Let me ask you a question about—did you go to one of the nominating conventions for the Democratic Party? Did you go?**

SD: No. I didn't.

00:16:31 **MC: You didn't go. But you were aware of it?**

SD: I didn't go. Yes I was aware of it. Because a job was a job during those times. You see financially that...what's the man's name out of Augusta came in, he spoke to us. He was...

00:16:54 **MC: A member of the NAACP?**

SD: Yes.

00:16:56 **MC: Was he the Executive Director?**

SD: Yes.

00:17:00 **MC: Or a Field Director on of the—sometimes they use that term. Well if you know if it was the Field—was it the Field Director?**

SD: Forgot the name, now...

00:17:12 **MC: Don't worry about it. That's...I guess what we could do is speak more squarely about the Progressive Democratic Party. What was it about that particular Party that led you to find that this is something that I want to belong to? I believe in the principles of this particular party and what it stands for. What were some of the decisive variables that led you to become part of that organization?**

SD: A part of—see, whenever you are strong in one area then the Chairman of any group would ask you to be a participant and involve yourself which would give the other organizations strife. So therefore I was asked.

00:18:00 **MC: They've asked? By whom?**

SD: By the president of that organization to attend the meetings. I attended the meetings—

00:18:10 **MC: Who was the President by the way?**

SD: I know...who was President then?

00:18:16 **MC: Was it John McCray?**

SD: It was either John McCray or—

00:18:18 **MC: Or Oshea—I can never say his—Osceola McKaine?**

SD: McKaine! That's the man I was trying—that's the man, McKaine. He was coming out of Atlanta.

00:18:27 **MC: Actually I was able to pronounce it correctly, but Osceola McKaine I believe that's not the correct pronunciation but—[crosstalk]**

SD: Yes. Yes. McKaine, that's him. I know his name was McKaine. Yes. Osceola McKaine. Yes, so he asked us to attend meetings. So we got all of the black organizations consolidate themselves. We came to one conclusion we would meet at churches. Various churches.

00:18:49 **MC: What type of churches did you attend?**

SD: Any church. Any one. The doors were open.

00:18:53 **MC: The doors were open? AME?**

SD: AME. Black churches. This—black churches. The doors were open and we'd go in there and we'd call the congregation together. Sometimes we'd meet even in the hall. Because if we had one goal it was to be involved in politics. That our children would be free to select schools or... I should say schools because of the fact there was no schools for us. We were segregated. We wanted to be considered a citizen of these United States. In the meantime, they would...after they didn't accept us and told us they would have to start from the county level to organize. In the meantime when we started to—John McCray, Arthur Clement, Joel Brown, myself, John Chism...

00:20:08 **MC: Who told you to organize at the county level? At the county level.**

SD: This is what the white Democrats were saying. In order that we could be recognized. You see so when—after we...if we were going to be a part of it we'd have to go—this was everything to slow us down.

00:20:28 **MC: I see. So you're talking about how you developed the structure of the Progressive Democratic Party.**

SD: You see what I mean? The structure. Yes. Right.

00:20:33 **MC: But did you get bogged down by these kind of impediments?**

SD: Yes. We did get bogged down because—

00:20:39 **MC: Did you overcome? What type of problems? You mentioned some of them but were there any others?**

SD: Yes. We got bogged down because we never finished organizing throughout the 46 states and...

00:20:50 **MC: 46 counties.**

SD: 46 counties in the state. By the time when we went to several...I think we went to about 12 or 14 counties in the state, then Waring handed the decision down.

00:21:07 **MC: So it was not even all that necessary by then.**

SD: Right. When the door was opened that we could be a participant and involve ourselves so therefore the organization dissolved.

00:21:21 **MC: Did it absolve immediately after the Waring decision? In fact you might want to talk about what the impact the Waring decision had on blacks and the political process in South Carolina.**

SD: I knew him personally, for that fact, and some of his relatives. It really put a burden on him being a South Carolinian and also a judge. When he come with that decision he lost a lot of white friends and the only thing he could have turned to was...at least we turned to him. We went down to him in groups and tried to kind of build up his faith in the decision that he made for us was the right decision.

00:22:22 **MC: That you were actually worthy—well you weren't groveling but you were giving moral support in a time when he was a white Charlestonian who was part of the privileged class and as a consequence of making the decision he was ostracized.**

SD: Right.

00:22:45 **MC: His property and his person...well his property was assaulted and his personal integrity was questioned.**

SD: Right. I can picture the whole place now. Right. At that time I worked for Eliza Cemetery in [unclear]. He was living right next door. I went to [unclear] there were times when the teachers and the most educated people would avoid taking any part in the movement that we had.

00:23:23 **MC: Why did they?**

SD: They were afraid of their jobs.

00:23:25 **MC: Did they have any reason to be afraid or were their rationale unfounded? Or was there really something to be—was it possible they would really lose their livelihood?**

SD: There were times [cough] that even the request to the parent of children...yes children there, growing up teaching school, that their mother would probably lose

their job or they would have a mortgage on their house and they would foreclose the mortgage if they would be a participant and try and get into something of that nature. So I'm going to tell you an incident that happened to me when they arrested me. I had owed a man somewhere around \$1000 and he called me and asked for his money. This was Waring's first cousin. He said 'You know you and I have been friends for many years, but now you are going into...this is for white people.' [laughs] He said 'this for white people you ought not to be involved.' So I said 'Mr. Waring, here I owe you some money. Here is your money.' I said, 'If it's good for you, it's good for me.' 'Remember that you have a lot of children' he said, 'and it would affect your children. You ought not to be involved with these types of things because they would trash you' and all this type of stuff. I said, 'Well I thank you Mr. Waring, but I thank you for all you've done for me. You've loaned me money and didn't charge me interest or anything like that. Here's your money.' He said 'Oh no you don't have to give it to me now, I just wanted to talk with you. See because politics is a dirty thing.' So he didn't want me to stay in there.

Then I had some supportive people that got me out of jail. They arrest me saying that I violated...what article? [Mrs. Devine speaks in background] The registration of trying to vote and he was a minor out of my grocery store. They arrest me because of the fact I had a voting machine in my shop and everything else to teach the people how to go to the vote. They figured if they get the head, the body would deteriorate. Then they arrest me. Came here around... I at that time was trying to get a part of Sullivan Island where they...rather than Negroes going as far as Atlantic Beach they could go across the bridge to Sullivan Island to go there to attend...to go to the beach. I was out that day. When I came back they put the handcuffs on me and took me to jail. You were at the store that day [to Mrs. Devine] Yes. She was at the store. They took me and locked me up. Said that I...I have forgotten what they called it, what act I had violated and all that sort of stuff.

00:26:44 **MC: So you were involved with voter registration.**

SD: Right.

MC: Was the Progressive Democratic Party affiliated with voter registration drives?

SD: No. Not at that time. No.

00:26:57 **MC: What time are you taking about?**

SD: This is back in the infancy of our participants in the system.

00:27:05 **MC: Ok. This is before the Progressive Democratic Party was even in existence?**

SD: No. They were existing. But—

00:27:11 **MC: What issues did they stress before voter registration?**

SD: Well now, that's another thing. When it looked like everybody shunned away from me after I got arrested, all the blacks got afraid. 1950. [Mrs. Devine in background] When I got arrested they said 'Oh Now Devine has messed himself up. He has all these children and everything. He's let these people put him in this'—Even my best friends said 'how are you going to get out of it'. You know one of those things. No support from them because they were shy and afraid of the white man.

00:27:45 **MC: Just getting back to the issue what were the goals? You made a comment about that initially the Progressive Democratic Party was not involved in voter registration. What were they involved in prior to their interest in voter registration?**

SD: They felt to themselves...until, what year that we started...I can't remember now, I think when we were already involved with voter registration. Yes. Before. Yes. Before '50.

00:28:18 **MC: So you were actually involved?**

SD: Yes. I remember that we had...we couldn't get as many people to solicit people to vote. That was before '50, Theresa? Because we had an office on Rutledge Avenue, in that area, for voter registration. We had—well I used my place [Mrs. Devine in background] Yes. Before the '50s I used my home and we met in the churches and everything encouraging people to register.

00:29:05 **MC: Who were you trying to get—did the Progressive Democratic Party favor any candidates? Did they stress a slate of people that they felt would be best? They didn't?**

SD: No. No.

00:29:18 **MC: Are you saying the Progressive Democratic Party was nonpartisan?**

SD: In the beginning before we could—yes we did say—I have to say that because they—

00:29:32 **MC: They did support a slate?**

SD: They did support a slate. They supported Arthur Clement.

00:29:35 **MC: So it wasn't...ok. So you can't say they were nonpartisan.**

SD: No. no. That's right. We did support—that was one of our first movements was Arthur Clement. Its coming right back to me.

00:29:47 **MC: Did they support the white candidates and black candidates?**

SD: No. We didn't get—it—we were concerned about getting blacks into the area that they had whites because at that time he was running against one of the strongest white candidates. Which was Rivers.

MC: Mendel?

SD: Mendel Rivers.

MC: I guess L. Mendel Rivers?

SD: L. Mendel Rivers. Yes. He was from Berkley County. My own county. The old Man.

00:30:17 **MC: Now we're talking about running for Congress?**

SD: Yes. That's when Arthur Clement ran so we supported him.

00:30:27 **MC: What about the positions below the Congressional level? What about the statewide and what about the citywide positions? Were you supporting black candidates at those two levels in the beginning years?**

SD: No. They didn't have it.

00:30:42 **MC: You didn't have any blacks running statewide or citywide?**

SD: No. He was the first as I can recall. Arthur Clement just like I am he is the first who ran for state or for—

MC: You mean as Congressional.

SD: Yes. Congressional. I said that. In my recollection I followed up with—we traveled all over the counties while he was running and everything. He would go into various counties.

00:31:15 **MC: So did you support his candidacy?**

SD: Oh yes. Yes.

00:31:18 **MC: Why do you think there were no blacks running for statewide or citywide or countywide positions in, let's say the period before the '50s I guess?**

SD: It was a hopeless case because of the fact that we were [recording cuts]

00:31:35 [recording resumes]

00:31:36 **MC: You started to mention that at one time that South Carolina really was a one party state and we got cut off.**

SD: Yes. See South Carolina was a one party state so therefore the only—they excluded black people for the simple reason that the Republican Party in the state of South Carolina was black. Until in the '40s. In the '50s when I think we had one white man, one white attorney here, that was a Republican that voted Republican ticket.

00:32:13 **MC: Were you ever a Republican?**

SD: Well, we all—black, I always say this is...I was concerned I was black. Any Party who was going to appear to the things and that was going to give us anything, then I was for that Party.

00:32:33 **MC: [laughs] But were you ever a Republican?**

SD: No.

00:32:35 **MC: You were never an official—**

SD: My grandfather was a Republican but not me. I came during the time of Roosevelt. Roosevelt with the bread basket for poor people.

00:32:48 **MC: I see. So it wouldn't—yes. What about the white primary with the Smith vs. Allwright that was 1944? Then I guess later in 1946 and thereafter the Waring decisions. Smith vs. Allwright declared the white primary in Texas was illegal and as a consequence of that decision developments in South Carolina of a similar vein affected the political atmosphere. What was the—you mentioned somewhat, what was the reaction of the Progressive Democratic Party to the realization that there was some sympathy for their position in the judicial system?**

SD: I think what I would say about that is during the time of Cotton Ed Smith who was a Senator and there was a lot of pressure on blacks. You know how most of the Governors and Senators of these United States felt about black people having a part of being a participant in the government. So we had what you call Cotton Ed Smith during that time. You'd never see it today. We also had a Mayor

that you see a Negro—the sky would fall down before you see a Negro go into a voting booth. [bell rings]

00:34:22 **MC: What Mayor was that?**

SD: That was Mayor Lockwood. The same one I got these houses from. [Mrs. Devine in background] Yes.

00:34:29 **MC: Let's stop briefly here. [recording stopped]**

00:34:31 **[recording resumes]**

MC: Ok. We just stopped, you had just named Mayor Lock? Lockwood as being very much vehemently opposed to the idea that he would ever experience black involvement in politics in South Carolina.

SD: Lockwood. In politics. In the city of Charleston I would say. He said he'd never see the day that Negroes would go to the polls.

00:35:00 **MC: After that day did come what was the reaction of white politicians after that had been decreed that blacks would become—irrespective of what they thought about it, that this was the political reality.**

SD: This is what they feel that they could defeat the Negroes from the hope. You know sometimes you want to kill the spirit of people. So they would—it wasn't that the news media would say that Mayor Morrison said he's not concerned about black folks. Jews and black folks he wasn't concerned about. So this means that this would delete the black people. 'What's the use of me going to the poll?' These were some of the sayings. This is what I was saying to my group. 'We are going to defeat him not to work for him.' Even 'the candidate ain't going to win.' Well we've got to show ourselves, show him that we have power. You see?

00:36:08 **MC: What did the Progressive Democratic Party do about trying to project the fact that black people would have political power? How did they get the message across to white politicians rather?**

SD: You know it's like we said in—I know I've said of the thing, that most people want the glory. So then when we get a certain distance and we feel that we have the thing that we want, then the man will come in and destroy the party.

00:36:50 **MC: How—**

SD: Paid off!

00:36:53 **MC: When was that first evident? When did they try to first give blacks money to—or select blacks to try to buy black votes? When did that happen?**

SD: Not only buy the black vote, it's the leaders. To give them a certain amount of money to *leave* the area.

00:37:13 **MC: To leave the area?**

SD: Yes. That's right.

00:37:15 **MC: Give money for who to leave?**

SD: I don't want to spell out the names of those people.

MC: Certain select. Oh you're talking about black leaders?

SD: Black leaders.

00:37:24 **MC: That they would be giving money to leave?**

SD: Yes.

00:37:29 **MC: They were willing to go that far?**

SD: Well they went that far because they got—

00:37:32 **MC: Did some people leave?**

SD: Sure! Yes. Now that everybody—

00:37:38 **MC: When did that take place?**

SD: That took place in the early '50s.

00:37:45 **MC: People actually were paid off to the point that they would sell—**

SD: I think that was one part of the Progressive Democratic Party.

00:37:55 **MC: Did people within the Progressive Democratic Party leave because of that type of pressure.**

SD: The head or the field—any time that you have a man of influence in the area that's going to influence anybody, they're going to try to get rid of him. If you are weak and if you want to accept—

00:38:20 **MC: Could we stop for a second? [recording stopped]**

00:38:23 **[recording resumes]**

MC: We're back. Did that happen? Did they try to bribe off people who were part of the Progressive Democratic Party?

SD: anybody that...the same Mayor tried to bribe me.

00:38:37 **MC: Which Mayor was that?**

SD: That was Morrison.

00:38:41 **MC: What was his first name?**

SD: Bill Morrison. William Morrison. But we became good friends after I said that I wouldn't accept any money.

00:38:51 **MC: Were there people who did succumb to that type of—**

SD: Yes. He named the people.

00:38:57 **MC: That he had paid off?**

SD: That he had paid off.

00:38:57 **MC: Why do you think were people trying to buy people? Do you think they were actually buying votes when they were doing that?**

SD: Yes. They were actually buying votes. They feel that those people who were in power that could sling—if they get a certain percentage of black votes along with the white vote that they could win. So therefore he would say 'now look I'm giving you so much money then go to the polls.' Those people would work and take taxes and carry the people to vote.

00:39:25 **MC: Did this only happen in the Charleston area or was this something that happened not just simply in Charleston but perhaps elsewhere?**

SD: [chuckles] Yes. It happened everywhere. It happened before—I remember before we were the participants. The whites they had—

00:39:42 **MC: The white politicians engaged in that practice with each other? So this is just business as usual? In the political arena?**

SD: That's right. Nothing. It was just a thing of color. [laughs]

00:39:52 **MC: Now that we have some blacks who are part of the game this is what we'll do.**

SD: Yes. Not concerned about the people but just for themselves.

00:40:01 **MC: That's very interesting. Very interesting, because I've asked that question only as it affected blacks so this is just simply part of South Carolina politics.**

SD: Nationwide politics. See any time one could—this is what they say 'Alright people are going to arrest Devine if we get Devine out we can control ward nine.'

00:40:25 **MC: What did they think? Did they eventually realize this wasn't possible, did they decide to work with you rather than try to—**

SD: Right. When they realized that I had the strength then, I could demand what I wanted. I wanted jobs for my people.

00:40:43 **MC: What type of jobs did you make?**

SD: I wanted the police. We didn't have black police.

00:40:47 **MC: Did that come into being? When?**

SD: Yes. When he asked—he called me down to the office when he offered me that money. I said I wouldn't accept any money but I would—I said I'm not rich but I'm far away from being poor. So I don't have to accept any money. What I'm concerned about...school guard for our children, playground for our children, and I said I would like to see black police. Negro police, it wasn't black then, negro policemen. Just the two of us, nobody else in the conference room. He looked me in the eye and said 'Devine, if I be elected. You said you aren't going to vote for me.' I said they fixed that I wasn't going to vote for him. He said, 'within six months you'll have black policemen in the city police department.'

00:41:40 **MC: What election was that?**

SD: That was the election of 1950. '51.

00:41:46 **MC: So that came to pass.**

SD: That came to pass. He got me four policemen. He made that commitment to me and he gave me four policemen. He gave me the school guards also.

00:42:02 **MC: So how many people were employed as a consequence of that type of maneuver I guess, or maybe not a maneuver. It just seems...vote swapping.**

SD: Well we had four black policemen. The first four we hired. We hired I think about two or three women, I just can't. I know one of them was here the other day to see me.

00:42:25 **MC: Who were school guards?**

SD: Yes. School guards. When I asked for the playground they told me they would never see the day that the black children would play on Martin Park because Martin, who was the Sheriff of the city, gave it to the white people. These are some of the things that I was in there constantly fighting for.

00:42:49 **MC: What other political plums fell your way as a consequence of being involved in politics? What about the Progressive Democratic Party? Were other members of the Progressive Democratic Party, did people try to bribe them?**

SD: Not...I couldn't say that. To say...but I know one man was given a certain amount of money to leave this area.

00:43:20 **MC: Did he?**

SD: Yes. He did. You know, I didn't—

00:43:25 **MC: Is that person alive today?**

SD: No, I doubt it seriously. See it aggravates me whenever one of our people sell themselves and stoop so low. I just watched—I lost confidence in all of them. I'm somewhat like a loner. We started—I've started—

00:43:48 **MC: You say you're a loner. Were you still affiliated with a number of groups I guess?**

SD: Right.

00:43:55 **MC: But you tried to perhaps steer an independent course because of some of the things.**

SD: Right but they called them—

MC: You're not just simply talking about the Progressive Democratic Party. You're talking about all the things you were associated with.

SD: Yes. Yes. Yes.

00:44:08 **MC: Ok. What do you know about the Palmetto Voters Association? Which was an organization that was formed around the same time as the Progressive Democratic—**

SD: That was formed by Jones. Dr. Jones. We talked to him—

00:44:23 **MC: Do you remember his first name?**

SD: What was Jones first name Mrs. Theresa?

[Mrs. Devine: I remember he was a dentist]

SD: Yes. See.

00:44:32 **MC: He was a black dentist in the city of Charleston. Ok. Were there any major differences between the Progressive Democratic Party and the Palmetto Voters Association?**

SD: No. John Green was a part of that Palmetto Association too. I think he was the first President. Old man. John Green. He's dead. You see, now during that time everybody had their little thing. I had the East side. On my side I'm considered a ruffian. I'm not a Party type of guy.

00:45:17 **MC: Are you saying the Progressive Democratic Party catered for the East side—you're not saying that.**

SD: No. No. No. No. No. I'm not saying that. I mean—

00:45:25 **MC: But are you saying that the Palmetto Voters Association was exclusive?**

SD: No, they weren't exclusive but they select their leaders. They would send their representative over to me if I want to be a part of them, then I—

00:45:46 **MC: Did you ever receive any feelers from the Palmetto Voters Association? To become a member? Anybody kind of sound you out, where you were coming from?**

SD: I wanted to be part of everything. Yes, I was a member. Well they knew where I was coming from because they knew the involvement with the people that I had. You see I had the people. So therefore in order for them to get my people—see because what I did, I would call them together and say 'now look we want to vote for such and such a one' and now you have the names of all of them now. We would meet at a certain church on Monday night. Then Tuesday morning when we go to the poll. I'll give you the name and the number that we would determine. This is how we had to do it. It was—this is what I did for strength. Not for the individual, I wanted the strength to let the white know that we have strength in the community. That we could put in and take out. Then they began to realize. Then I wasn't selfish enough so I went over to Joel Brown. I said here I got the book on the Great Game of Politics. This is what we have here. We got together because we were working for one goal. The same thing, to be a first class

citizen. Then there were many times—Joel Brown was the president of the NAACP and I rode along with him in various places. We helped people out.

00:47:43 **MC: Were you ever part—maybe you answered this but I wasn't paying attention, were you ever a part of the Palmetto Voters Association?**

SD: Yes.

00:47:52 **MC: You were?**

SD: Yes. I was a part of the Progressive Democrats and the Palmetto.

00:47:58 **MC: Did you ever attend any of their meetings?**

SD: Yes.

MC: What type of goals did they have that were different perhaps from that of the Progressive Democratic Party? Or maybe there weren't any?

SD: There were no differences. There weren't any differences because of the fact that we wanted to be a part of the legislative body of the state of South Carolina. We wanted to put people in those slots.

00:48:19 **MC: Did the Palmetto Voters Association identify certain people that people should vote for in terms of a slate or were they nonpartisan?**

SD: Yes we did. We did. We identified people. I remember we'd meet at Dr. Jones' office.

00:48:38 **MC: And you'd have a slate?**

SD: Yes.

00:48:39 **MC: So that people would support these people. How did the coexistence of the Progressive Democratic Party and the Palmetto Voters Association jive?**

00:48:48 SD: They mostly were the same people! That's what I'm trying to tell you. That the one in the NAACP and the one in the Demo—we are all one. In order to bring up a total, all of us were one group. We came into one.

00:49:05 **MC: Let me ask you another question. Do you think that there was two groups which had essentially the same purpose, was it over a cult of personality that one person or a set of personalities wanted to be the leaders. Wanted to be in the role of leadership and nobody wanted to share it and let's say one particular party...?**

SD: Well that always have that case. Right. Right. It's just like churches, divided.

00:49:28 **MC: Was that the reason for the division? Because essentially you're saying that there were the same goals and that probably voter registration—**

SD: You...let me. I think I got something, I'll let you read. Cut off again.

00:49:38 **[recording stopped]**

00:49:40 [recording resumes]

MC: Ok. We're back now. So you were part of it. You say there were a number of people who had political ambitions or interested and so they came to be prominent members of let's say a particular party or particular association but basically quite often when you look at the rank and file, you find the rank and file oftentimes were members of several organizations.

SD: That's right. Several organizations. Right.

00:50:04 **MC: All committed basically to one thing.**

SD: Right. One goal. One goal.

00:50:06 **MC: That is that black people would be equal partners within American society.**

SD: *Right!*

00:50:12 **MC: That's the bottom line.**

SD: That's the bottom line.

00:50:15 **MC: What were some of the achievements and perhaps the shortcomings of the two groups you were part of? Let's start with the Progressive Democratic Party. What were some the achievements and shortcomings of those two?**

SD: Well the achievements is that we had organized. We got the cohesiveness. That's the most important thing. We got some leaders that come and go. We were still together because we wanted Charleston to continue the growth in politics. Regardless of whether one gets weak or whether it was being bribed off by some whites that you know one thing sometimes we—as a negro I shouldn't say that but we get big headed. Then I've had it happen to me in the eight years that I was in City Hall that a white man would come to me and say—

00:51:22 **MC: By the way, you should tell people what position you held in government because you were an elected official at one time.**

SD: Yes. I was the first City Councilman.

00:51:34 **MC: First black City Councilman**

SD: First black, and also the first Mayor Pro Tem of the city. I held Tri-county area, the three areas Treasurer. Vice Chairman of the Tri-county: Berkley, Charleston, and Chester Counties. I held there as Chairman of the OIO [?]. So many [laughs] you know.

00:52:06 **MC: I think in other words you're well qualified to talk about politics in Charleston. Back to the last point we were about to make about the achievements, were there other achievements besides the cohesiveness that was created by banding blacks into political associations? What were some of the shortcomings?**

SD: The shortcomings were that—I don't think there is any shortcomings. The main thing is that we grouped ourselves and they were bickering among who would be leaders. This is the thing.

00:52:51 **MC: Which is perhaps natural or something to be expected. Perhaps was that a reason for the existence of two organizations which have similar goals and aspirations.**

SD: Right. Well it serves its purpose. Those two organizations served its purpose. The main thrust of the thing is to be a part of the Democratic Party. So then when we became a part of the Democrat Party then the whites started going out of the Democratic Party and they organized the Republican Party. See the more we got into the Party, just take for instance Sanders as the Chairman of the Democratic Party now he's the first black.

00:53:36 **MC: You are talking about William Sanders?**

SD: The same Sanders you were talking about with the sickle cell. See, so the main thrust of the thing that we drew all workers, even those that signed with the militant man and I was a liberal. I wanted to get in there. I couldn't stay on the outside and know what they were doing on the inside even though I had all the tricks of the trade because in the political arena and black churches. [chuckles] That started the outcome, it was churches and other churches. Their vote selected me they have a way of selecting and electing their people so this is the same thing in the Democratic system of government. But I wanted to get on the inside not taking hearsay, I wanted to see how it operated and what. Oh yes, I've been driven. After I got into the office and I managed over the next two years after I got in there I could have been out. If I was a man looking for money. I was looking—I wasn't going to sell my—one thing that my grandfather told me. Don't sell your people for a horse and buggy and an acre of land. That stayed

within my mind. I said I'd never be a Judas of my people. God blessed me so. I'm not hurting. I've a rather prosperous life. Children have done well, I'm proud of everything. Grandchildren in high places. I don't force anybody to their selection.

00:55:35 This is—you know the thing that really disturbs me with my people—the black people when I was over in Africa and all the various countries that I've visited. There were 5000 dialects of Swahili. In every village you go into they speak a different language. They speak—that's the Swahili but you know what I mean, they don't understand in the next village. That's just like one part in New York and South Carolina. But you understand one thing. You have a human compassion for people and you could understand that. You see a child in Africa has the same needs as a child in America. These are some of the—when I met Paul Roberson in Aiden in 1959. When [unclear], all of us come together what they were trying to consolidate Africa to be a united state. But the Caucasian didn't want to see that because they would lose footholds on things like that. This is why I don't—why they aren't bothering those people over there now. [unclear] the Mambo, Paul Robeson. That's why they call Paul Robeson a communist. The only thing because he wanted things better for black people. Now I imagine if Paul Robeson were in the United States at that time he would look down on me. [laughs] You know what I mean? I could see he's a Yale graduate and I just got a normal education. But now that we were all in Africa, we were all one and we were one cause. We were all sitting around the table. I imagine that I was the only one that couldn't speak to but one—scarcely could speak one language. This is the advantage that we as black people are to look. You see now—I saw children divided on the side of mountains with burlap cloth in order to try and get an education.

00:58:02 **MC: You saw that type of determination then?**

SD: Right.

00:58:05 **MC: So why can't we do in our country where we have a little more—**

SD: More! See that's what was said to me over there. I was in America you black people have the opportunity to cut—here look at all the resources here in Africa. The diamond mines, the gold, the copper, the zinc. Study engineering. Come over here. We need you. The white man is exploiting us. We don't have anything to say here you bring in material here and now, you're bringing us obsolete material. That's what the United States are giving, even though they said it's a land-lease. These are the things that I was pushing for and I finally instilled in my sons and my daughters. Now if there were children wanting and their parents have to get up early in the morning and stand around a project until sometime to get a job for 50 cents a day. 50 cents to clean...to clean blacks houses too. Some of them over there are blacks who are a part of the English government. They have big jobs so they go and the natives of their land they hire them for a day or so.

00:59:25 **MC: SO your concerns were not just restricted to the Charleston area? Not even restricted to the United States. They were really like a pan-African—like a said earlier I guess. You were a pan-African. A person who believed in black progress not just in America but all over the world.**

SD: Right. That's it. That was instilled in me through my grandfather.

00:59:45 **MC: Well I think we have covered all the ground. I've learned a great deal on it. Thank you for your help and your cooperation.**

SD: Thank you. This is what I always say I wonder why that we can't get it over. We start dealing in personalities. That's one thing wrong with the blacks of America. We want—once we get in a position—I see it with some of the big stars. Football stars, basketball stars, the minute they get a little progress. They are donating so much, to the Caucasian and your people they have needs. The lifestyles have already changed now. I run a successful business for 40 years. Nobody who worked for me said Devine take on penny from me. Some of them, I taught them. I showed them how to get a home. I said this is your goal, a home. You have a place that you can call your own. I encouraged them. I said I don't want you to work for me the balance of your life. I want you to get some education, but in the time of you getting that education you must remember from where you came. That's all I'm asking. I helped some of them to go to school. I helped some to go right down to that college where my friend is at right now.

01:01:26 **MC: Is that the College of Charleston or the...?**

SD: No. The College of Charleston wasn't in existence for Negros. I just—

MC: The Citadel?

SD: The Citadel, when I was in office, black people couldn't go to any of those schools. Then I started to lower the curriculum, to lower the tests in order to get some Negros into some of those schools. You would be surprised that some of the tests that I examined during the time when I was on the Education Committee. I said 'why do we spend money if you aren't college material?' Just like I tell my—I had ten children. I said 'Now don't let Daddy waste the money if you are going into college to throw it away. Now if you go in there to study, then it's all well and good but if you go in there to just waste my money, you might as well forget it. When your report comes and I don't see an average'—I always had a thing since they were in elementary school, high school. I'd give you 25 cents for each 'A' that you have on your paper. That made them improve themselves. They were running, 'I got a dollar and something', 'I got so and so this month'. Encouraging the children.

01:03:02 **MC: Did you do a lot of community work?**

SD: *Yes!* Yes.

MC: What type of associations were you affiliated with?

SD: Well I created my own association. [recording sound warps]

01:03:11 **MC: You created your own? What was it called?**

SD: Welfare.

01:03:13 [recording cuts] **End of Interview.**