

BROWN, J. Arthur
INTERVIEWEE

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Abstract: In his interview with Michael Cooke, J. Arthur Brown (1914-1988) discusses his involvement with the NAACP. Mr. Brown details the NAACP's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement in the state of South Carolina. He discusses the pivotal cases of Brown vs. The Board of Education and his experiences with Judge Waties Waring.

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

Time	Keywords
00:00:08	MC: —Who has been very active in the Civil Rights Movement since the 1940s and is I believe still active today. Mr. Brown could you give us a brief biographical sketch of your life? When were you born, where were you born and what is your education?
	AB: I was born in Charleston South Carolina, August 16, 1914. Really a senior citizen, I will be 70 in a short while. I attended my elementary or low grades at Burk High School up through eighth grade. From eighth grade on through twelfth grade I attended Avery Institute which was a private school in this community then under the auspices of the American Missionary Association, which is a group of Northerners who came into the South and organized educational institutions right after the turn of the century. After completing high school at Avery, I attended South Carolina State College where I received a degree in Business Administration. That has been the extent of my academic classroom things from there on it's always been just practical experience and worldly involvement.
00:01:37	MC: What is your occupation now by the way?
	AB: I am classified as Community Relations Specialist working with the City of Charleston. What we do is we work with various problems that the city encounters. Sometimes when the situation that can become explosive like if you can't sometime get to the basis of it and try to find some type of compromising

deal were we can take some of the heat off or get some people together to start talking at the table rather than attempting to start throwing bricks in the street.

00:02:13 **MC: When did you first become concerned about the black participation in politics?**

AB: Well I could imagine—I would say way back in the—let's say back in the mid '40s. Well let's maybe get back to around maybe '44 or '45. There was a time when it was quiet a struggle, in South Carolina particularly, where Negroes were involved or attempting to become involved in the political arena. There were all types of barriers placed against you. You had the poll tax, the literacy test of which there were a number of questions that had to be answered on a form that was established by the state and established prior to or by the all-white Democratic Party. Such stupid questions as 'Have I ever been arrested?' or 'Have I ever been convicted or involved with sodomy or miscegenation or incest or such. Another of which I thought was very stupid which was saying if the person had been involved with wife beating. I always thought it was the most stupid thing because women filled the same questions. My question was what would a woman be doing with a wife? Anyhow, we had registration boards here and all over the South, particularly South Carolina and this part of South Carolina. There were boards all over South Carolina, where the boards were opened only one day a week. The first Monday in every month would be the time when the board was open.

00:04:14 **MC: Was this board open only to blacks or whites or...?**

AB: No, no, no. It was open to everybody but was just this one day a month. If you didn't get in on the front—that is in other counties. In Charleston we were able to get the board to open three days. The first Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of each month. But who you didn't register during that time, you had to wait for the following month for them to go in and register. Even when you were attempting to register, you were a lot of times subjected to any number of insulting attitudes. It goes beyond saying you had an all-white registration board who had their attitudes and were not interested in having Negroes to register. Of course, this followed a case—this period that I'm talking about now followed a case after we had one of the landmark decisions by a federal judge. Judge J. Waties Waring. We had struggled back and forth. There was a case that originally came up in Columbia attacking the Primary. It was a case of Elmore vs. Rice in Columbia. Mr. Elmore was a taxi cab driver in Columbia and Rice was one of the Democratic Officials. That case was—something happened to the case, I don't recall exactly but it didn't reach the point that we wanted it to. So right after then a case was held in which the next plaintiff in the case was Brown vs. Baskin. Mr. Brown was an operator at a Texaco station down in Buford. Baskin at that time was the Chairman of the State Democratic Party. NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] under the auspices of being under the legal guidance of Thurgood Marshall, who was the chief lawyer with the NAACP

at that time, handled the case. The case was held before Judge Waring in Charleston. The reason for the case, as I mentioned, the Brown vs. Baskin. Baskin was the Chairman of the Democratic Party for the state of South Carolina. We were advised to go on and bring it in this particular manner because if you did it with the Charleston area, or the Buford area, or the Georgetown area with 46 counties you could have been 46 years doing this. So you enjoin the entire state Democratic Party so when the ruling came up this was a ruling against the whole party. It was held in Charleston.

00:07:25 **MC: Do you remember the year?**

AB: '47.

00:07:28 **MC: '47.**

AB: Yes. When Judge Waring ruled and he got a whole lot of opposition and yin yang-ing upon the thing. But he ruled that he was opening up the Primaries to all people. I'm very happy to look back on it. Was fortunate to have sat in the court room when this decision was rendered. When he said then that he was not opening the books to the Negroes, and these were his words, because maybe next week the Chinese or some other people would come up so I'm opening it to all people who desire to vote. He informed the group in court that day that he was backed by the United States Government, his ruling was. He wanted them to know that he would be available on Election Day. He would not tolerate any foolishness. He left them in the courtroom by saying to them that 'I want to inform you that my ruling will be carried out and I would also like to further inform you that we do not have air conditioned jails in South Carolina where we serve ice water.' Which was really kind of telling them this was going to be. We came on through. Prior to that we had officials in the city of Charleston where the case was being held who were saying that blood would flow in the streets before Negroes were permitted to vote. We finally went on and voted. Some of them had said it would be over their dead body or they would be dead and coincidentally one of the outspoken politicians at that time who said that we would never see the day or that he would never, he died about a week or so prior to the registration. So it was a kind of—

00:09:27 **MC: What was his name, by the way, do you remember?**

AB: I think it was Lockwood was his name. Yes. I think it was...he was the Mayor of the city at that time. I think...almost positive it was Lockwood who said that you would not vote but we went on and voted anyhow.

00:09:44 **MC: How many people voted when they had that first real opportunity to do so? Because it must have been a lot of economic pressures...**

AB: Well there was a lot of economic pressure and...[to MC] can you cut that just a minute? I just don't...

00:10:02 **MC: Oh. Ok. We'll have to stop. [Recording pauses]**

00:10:05 **[Recording resumes] MC: We're restarted. Maybe we should stop?**

AB: Yes.

00:10:08 **[Recording resumes]**

MC: Ok. We're resuming the conversation. You mentioned about economic pressures placed against people who might have voted, how extensive was that?

AB: Oh it was quiet extensive. Between the NAACP pressure and from the economic [person in background shouting] from the economic pressure was brought...well they attempted to contact people and ask them not to hire people who were actively involved in the NAACP. As I said in some areas they even went to the extent of a lot of people lost their jobs. A lot of cases where they were trying to get people to not hire anybody who was connected with the NAACP, who had any outspoken movement let's say toward the voting.

00:11:18 **MC: Do you recall a number of laws that was passed by the legislature of South Carolina in 1956 that specifically were designed to single out and to blackball members of the NAACP?**

AB: Yes. I don't recall them. There were laws that were on the books in various counties which said that any—particularly where teachers were concerned, that they could not—they had to sign a contract that you would not belong to the NAACP. That you would not teach a white child in school and those types of things. Teachers had to either sign those things or...and of course the main thing was 'do you belong to the NAACP?' If you ever said that you were in trouble. So a lot of teachers had to do it, back in those days we used to have to do a lot of...they just drove us to doing all kinds of undercover situations. We used to get memberships from a number of teachers. In some cases we were really a little teed off with some of the teachers because one of the main cases was brought in Charleston here was one of the equalization of teachers' salaries. Where teachers were financially the number one recipient of that particular suit and sometimes was very discouraged to find out that they were the ones when the NAACP got the salaries raised but yet were unwilling to donate. Back in those days it was just a \$2 membership but they would start using all kinds of excuses.

00:13:02 **MC: Maybe we should make a little clarification. You said equalization. Based upon race?**

AB: Yes. Yes. Well you see there was a time when, for instance I don't know for other sections of the state but there was a time when the people of Charleston...the principal of the white school would get in about almost \$300 a month to pay to about \$50 a month to a [black] high school principal. All the salaries were based on ...[to MC] let me tell them to...

00:13:40 **MC: Hold on a second. [Recording paused]**

00:13:42 **[Recording resumes] MC: Ok we're resuming.**

AB: Yes. What I'm saying is those were the type of pressures that were brought on people who attempted to be vocal. When you were saying about equalization, you had a case back—You had one of those crazy laws. There was a time in Charleston when a teacher in Charleston school system could not get married. The first time we brought a suit, it was one young lady she finally went off that summer and got married. We knew she had done it secretly, well she thought she had done it secret but it got out. We knew if it went on into court they were going to pull up that she was not an eligible person so we had to go around and find another person to deal on the equalization of teacher's salary. The same Judge Waring was the judge who presided over that. That made this school board here pay equal salary for equal qualification and not base it on race.

00:14:58 **MC: What about your role in voter registration activities? When did you first become part of that movement?**

AB: Oh well, I'd say back in the '40s. During the same time that Judge Waring passed the ruling. See prior to '47 blacks could only vote in the general election. They could not take part in the Primaries like the Mayor or your Sheriff or whatever. You could vote for the President of the United States once every four years.

00:15:30 **MC: Just for the general elections but the statewide offices or county offices...**

AB: General elections. Which were known as the Primaries. Judge Waring, when he came up with this. He opened the books and said that everybody had a right to vote. Which was his opening up the Primaries to all people. Prior to that—as I said we worked along with them. We were struggling along trying to get that done so I'll say that we worked along with that voter registration from the very inception in the '40s.

00:16:13 **MC: What groups were very vocal in regard to voter registration? What organizations really pushed that issue?**

AB: Well you had the NAACP at that time. You didn't have all these bunch of...maybe I shouldn't say it that way. You didn't have PUSH [People United to

Save Humanity]. You didn't have SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. You didn't have CORE [Congress of Racial Equality]. That's yes. Everybody primarily looked to the NAACP. Which is probably right now the only one that survived. Most of them are gone off of the sea. Then the NAACP was primarily the granddaddy of that whole fight over here. As I said there was no SNCC. There was no CORE. There was no PUSH. There was not SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference]. None of those organizations were even in existence almost back in those days.

00:17:17 **MC: What type of efforts did you have to exert to get blacks to register? What were some of the obstacles that they had? After all they had been disfranchised for a long period of time. What problems did you have trying to convince them that they needed to register? To make their voice felt?**

AB: Well. It was a great degree of apathy to start with.

00:17:45 **MC: Why do you think they were apathetic?**

AB: Well I guess they just hadn't done it before. Some of them were afraid. A lot of people there had some of the plantation apathy or hangover. You know.

00:17:58 **MC: That they didn't really believe that they were equal to whites?**

AB: Well some of them didn't. Some of them were working on plantations. Some of them were working in service to whites and some their white bosses or madams would tell them 'I wouldn't bother with that thing, that rabble-rousers.' Some of them believed it.

00:18:19 **MC: How were you successful then in breaking down those—not mentality because you have a number of mindsets involved.**

AB: Well it was just a struggle. One of those on-going things you just had to keep on beating the bushes. We went around from time to time and got with the ministers in the churches. We used different tactics in order to try to get the ministers. Of course a lot of ministers were not interested but you did have a few of them who were interested.

00:18:51 **MC: Such as who?**

AB: Well a number of ministers. I don't remember all of them off hand but you had number of ministers. In fact I'd say Veal was there.

00:19:02 **MC: Frank...?**

AB: Frank Veal whose picture I showed you there. He was quite active back in those days of Emanuel and then you had...

00:19:11 **MC: He was a pastor of Emanuel AME Church?**

AB: Yes. Yes. AME. They had a Reverend Long before this. Had Morris Brown, he went after. We toured several churches like that. They were very sporting but you had a whole lot of preachers that felt that Jesus will take care of me. You know what I mean? All this meant we had a long way to go to help them and they didn't think nothing about that. [unclear] but they did have—so then we had to use several different tactics. Back in those days one of the things the NAACP had a division of voter registration. From time to time we'd have these kick off things and one—different tactics they used. One of the tactics that the NAACP used back in those days, they had what they called Honor Roll. They had this scroll put in the church...what do you call it? The vestibule of the church. You got some of those ministers who were interested, would ask on certain Sundays they would set up a voter registration committee within the frame work of the church per se. Then what they would also do then, was a certain Sunday they would ask the members to come to church and show their registration certificate to that committee. That committee in turn would put the names and registration number on that Honor board. See a lot of the folks started picking up a little pride then because they didn't want to see that roll up there with their names not on it.

00:21:01 **MC: Not on it. [chuckles]**

AB: So that was one of the ways. Another tactic they did use one time was we had thousands of little gum things, just about this size, and the thing was on there 'I am registered' or you are. You know one of these type of fun that they did with gum. What we did was we start setting up on a block campaign type of thing were you went down the block. What we would say if you are five people in your house if three of them are eligible to vote then when you get the three people, now if there are two kids you don't blame them, but if you had three persons in that house who are eligible to vote when you have proven to us that these two eligible voters have been registered then we would stick this on your front window in the home. On the window.

00:21:58 **MC: Kind of like the blue eagle thing of the past. Something similar to that.**

AB: Yes. Whatever. I don't remember. Yes. So what you do was when the person next you had it, well I want one too so they would start doing it. Really you can never say this is a one two three way then. You just try to do every little gimmick to try to encourage—

00:22:26 **MC: That reminds me. 1952 you ran for the South Carolina House of Representatives. Could you tell us why you did so?**

AB: Well we did so primarily—

00:22:37 **MC: You say 'we' who were the 'we'?**

AB: Herbert Fielding who is presently in the House, and a Reverend Frank Veel who was at that time Pastor of Emanuel AME Church. Of course Emanuel churches had a long history in the struggle in the Civil Rights Movement because it was alleged that from Emanuel Church that Denmark Vesey lead his putting together his insurrection movement. The churches for a long time, not as the only one but it does have a history of being involve in that. We realized back in those days that we didn't have enough—I don't think—I think after all we struggle for we finally got about 3000 blacks on the books. We then realized we could probably—got enough to even win if we were out there running fool enough to think that we could win. Could buy—

00:23:36 **MC: But did you really think that you seriously had a chance of winning?**

AB: We were fool enough to think. Then on the other hand we knew that we didn't. We felt that putting our bodies sort of out there and going around to various churches and that we were encouraging people to register who would not have registered before.

00:23:57 **MC: Did you?**

AB: Yes. We definitely did.

00:24:00 **MC: Did you see a sizable increase of the voter registration?**

AB: Yes. Well we saw it yes. We saw a sizable increase in voter registration at that time. It was...yes we saw a sizable...well it's...there were also these things that what a person had to do was to...back in those days now, there were eleven of us running so you had to vote for eleven people. You see what you were doing was you were voting for—the blacks primarily were voting for us but also our blacks had to vote for whites.

00:24:47 **MC: So this was the full slate. The full slate was kind of worked against you because it wasn't single shot.**

AB: No. no. You see you could up there and go boom boom boom but you see whites weren't voting for us. We got one or two votes here and there but it wasn't us. We had to vote for either of them so when they got their white votes plus our votes that really put us out of the board.

00:25:17 **MC: So full slate operated against black interests.**

AB: But you see the machine was set up that if you didn't vote for eleven then the votes didn't count.

00:25:28 **MC: That's right.**

AB: So many of our people even then being timid and some of them couldn't even get...they went 'I ain't going to vote for them I'm just going to vote for you all.' Then if they voted for three of us they could have stayed at home.

00:25:41 **MC: Yes. They invalidated their ballot.**

AB: Yes. Those were some of the obstacles that we did face back in those days. Then we finally were able to get together and we—I'm trying to remember. We moved around and tried to set up voter registration committees. We drove all around trying to—

00:26:05 **MC: Do you remember the titles of these organizations?**

AB: Most of them were done then under us, the NAACP, but we were working with the various Masonic Lodges. Nearly everybody looked to the NAACP back in those days, the umbrella. So you had your Usher's Union, and your social clubs and all but they were all kind of looking forward to the umbrella organization. Like I said we had a very powerful Usher's Union, you had your Masonic Lodges, your fraternities, your sororities, and you're asking them to try to make voter registration a part of their program. I remember one time we were working with, particularly back in those days, one of the large segments with the Longshoremen union. We finally sold the head of the Longshoremen union, a Mr. George German who was quiet a powerhouse with the waterfront gang then. But we finally sold him on the idea and he made it almost mandatory that when those fellows came in to draw their payroll check he said 'show me your registration certificate. You hand me your registration certificate as I hand you your check.'

00:27:25 **MC: The NAACP?**

AB: Well, for registration.

00:27:26 **MC: Oh I'm sorry.**

AB: For registration yes. We also had several of the other organizations of that nature. For instance I remember one time when the sanitation workers were able to come on and move in and got a number of them to register just about then. In recent years just to be able to just have some deputy registrars so that we could move around in various areas and register people rather than everybody having to go down to the place.

00:28:10 **MC: When did this happen?**

AB: Oh I guess this was 10-12 years ago for deputy registrars. What we used to do, several of us like Herb or Esau Jenkins particularly who was very active, when we would go down to the registration board as people were lined up out

there, we would walk along and find out from them where do you live. They would tell us well we live on such and such a street so what we would do we had some small pieces of paper like this in order to kind of speed it up we had a map and we would say alright if you lived on so and so you lived in twelfth precinct two. We'd give them the slip so when they got up to the desk for registering the registrar would not have to stop to look on the map to see where it was. In order to try to help to speed it up.

00:29:10 **MC: Were there ever—now we're getting into the '70s now. Let's back track a little and talk about Judge Waring. Did you know him personally?**

AB: Yes. I knew him personally.

00:29:21 **MC: Did you want to talk about that?**

AB: Well, Judge Waring was an individual who we might call a Messiah of our time. Judge Waring—I became intimately involved with Judge Waring and I'd say I got to know him pretty personally. I visited him because after he passed a number of his decisions he became ostracized by this community for a lot of his decisions particularly on our behalf. It came a time shortly afterwards that after a number of his decisions he was completely ostracized by the white community and his friends and all.

00:30:12 **MC: Was he a native South Carolinian? [chuckles] I'm thinking of a library now, a native of South Carolina.**

AB: Native South...He was a native Charlestonian. He was the grandson of a Confederate general. He served for a period of time as the kind of top pick with the Democratic Party. He...served one time as the [unclear]of Charleston. Then they had some internal affairs but he finally divorced his first wife. He married a Mrs. Waring who...the second Mrs. Waring. **[Recording stops]**

00:31:09 **[recording resumes]**

MC: Ok. Well you might as well continue.

AB: Well yes. I said after that second marriage he became completely ostracized by his former wife's friends and relatives and sources and what have you. A number of organizations in the community that he had previously belonged to, he was asked to withdraw. As a result of that I would not be too naïve to say that we were the recipient of some goodies as a result of their having ostracized him because I think with his Mrs. Waring he got a chance to sit down to himself and realize how wrong he might have been. When these cases came up he went on our side because most of your major cases to prepare during that period of time were here and decisions rendered by Judge Waring. One of the first ones as I said was the one that related to the white primary. Then right afterward, let me see, there

was the case of Viola Duvall vs School Board of District 20. This was one on the equalization of teacher's salary. Then there is another one—

00:32:43 **MC: Irrespective of race?**

AB: Yes. Before it was based on race. The, well you had two or three others, then when one of the major cases—the turning case was when we had a case in Clarendon County. The case of Briggs vs. Elliot. This was one of the cases for the desegregation of the school system. Briggs was a young [unclear] student up in Clarendon County and Elliot was the Superintendent. So that's how the case got its name, Briggs vs. Elliot. Back in those days some of the months had been still at the head of the place so they had a long period of time this case being heard here but then this goes back to the time that Thurgood says was contenting that you were challenging the Constitution with the manner of a three judge court. A three judge court was held in that case although Clarendon County was the one it was held in Charleston. There were four other cases which were the Brown vs. the Board of Education out of Topeka Kansas was the lead case. Then there was a case in Virginia, in Washington, Kansas...where else? Then the Clarendon County case was our case.

00:34:21 **MC: All were part of that one, I remember.**

AB: All were part of that five cases that made up the Brown vs. the Board. Judge Waring ruled. There was a three judge court hearing. Judge Waring ruled—he dissented. I forgot who the two other judges were, they were probably told to me. The two other judges based their theory on Plessy vs. Ferguson. Separate but equal, the 1896 decision. Judge Waring contended that segregation was wrong and that we need to wipe it out. There can be no such thing as separate but equal. He rendered a dissenting decision in this hearing. When the case went to the United States Supreme Court I was read the briefs. The United States Supreme Court almost verbatim said the same thing as Judge Waring.

00:35:16 **MC: Said the same thing.**

AB: They unanimously agreed on it. Nine judges. A unanimous decision, on Brown vs. the Board on a number of the recommendations of J. Waties Waring. Said in that case that all you need is but a historian; but it's a tribute to him. In fact, you might say he lived ahead of his time.

00:35:41 **MC: Yes you'd have to say so.**

AB: Well not too long ago, a couple years ago, in City Hall...I'd like you to further see it. A couple years ago the Walter White Award was presented to a niece of his and she in turn turned it over to the City of Charleston. We had a very liberal Mayor who had the guts to accept it on behalf of the City of Charleston and had it permanently installed in the Chambers of City Council. When it was

done he had me to deliver the keynote address that night. I don't know how much of that talk was accurate or appropriate but I went on and told them about my experience with Judge Waring and of the various decisions that he had rendered. I said we had been living with the messiah of the 20th century so to speak. I concluded my—which they quoted in the paper I thought I had one, I probably have one so you can get to read it. I told them in concluding that I'm thinking about two men and both men are judges. One had the backbone and the other did not have the backbone. One was willing to do what was right. The other was being persuaded by public opinion. I concluded by telling that the two men I am thinking about or the two judges were J. Waties Waring and Pontius Pilate. I said because if Pontius Pilate had the backbone of J. Waties Waring we would not be celebrating Easter because Jesus would not have been crucified. [Both laugh]

00:37:48 **MC: That's pretty good. That's pretty good.**

AB: They quoted me in the newspaper and they also quoted me in the minutes of the meeting. They sent me a copy of the minutes of the regular meeting.

00:38:03 **MC: One other topic, you were right about that, he was ahead of his time Judge Waring was. When you look at the South Carolina legislature in 1956 they passed two measures that were specifically directed against the NAACP. So that does tell you they were against...**

AB: Oh. Yes. Heck yes. He was ahead of his time. Because they had all kinds of things. Here is one this was a paper there they sent me. I had forgotten about it. I wrote something in a newspaper as it related to the sit-ins when Mrs. Marion Grasser just recently died. He was saying that all of these sit-ins were the result of outsiders. I'm telling him that if he's so stupid to allow himself to believe all that and people believe that all these things because we don't need an outsider to come and tell us when we're getting kicked around. So this is they quoted me and what I told them in the news media and my opinion it made it to the sit-ins during the demonstrations in the '60s.

00:39:25 **MC: What about your role? You said you are a contemporary of Matthew Perry, you're a little older than Matthew Perry. Can you tell us about when he first became interested in the NAACP and took efforts—?**

AB: Yes. I'm older than Matthew Perry. I don't remember when exactly. It had to be somewhere around between '50...

00:39:48 **MC: Mid '50s I guess.**

AB: Yes. Wait a minute. Yes. Mid '50s. I talked with him near the '60s. Yes. Matthew came on just about almost around the beginning of the '60s.

00:40:05 **MC: What was his contribution in the early years?**

AB: Prior to that Matthew was a Columbia boy but he had located his law practice, normal law practice in Spartanburg. That reminds me of another decision of Judge Waring. That was when there was a time when blacks had to go elsewhere for law. We had a young lawyer, young man who attempted to go to law school. John H. Wrighten who was one of the Civil Rights lawyers later on. Wrighten attempted to go to law school in Carolina and they turned him down.

00:40:53 **MC: University of South Carolina?**

AB: Yes. University of South Carolina. Then when we took this case before Judge Waring. Judge Waring gave South Carolina one of three options. Build a law school at South Carolina State College, admit Wrighten to the University of South Carolina Law School, or close the University of South Carolina Law School. [MC laughs] He was real rough on them. [MC laughs] Of course...

00:41:29 **MC: That number three was pretty tough on them.**

AB: Oh yes. Well you see under their Plessy vs. Ferguson theory at that time they went on and built a law school at South Carolina State. That's where Matthew took his law at.

00:41:44 **MC: Same thing for Judge Ernest Finney.**

AB: Yes. Finney was there too. This let me see, Boulware who was preceded Matthew. Boulware and Jenkins who were more or less Civil Rights Lawyers prior to that. Both of them I think were Howard University graduates. Those were the decisions. Then for a while—another historic decision came about as a result of that. Prior to that South Carolina lawyers who went to University of South Carolina, the law school, they passed the bar by acclimation. As soon as they got their GD degree they were lawyers. Then finally came back with another little thing. This had been right after then. They established this Bar Association that you have to take the bar examination to become lawyers. After Negroes were permitted to go to [University of] South Carolina. Finally of course after the decision of May '54 that just crumbled all of them on down because shortly after was when we decided to attack the thing. I was State President but for a while when I was local President Harvey Gant—

00:43:26 **MC: You were President of the state NAACP?**

AB: Yes. I was. From '55 to '60 I was local President. From '60 to '65, I was state President. It was during that time that we attacked the decision—well we start in on Brown vs. the Board. It was then that Harvey Gant who was first Chairman of my youth group decided he was going to jump on the state hard. That's when we filed the suit. We had two suits filed. One was Harvey Gant vs. Clemson. The other one was Henrie Monteith vs. the University of South

Carolina. We got to court with Harvey Gant's case prior to Monteith's case so of course Monteith had to follow into that and this is when we broke down the barrier of the colleges. The Citadel, The Medical University, and Winthrop, all the rest of the state supported schools. We started that one on the academic, on the higher education level. Then about three years later we came back and I used my daughter as a plaintiff in the case of Millicent Brown vs. [Charleston County] School Board district 20. This one ran—we desegregated the school system here in Charleston. It was only the school district here. Of course Judge J. Robert Martin presided over there and he ruled back in those days then that only the named litigants could attend school that coming year. Then we got hell again because here some of the people 'Why I can't go to school but you can send your child and I can't?' and 'Hell, I tried to get you to sign your name and you wouldn't sign.' That's from when I was suing that book and putting in names.

00:45:23 **MC: But isn't that just a token way of presenting these...?**

AB: Well that's what it was. It's still this way. [chuckles] You still run into that because you take right now on, I guess, district 20 is about 98% black. You have quite a bit of desegregation in your schools in the outlying areas but Charleston, I don't believe you have 15 white students in all of Charleston school system.

00:45:54 **MC: Let's get back to Matthew Perry. Earlier you said something about his development, what impact did you have on his development? His interest in Civil Rights.**

AB: We worked along with Matthew, and there came a time that we were interested in a lawyer coming aboard and a young one. Some of the others were getting older and Reverend Newman, I think, was—Ida Quincy Newman—who is the Senator now. Well, Newman served under me as Field Secretary when I was state President. This was during all of the '60s. This is somewhere we came aboard with Matthew, I don't remember the exact word or something but it was during that period that he became involved. Of course heretofore just like to say he had just a regular run of the mill law practice up in Spartanburg. Of course he is a Columbia boy but shortly after that he finally moved on back to Columbia when he came. I think he had the reputation nationally as handling more student's cases than any other lawyer in the country. He did a hell of a job with it. Matthew had made quite a name for himself. We kept in touch with each other quiet often. As a matter of fact he and I just came off the board as members of the Trustee Board at Voorhees College just in the last year. I run into Matthew, you know, quite often.

00:47:30 **MC: Could you tell us a little about some of the black political organizations that spring up during the, I guess, '50s and '60s such as the Democratic Committee, maybe before—**

AB: Well, you had an organization that's called the Progressive Democrats.

00:47:44 **MC: Right. A Democratic club.**

AB: Yes. Well it was almost like a club.

00:47:52 **MC: Could you tell us a little bit about that? Why that was organized?**

AB: It's because it was trying to put some cohesiveness in the political arena. Although we had all those obstacles against us, this was even before Judge Waring's thing so they were trying to attack it. I don't know whether you are—are you familiar with John McCray?

00:48:16 **MC: No.**

AB: So John Henry McCray at that time had a local newspaper called the Lighthouse. When he—John was originally from Ladson, Lincolnton. Went to school at Avery then at Talladega.

00:48:31 **MC: The Lighthouse was published where?**

AB: It started here in Charleston then finally he moved to Columbia. He bought over another paper, something that was called the Informer. It was a black paper. He then combined them so from then it was known as the Lighthouse and Informer. When it was published in Charleston it was originally the Lighthouse. John and...now a person who could give you a little more background on that because I don't want to—who is a little more familiar with—would be Arthur Clement.

00:49:09 **MC: And where is he?**

AB: He is right—he is located here.

00:49:14 **MC: Ok. Maybe we'll—after the tape we'll talk.**

AB: Yes. Well, Arthur was very instrumental in working along with McCray and John Weer and several other people which I would rather you talk with him to—see because I—in my younger years I was not as active then. It was an interesting part of history because they even went to Chicago and challenged the seating of the white Democrats at the Democratic Convention. I remember they—I can remember vaguely how they made a very strong impact and who became quite an ally of theirs was Congressman Dawson, who was quite a political figure in the Democratic Party back in those days. I would say I rather Arthur talk with you. Arthur, John Henry...can you cut that a minute [to MC]?

00:50:16 **MC: Ok. We'll stop.**

[Recording pauses]

00:50:18 [Recording resumes]

MC: Ok. We've resumed the interview. We mentioned the Progressive Democratic club I believe. Were you ever a part of the Democratic Committee of the late, I guess, the late '60s early '70s? Were you ever part of the Democratic Committee?

AB: You were...it was a talking type of thing that you were named as a representative to the local precinct Democratic club meeting. It was just a name only thing, most of your officers were all involved. There was white meetings it was just a little talking thing. You looked at it, the fact that you were at least sitting in there listening but it was purely a lilywhite charm operated situation.

00:51:13 **MC: Are you talking about Democratic Club or Democratic Committee?**

AB: I'm talking about the Committee too. You didn't have—from then you didn't get these recent Democratic clubs. Now, we did have a group which we call PAC which you could probably call the Democratic Committee where we did a lot of our internal operations from. I would call that the Democratic Committee because this was where the real power structure of the Democratic Party was. You would name—they would name...you would have three or four heavy predominantly black wards, they called them back in those days. They would name three or four—it was a talking situation, you know, from each ward. They in turn would....

00:52:09 **MC: What about your efforts to see a voting rights act pass, did you participate in that process or were you just kind of reacting to the voting rights act proposal made during the mid '60s?**

AB: Well working with the NAACP, you were originally a part of it because your...I worked very close, I don't know how much dealings you've had with him or of him but does any of your records show anything with Clarence Mitchell?

00:52:41 **MC: Clarence Mitchell? No.**

AB: Well he's the one that you could not right a history of this struggle—

00:52:48 **MC: For this particular state?**

AB: No. For the—he was the—they referred to him as the one hundredth man in the United States Senate. He was the NAACP chief lobbyist. He worked on any number of things. I remember when Clarence and I worked together when we was desegregating the naval shipyard. Clarence always came down here and we got on with it. When it was ruled that there would be this desegregation, then we had to

check on it. Clarence came down from Washington and we ran around the shipyard to see that they had taken down the colored and white signs that they had had. Colored and white signs in the shipyard over the toilets. You had it in the cafeteria where the whites ate in one section and all that kind of crap like that. Clarence was one who did more, while the courts played its part, Clarence did a whole lot of bending of elbows and pushing that Civil Rights bill. I can remember I was out in Cleveland the day when the Civil Rights bill was passed. I remember I sent him a telegram from Cleveland. He thought that [unclear] Said ‘Arthur, Cleveland? Hell they wanted you out of the South. He just concluded that I was out there. He is a person who you really need to do some reading up on because he did it in all. Clarence covered the water front. Clarence Mitchell. You need to make a note of that. That’s a name, he made a great contribution. He was...I forgot what they called—what’s Clarence’s official name but he was the number one lobbyist. He had been in and down with them a long time. In fact you know he has a brother that’s in Congress now. Terrance Mitchell. Then he has a son that’s in the Baltimore Senate. They have been involved in it across the board. In fact Clarence’s wife used to be the Field Secretary and his mother in law for a number of years Mrs. Jackson, she was the Chairman or State Secretary—I mean President of Baltimore Maryland.

00:55:34 **MC: Ok now it comes to me. Ok. Did your group petition for the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965?**

AB: Well as I said we all worked a part of the program of NAACP.

00:55:52 **MC: How did you make your voice felt in South Carolina?**

AB: Well by attempting to register as many people as we possibly can. To show you how essential voting was.

00:56:08 **Did you petition or lobby Congressmen about the need for that bill?**

AB: Well yes. We did it but you know it didn’t—it fell on some deaf ears and all. But they knew we were there. We knew they knew we were there because back in those days you had people like Strom Thurmond to deal with. He spoke for 25 hours against the Civil Rights bill. You would tell them but they weren’t listening to what you were really saying.

00:56:43 **MC: How did you help the national—how did you help that national effort? Did you perhaps support the effort by funds?**

AB: Yes. We always sent funds over to...you know for certain and putting on different things and sending funds. Trying to increase your membership because after all the more memberships you have—I mean a certain cut came to the local but the bulk of it went to the...things. We also attempted to ask as many organizations and churches and individuals to purchase life memberships because

a nice chunk of that went to promote the program. For instance, I just sent another one the other day it's just coincidental that they're coming up with something new for \$40 you could buy one. For \$40 they would send you another one. Clarence Mitchell, we were just coincidentally talking about him, but Clarence Mitchell's picture would be on it here where we have Lincoln's on the new one.

00:58:01 **MC: I see. Ok. Is there anything else we should discuss that we have perhaps neglected?**

AB: I don't know. It's just like I said it was that continuous struggle that we saw. We really saw the need for it. For instance I can remember when we were not able to even play golf here. We filed a suit against the municipal golf course, against the City rather for the golf course based on the theory that we were paying money for taxes. Now, I might say that you probably in Charleston right now have one of the most liberal administrations probably anywhere in the South. [Intercom and bell in background] **[Recording paused]**

00:59:04 **[Recording resumes]**

MC: Ok. I guess we're kind of summing up the interview. Your highlights as a member of the NAACP and its contributions to a number of areas such as voting rights and voter registration and the courts.

AB: Yes. We had the voting rights and registrations. The courts on the desegregation of the golf course. The desegregation of the state park in South Carolina. The desegregation of the schools, this is in the City of Charleston. Worked with the desegregation of the university on the state level. Back in those days on the Plessy vs. Ferguson, the erection of the law school at South Carolina State College which has since been erased.

01:00:06 **MC: So there are a number of accomplishments of the NAACP.**

AB: Oh yes. I told you about the teachers equalization based on race salary coming through. So NAACP has played a pretty active role as far as South Carolina is concerned, or in any other one that I mentioned to you that I want you to look up the case of Sara May Fleming which was the desegregation of entrusted transportation in South Carolina.

01:00:39 **MC: Ok. I guess we've had a fairly full discussion. [AB Laughs] I thank you for your help in my project.**

AB: Yes. Okey Dokey.

01:00:50 **End of Interview.**