

BROWN, J. Arthur
INTERVIEWEE

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Abstract: In this interview with Michael Cooke, J. Arthur Brown (1914-1988) discusses his experience at Avery Institute and later the Progressive Democratic Party. Mr. Brown details the influence the Avery Institute had on shaping his outlook on black equality and fostering his interest in politics, as well as the NAACP's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement in South Carolina. He discusses his involvement with the Progressive Democratic Party and their influence on the black community, 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
00:00:00	MC: Today is February 14, 1986. I'm conducting an interview with J. Arthur Brown who resides in Charleston, South Carolina. Mr. Brown can you give us a brief biographical sketch of your life? Your birthdate, birthplace, education, and occupation?

AB: I [clears throat] was born in Charleston, August 16 1914. Spent all of the major part of my life here. Educated in the public schools of Charleston until eighth grade. From there I transferred from the public schools to Avery Institute which was a private school under the auspices of American Missionary Association [AMA]. That was an association that right after the turn of the century, a number of northern liberal whites came south and attempted to further the education of blacks right after the turn of the century or maybe after the Emancipation Proclamation. That institution was quite well known because it also established another institution, for instance, on a higher level called Fisk University in Talladega. Particularly known in the South for products of the American Missionary Association.

00:01:22	MC: What type of education did that institute provide?
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AB: It provided...it was an institution as I said it was a private institution but we thought in turn that it did give you a superior educational background based on the theory that all of the members of the faculty were college graduates. This was what we cannot say of a number of the public schools. That both as I mentioned Fisk and Talladega were known for and really embraced their high academic standards. Avery having been sponsored by the American Missionary Association, I would say 95-98 % of the members of faculty of Avery were products of these institutions. It brought us—it was also an institution that that's, I say, gave a lot of freedom to programs and things of that nature that was not accorded in the public school. Where we brought in speakers and talked about the changing times and—

00:02:41 **MC: What kinds of speakers did they bring in so that you could listen to them?**

AB: Outstanding pupillage of that time, we would say inducted the boards, or Walter White and Brown Lee and a number of top speakers who were interested particularly in the changing times and spoke about the segregated system which we lived in. This could not happen in the local public schools because the power structure would see to it that this type of thing did not go on in the local public school. We did have it in Avery. We had courses there. Courses like—at Avery during that time we had courses like Physics, Chemistry, Latin, French, and things of that nature that were not even taught in your local—

00:03:44 **MC: More classical type of education.**

AB: More classical type of things. It was a type of situation that they [clears throat] attempted to enlighten you on what—I mean of things going today then it was a system—and Mr. Cox at that time who we met—

00:04:02 **MC: What was his first name?**

AB: Benjamin F. Cox.

00:04:05 **MC: Was he black?**

AB: No. He was...he was black and he was white. But I'm saying he was real fair and could easily have been taken for white but he was a black man. He was a graduate of Fisk. He was quite an educator and quite a disciplinarian. He attempted to expose us to all of the higher things in today's goings on. For instance, a program that he had which we called back in those days we referred to it as the retortory. But this was a mandatory thing particularly for juniors and seniors that each year you had to memorize a piece of literature or a speech or what-have-you, and you had to deliver that to the chapel service. Which means you dig in to get the various subjects that you were talking about, number one.

Plus the fact that it was also preparing you to appear before audiences and knocking out some of the fear that you would have appearing before groups.

00:05:20 **MC: Did they ever—did the instructors at Avery Institute ever argue for racial progress through your efforts? Was it a belief that you were the key to the black man’s future in Charleston and perhaps—**

AB: Well no. Now back in those days I was just a high school student but we did discuss among faculty and staff programs of that nature, you know.

00:05:49 **MC: Was there any concerted effort on the part of instructors to really be race leaders and instill in the students the need that they should be perhaps race leaders?**

AB: Yes. Well this was—particularly... I mean this was a very noticeable fact in there because the fact that you could sit down and talk with them with our faculty members and they endorsed these type of conversations plus the fact that they brought in some of the leaders of our time to come into be speakers which exposed us to that type of environment. I mean these people were part of it.

00:06:34 **MC: What I’m getting at is—the reason I’m asking is, I don’t want to try to put words in your mouth. I have noticed a pattern that there seems to be an extraordinary number of people from Avery Institute who are what I would call race leaders. I have a suspicion that that was cultivated long ago. Perhaps when they weren’t even aware of it. That they were being groomed to be the black leaders of the future.**

AB: Yes. Well that could be. I mean the degree of independence and exposure that you were given too maybe you didn’t think about it then but if you look back probably this was in the background.

00:07:20 **MC: Were any of your instructors very active in the community and spoke their minds not only in school but outside in the—**

AB: Yes. We had one or two instructors who weren’t afraid to walk out in their curriculum about that. And plus the fact that—

00:07:37 **MC: Do you remember their names?**

AB: Well let me see. We did have a, I’d say, a Mr. Horsey, A.W. Horsey [spelling?]. We had—who was a Charlestonian and [a piscaite?]

00:07:53 **MC: And what was his field?**

AB: Let me see I know we took Latin under him, and one or two other things. Back in those days every guy in elementary was trying to learn Latin. He was one

of those and we also had a Mr. Whitaker [spelling?] who was our French teacher. He was also a piskite. He worked also along with the football coach. He was one of these guys who was willing to take up. There was also one who I almost idolized. It was a Dr.—well he's not actually a doctor, but J. Andrew Simmons. He was quiet a very outspoken... maybe some of your moving around you probably met him. He would have been around in the Columbia area because at one time he was the principal of Booker T. Washington High School.

00:08:50 **MC: Yes. I have.**

AB: In Columbia. Well he was a Charlestonian. He was here at Avery for a while. A very outspoken type of person. When he left Avery...

00:09:02 **MC: Was it because of his outspokenness?**

AB: Well no when he left it might have been better working conditions. Well not working conditions, might have been better salary I think. I don't—in the public schools, I don't know how their salaries range. But he was good for us while I was a student here. [??] The shirt that I suppose he wore one time was Superintendent of Education was addressing a group and he left I mean he was doing a lot of this talking from what I can understand and one of the things he was saying that in you know in his world he didn't feel that any negro teachers were capable of earning the type of money or somethings the white teachers was capable of having. It was said that Mr. Simmons just got up and walked out of the room, came on down stairs in the office where the meeting was being held and wrote up his resignation and went on upstairs and handed it to the Superintendent and that's the way he was [unclear] in the school system. He went from here and went on to Columbia. He was quiet an outspoken person in Columbia at Booker Washington. Then he left the system here and went upstate New York to Rockland County, I think it was Hillcrest. That's the name of it. I don't remember but anyway. He stayed up there for a number of years because that's where he died. As I say you did have these type of people who were willing to speak out with the—

00:10:39 **MC: What was the impact on you when you saw people like that? Willing to speak out at that particular time when that wasn't a time when many people were standing up for their rights.**

AB: I was, kind of, admired those people. Because on the other side of the coin particularly in public school you know if they cry in the public school—but you cannot put your hand on a person in the public school who did that. Plus the fact in the public schools you had...hell if you...male thing or some of the female... because you know Charleston had some peculiar laws. One time we had a law in the city of Charleston here in this district where a teacher could not be married. If she was—she had to be a single person so therefore you had a whole lot of female teachers in the public schools system and they weren't willing to get up and

express their opinion. They went home and then on back to their so and so in private rooms.

00:11:49 **MC: I see. Well since I have interviewed you before I'm going to skip part of your education and your occupation because we've been over that before. When did you first become interested in politics and why did you become active? What stimulated your interest at first?**

AB: Well, I don't know. I guess a number of things that I saw that I felt just wasn't being... maybe done right. After I...some of the experiences that I had coming up as a young child and some of the discrepancies that I saw being practiced by the system, I think, kind of inspired me or woke my thinking to becoming more in the political arena. At that time...the early part where even if you talked about—the Democratic Primary was not open to negroes and you had to pay a poll tax back in those days yet you were being burdened down with these civilian obligations but yet you were denied so many privileges of participating in things. Say to become an elected official in Charleston was taboo. You had your school boards where a number of blacks or negroes, we didn't use blacks than, they were negroes were involved that you had no say on your school situation. You had in your public schools you could...you saw books that had been used in the white school system. All torn and ragged and passed them on. You saw even they were so naïve to in many cases had a rubber stamp made that stamped in the book that these books were to be used in negro schools only.

00:13:58 **MC: Only.**

AB: It was those type of things. There—you had your swimming pool that no you cannot go to or you had a—we played football and we had to clear out an open field where they had a playing field for young white high schools. It was a park, Hampton Park, up here nearly where the Citadel is now. That if a negro attempted to even ride through there—just driving through—a cop would stop you and wanted to know what was your reason for going through there. On the colonial lake and there were some bases out there put out by one of the social service clubs. I don't know which one it was one of those of that type, but donated and put out on the Colonial Lake out there but tattooed or written on the back of the benches 'For use of white people only'. It's just those type of things. Then finally when we got into the arena attempting to push this voting situation though, as you say, even prior to that came along the Progressive Democratic club, I mean it—well they called themselves a club, but at that time they were even—although they called themselves a club they were denied—

00:15:42 **MC: Where they a Party or a club?**

AB: Well, they called it the Progressive Democratic Party but it had been—it was—you could have called it a Party also. We said there is a group of people who were interested in participating in the political arena.

00:15:58 **MC: What were some of the motivations for people to participate and, maybe more important, why did a number of people form that particular party?**

AB: Well they saw that...Hell all of our elected officials were white. If you looked at the whole situation you would see that way back in those days you were living in a political world. If you had no part in that, I mean where you had to almost everything you dealt with had to be one 'he's half a man' or back door or 'yes, boss' type of thing and I think we felt that as individuals that as tax payers, human beings...

00:16:47 **MC: And maybe veterans?**

AB: As veterans. Yes. Veterans were coming back. You know, they had been overseas and come back and couldn't do this and couldn't do that. So it was all those type—a conglomeration of maybe denials of rights and privileges that, you know, gave rise to it. As I said, I know you have met with John McCray well John and I went to high school together. John was two years ahead of me in high school but we all came along together there. There's not that much difference in our age. John was very active there, then he moved on. He went from here down the Talladega, he graduated from Talladega. When John came back—and, you know, several of us just got together and kind of 'well let's do something about it'. Of course John McCray and Arthur Clement and Mr. John Wheeler, and Preston Robertson and several other people I can't...

00:17:55 **MC: Are all those people alive or?**

AB: No. If I'm not mistaken I think...I might be wrong but I think Arthur Clement and myself probably might be—that I can think of in Charleston of people who maybe have been a part of working—

00:18:12 **MC: What about Saint Julian Devine?**

AB: Yes. Well maybe, say yes. Julian Devine maybe another one. I don't want to leave anybody out yet. Julian came along which at that time...

00:18:25 **MC: When did you first become a member of this Progressive Democratic Party?**

AB: Well, when was it formed? I don't remember years.

00:18:32 **MC: I believe the mid-1940s. I don't want to give an exact date, I have a date in mind but I might be wrong.**

AB: Yes. Well it would be in the '40s because see, I came out of college in '37 and I've been here almost ever since. We had worked along with trying to do that as I said John McCray and Arthur Clement and those are—I knew some of the other people on the statewide level like John Bowman I mentioned, there was Osceola McKaine, another guy we used to call James—we used to called him Nougat, he was another McKaine. There was some folks from all over the south. They had B.T. Williams, Reverend Wheeler.

00:19:20 **MC: This is a statewide Party?**

AB: Yes. Well it finally came into a statewide...

00:19:25 **MC: Was it a situation that it wasn't a statewide party at one time?**

AB: Well, you know, you held a meeting somewhere to start it and then it...spread, yes.

00:19:34 **MC: Started to spread. I see. So perhaps when it was first formed where—**

AB: Might have been around Columbia somewhere. Could of have been around Columbia.

00:19:41 **MC: But as time passed it began to have a statewide impact and became a statewide...**

AB: Well we started...yes. Because it might have been moved from place to place. One of the biggest things that came about was when they had the state Democratic Convention and all of the delegates were lily white delegates from South Carolina. This was one of the first big moves that kind of really fore fronted the Progressive Democrats. When a group of folks, I was not in that group, but a group of folks went to Chicago and challenged—

00:20:16 **MC: Was that 1948?**

AB: Might have been around '48. And challenged on the floor and Congressman Dawson, I think. Somehow—

00:20:29 **MC: William Dawson?**

AB: William Dawson, yes. [coughs] He was a black congressman. It was odd so to speak around Chicago. Somehow McCray and Modjeska and several of them got together and pattered around there for a time, he turned up. Pushed them toward making our case, they came back in the name of going around and—

00:20:57 **MC: Challenging the credentials.**

AB: Challenging, yes. It was just really after that when the Primaries were opened to Negroes and we had a case of—the first case that came up was the case of Elmore vs. Rice in Columbia but something happened. I don't remember exactly what happened, some legal put back and that case kind of flipped down. Then a couple years later a group, this was under the auspices of NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] but just about everybody was on the part of both of them. The next case, came out of Buford, was Briggs vs. Elliot. That was a case with the opening of the Primary and at that time Thurgood Marshall was the key councilor then. It was, this time we were advised not to just sue Buford but to enjoin the entire Democratic system. I mean the white Democratic Party. It was kind of like, Ed Baskin at that time was the chairman of the whites so we filed the suit and enjoined because he would advise 'you have 48 counties and if you had to grab Charleston build the charge you'd be 49 years [laugh] doing this so we put the whole thing in there and this is where the case came into being. It was heard here in Charleston with Judge J. Waties Waring rendering a decision on it.

00:22:38 **MC: You mentioned that the role of the NAACP, did the Progressive Democratic Party play a role in that as well?**

AB: Yes. Well it's like I said, if you had any number of people who were—

00:22:51 **MC: Any group play a primary role in that? Was the Progressive Democratic Party playing a *primary* role in these court cases? It seems—**

AB: Well no. You see what happened, you worked along with that but your leading force, because of this things were legal, so it was the NAACP. But you still had the same person. You know what I mean?

00:23:11 **MC: I see.**

AB: For instance Mr. MacDonald out in Sumter there who was very active with Progressives. In Columbia you had Mr. Hinter and you had a number of people who were—

00:23:23 **MC: So people had a number of affiliations. There was no such thing as...well the Progressive Democratic Party had no part of it because quiet often people had alliances with more than one political affiliations.**

AB: Yes. Yes. Matter of fact, even any of these names that I have been recording here this afternoon all of them that you could—well the Progressive Democrat was also very openly involved with the NAACP. It was a struggle for survival so whatever had to walk was on that road for the struggle. So this is like for years Mrs. Modjeska Simkins was the state secretary of the NAACP. John McCray at one time was the local President of NAACP. I was at one time the local and state

President of NAACP. McKaine and just—like I said you name it and... people—it was an integral thing in the struggle.

00:24:28 **MC: What about specific goals of the Progressive Democratic party? What were their agenda apart from the NAACP's agenda?**

AB: Their agenda was to feel that if you were a party, you were a voting group then you felt that you should be a part of the system. I mean, that is as far as the voting is concerned but you should also be a part of—you should have some of these...I mean if you want to call it a political plums, that's not exactly what I had but why can't you be in the clerk of courts or holding some of these offices? I mean you were a citizen you had the right to vote. You were certainly deemed as intelligent as the part of those who were in there so why were you...excluded?

00:25:19 **MC: Excluded.**

AB: The only thing you could put up there would be race.

00:25:23 **MC: What about the fact that many black people had become convinced that the National Democratic Party was a party that best espoused their views and values? Was there a feeling that 'we have to get into this fight and we need to become part of the National Democratic Party and the only way to do that was to become part of the State Democratic Party and the only way to do that was to introduce some reform. Was there any consideration to that?**

AB: It was definitely that. Of course I'm trying to think because maybe I was stubborn and maybe hadn't thought too much of it but I really believe the turning point of Negroes with the Democratic party was when this country had just come out of the regime of the Herbert Hoover depression. On came Franklin Delano Roosevelt flying the banner of the Democratic Party with all of these programs that were helping hungry people, old people, broke people...

00:26:36 **MC: White and black.**

AB: White and black, yes. More or less blacks were being helped because you had a lot of these social programs that they refer to it now, that blacks were being—you had your, what you call it, CCC and guys got jobs working and cutting down trees and lumber. The social program that we do have today was introduced under the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration which I felt gave to negroes the theory that 'this is the savior, this is the salvation.'

00:27:17 **MC: What about—**

AB: And this, like I say, this coming from all from the people seeing people coming from the bread line with Hoover to where at least they could get a loaf of bread with Roosevelt. So that's good for them.

00:27:32 **MC: That was the decisive factor for people switching their political identity. What about the impact of the Progressive Democratic Party's activities? What was the effect on the white political status quo?**

AB: Well, they looked at it with interest and probably disgust because what you were doing you were attempting to...kind of conquer their little kingdom that they had built up as their world. You know what I mean? The untouchable. Then you come up with something that you are...questioned their identity as to 'do you own me? Do you have the right to tell me when I can breathe or when I cannot breathe?'

00:28:27 **MC: One of the most notable person who reacted to the legal decrees of the federal government that as really working on behalf of white people was Olin D. Johnston. His response when he first heard about Smith vs. Allwright, was that he was going to fight it at every step and that white supremacy was going to prevail. How many white politicians in South Carolina took the position that 'at any cost, I don't care what political course is necessary I'm going to fight this every step of the way'? Was that the case in South Carolina? What was the reaction of the white political status quo to the emergence of the end of the white primary and the emergence of the Progressive Democratic Party? Did they take positions such as like Olin D. Johnston or did they take a position that was perhaps apart from his?**

AB: Oh yes. There were a number of them. No a number of them took Olin D. Johnston's. And what would happen was...I believe his, probably, role made him more vocal than anybody else. What was he governor?

00:29:51 **MC: Governor yes.**

AB: Yes. Well so what happened was you listen to what the governor said. When a thousand farm hands were saying the same thing, when you had hands on them but he was speaking the...You were attacking a kingdom, you were in the downfall of a regime because of white on white, you know what I mean?

00:30:18 **MC: What was the reaction of some of the politicians? Maybe not—did all politicians react the same way that Olin D. Johnston when they saw that the walls of Jericho were coming down that they said they were going to try and prop up that wall anyway or did they say I'm getting out of the way of this wall because it's falling down?**

AB: Now well very few of them acknowledged it. Now probably a few of them did but most of them put in all a number of efforts to maintain the status quo. Johnston being a person in the political arena and back in those days when Negroes were not voting even—you know it was a really difficult thing because

even after we got the right to vote there's not any more of them than there are now. So many of our people are so negligent about exercising their right to vote.

00:31:17 **MC: Did the Progressive Democratic Party play any role in voter registration?**

AB: Oh yes. Yes.

00:31:21 **MC: Was that part of their agenda?**

AB: Yes. That was a part of the thing because that was back in [recording stops]

00:31:28 [recording resumes]

MC: We would like to continue from the discussion about voter registration and the part that the Progressive Democratic Party played in that. So you can continue.

AB: Yes. See back in those days in the infancy of—I mean when the primaries were opened and the Progressive Democrats that's—like I said when the NAACP—all of these organizations that were opened to try to—so we worked together quite a bit and attempted to promote programs to encourage voter registration. There was a lot of difficulty because all of your registration boards were purely manned by all white people. When you went into these places to attempt to register, all types of discourtesy was—fed to you if you want to say it that way. South Carolina came up with a—one of the most stupid forms that you had to fill out. One of them was...this various things that I have never been arrested for so and so. I have never been convicted of so and so. Well...some of the most stupid things. For instance, 'I have never been convicted for wife beating.' Now when a woman has to fill that out tell me how does a woman have a wife? [chuckles] Some of them about miscegenation and sodomy and all these things that I will not...See back even in those—right about those times you were getting laws on the books because you had all white legislative body on there and they were passing laws on the various areas for discouragement and fear of people. That you were not to register. 'Just comply, this is a white folk thing. You darkies...' this is what they would be saying. 'You stay out.' Particularly in South Carolina, being a rural area you had a *large* segment of your population on a farm. Plantation owners were telling those sharecroppers particularly 'don't you get any notion about you going to be registering to vote.' All types of discourteous attitudes were done by registration boards. They made it very uncomfortable for persons to register.

00:34:27 **MC: How did the Party overcome this attempt to either intimidate blacks from participating in the process or the amount of apathy that had developed over the years because of the denial of opportunity?**

AB: Well it wasn't a bed of roses. You had to bring people in and try to teach them. A lot of our people, as I said, you had a dual situation there. You had a real situation where Negroes particularly on farms were not trying because they feared they were going to get taken off. Then you had a number of people particularly in the negro areas who felt they were going to play it safe. 'I want to enjoy what you get but I'm not going to put my life or my future at stake. You go on and hold your meeting but don't come looking, I'm not going to be there.' But if you offer any of these benefits they'll ride the rail. You know what I mean?

00:35:44 **MC: I see.**

AB: Oh yes. You take for instance we even had, as I said, right after then a lot of laws started coming on the books. There was a South Carolina law that said that where school teachers were concerned they had to sign a paper that 'I will not teach a white child.' On some of the contracts that they had to sign in some of these more rural school systems that 'I cannot or will not be a member of the NAACP.' There was targeted opposition at that time. People were just saddled down with all of those types of things.

00:36:34 **MC: How did he people who were part of the Progressive Democratic Party get together and decide on what course it would take, what type of political action it would take?**

[crosstalk]

AB: Various meetings and you tried—

00:36:51 **MC: At what level?**

AB: Well, state, county, and local level. One of the parts the Progressive Democrats probably also did was you tried—although you were almost helpless—you tried to do some background studying on the attitudes, statements, voting records of your people. Tried to say to them—for instance, since Negroes have increased their voting strength a lot of attitudes have changed. For instance William Jennings Bryan Dorn, who just recently a year or two ago, was head of the State Democratic Party had welcomed our participation but I can remember years back how he was as a young congressman was the one that attempted to introduce a bill to impeach Judge Waring.

00:37:58 **MC: I remember reading some of his letters at the South Caroliniana Library which made very interesting reading about the 1940s. He was very opposed to a number of these measures that were going on as you just mentioned. That can be documented easily. All you have to go to the University of South Carolina South Caroliniana Library and you have boxes and boxes and boxes of materials either sent to Dorn or by Dorn about his position on the civil rights issue that was developing in the '40s and '50s.**

AB: Who spoke—who has a record of speaking more out against civil rights bills in the history of the world than Strom Thurmond? We didn't even know him for about 25 hours on him and then...

00:38:57 **MC: Well I can't speak to you on that because the work has been very clear.**

AB: But you see all of these things here we had a very liberal guy in Charleston. O.T. Wallace was his name. He was one of the few whites that you could talk with. I can remember back in those days you'd sit around and talk and he would say 'Well, don't just blame white people, you blame your people. Because if your people would register to vote you would make Strom Thurmond as liberal as Jacob Jones.' I can remember comparing those two extremes.

00:39:39 **MC: Yes. Those, I guess you could say were, two extremes.**

AB: He and Strom Thurmond, he'd around and he'd shake his hands.

00:39:53 **MC: When did that come about? I'm interested in that issue. When did these white politicians who were formally very conservative become turned around to the fact that blacks were going to be part of the body politic? They were going to regard them as important to their chances of remaining in office.**

AB: Well for instance it all came about not that there was any chain of love, it all became as a result of a concerted effort of all of the organizations combining and attempting to increase the voter registration program.

00:40:30 **MC: So is this not simply the Progressive Democratic Party?**

AB: They had their role.

00:40:35 **MC: But every group played a part in that effort because not one—did any one group try to take on voter registration by itself? During the '40s and '50s not the '60s. During the 1940s and '50s was there any effort on the part of let's say the NAACP to really do the job by itself. Without any help of—**

AB: I don't know that they wouldn't welcome any help but the NAACP was an organization that did have to a certain degree let's say some financial backing that could promote these programs versus some programs like the Progressive Democrats or what have you who did not have that—

00:41:22 **MC: Ok what were the shortcomings of the Progressive Democratic Party?**

AB: Well one thing I would say that was more common but they did not have the financial backing that it took to move around and spread like the NAACP. They had a voter registration department just like they had a legal department. They had

a department like the church work department but they also had a department on voter registration. I can remember Johnny Brooks, died a couple of years ago, but for years Johnny Brooks was the national director of voter registration.

00:42:05 **MC: So that was one advantage that the NAACP and one disadvantage.**

AB: Yes. As a matter of fact, did you meet a Mr. Patton? In Alabama?

00:42:12 **MC: No, I didn't.**

AB: Well Patton used to be for the fifth district and took in a deep interest in the NAACP, but Patton was the kind of reasonable man. Here I remember a couple years ago Patton was—

00:42:30 **MC: What was his first name?**

AB: W. C. Patton.

00:42:32 **MC: W. C. and where does he reside?**

AB: He was around Birmingham. Matter of fact he was one of the head Deacons. Because Patton and I came together when—he was one of the head Deacons of that church where those four little kids got bombed. Where was that? Birmingham Alabama?

00:42:49 **MC: I believe it was Birmingham, I can't remember the church.**

AB: I remember I used to kick back in those days when we used to be nice to kids. Fred Shuttleworth, or I think Fred went up to Cincinnati by then. We used to be pretty active. I used to—he used to say he was from Birmingham and I would say 'Boy why'd you say you're from Bombingham?' [chuckles]

00:43:11 **MC: Bombingham?**

AB: Bombingham South Carolina. [chuckles] That bombing changed the opinion. There was no change of heart or religion or something. [crosstalk]

00:43:25 **MC: There was practical—political pragmatism. At its best or worst. Maybe political pragmatism doesn't have any best or worst it just acts. In its own interest.**

AB: Just acts. They saw this and you see we had to—we started trying to use all types of tactics in order of registering. You know, attempting to register. The man was looking at you when you were doing these—

00:43:54 **MC: Is this the Progressive Democratic Party specifically?**

AB: Well I'd say some of it did.

00:43:59 **MC: What type of specific things did the Progressive Democrats do to try to promote voter registration?**

AB: I would say in this area they were the initial promoters of registration. Even before NAACP.

00:44:11 **MC: NAACP.**

AB: NAACP even came in to it. Now this I can say, when they came in they had a program, they had money, they had people employed. They could do it whereas all of the Progressive Democrats were purely volunteer for that situation.

00:44:30 **MC: How far would they go? Would they help people to the polls?**

AB: Yes. We helped people to the polls, you...attempted to provide transportation for them at the polls. We tried to set up those set ups around the polls to find out how many people had voted. How many had not voted. We used to have a little set up down the street where we'd catch people and get their names when they come to... Then after a certain time in the afternoon we'd ask people to—we'd start checking the list and see that Cooke had registered so let's go and get Cooke over at the cigar factory. There was no one thing that you didn't do.

00:45:20 **MC: What about before the election? What about workshops prior to the election to educate people as so as to get them prepared to be certified as registered?**

AB: We had some of those and what we used to do is they had these long application blanks that 'I have never been convicted of...', you know, sodomy and miscegenation, and all this type of thing and cases they were where there was the prerogative of the board to question whether 'Do you know what miscegenation really was?' 'Do you know what is sodomy?' and they could turn you down on the basis if you didn't. So we used to hold workshops. What we did was we mimeographed hundreds of hundreds of duplicates of the registration application that you had to fill out. Held workshops in churches and lodge meetings and wherever you could get a group of people to try and instruct them so that when they went down there they would be knowledgeable about what they were facing.

00:46:43 **MC: What happened if you couldn't fill out the form properly? Were you turned as unqualified to be a voter.**

AB: Yes. They would do that.

00:46:55 **MC: So what did you have to do in that regard? Did you have to—**

AB: Had to try to teach people how to do it.

00:47:02 **MC: Was that a real difficult task?**

AB: It was a lot of times because, you know, even today because let's say some of our people they're timid as hell with you. Because as soon as the white man look them in the eye they start getting timid as hell. [laughs] We had that to...well people have always been [coughs] up and down with the white man. The master all the time so we've always had that fear. This 'well who am I going be facing Mr. White Man and looking him in the eye and telling him what we going to do.' Then we also had another situation that we had because we had every little technicality that we found. We also found out and checked if a person paid taxes on property valued at over \$301 you could use your tax receipt in lieu of that but so many people didn't know it. So many of these members of the board that nobody went round it and say 'You can't do that.' And they would just go on back because they...you know they say it that way. We did that type of thing. A group of us, I remember Esau Jenkins and several of us, we used to go down to the registration board. We would try to enlighten our people and it would kind of encourage them when they'd see some of us around in the line. Then we had maps of the whole area and if a person would say...well we'd say 'where do you live?' and he'd say 'well I live on', I'm just using this for an example, 'I live on 270 Ashley Avenue.' 'Well ok if you live on 270 Ashley Avenue then you're in Ward 12 Precinct 1.' So when you go in one of the first things they are going to say is 'Where you live?' or so and so. So you just hand them the—we used to put it on a piece of paper. Then they kind of changed their attitude because they're thinking somebody is probably looking it up and showing them.

00:49:16 We had cases where sometime they'd get mad and be very insulting to people. We had kids who would say 'Oh you don't know what' and tear the paper up and throw it down. A couple of times a couple of us one time had to go up for a meeting with the Attorney General to complain about some of these people. We were saying the law was saying at that time they had something on the books that if you failed to pass the literacy test then they were supposed to write on the back why. So then we were saying now how can you write why on the back of a paper that you have thrown in the trash can? Plus the fact it's certainly very insulting for a person to have a piece of paper like that just thrown...and we just kind of had a little talk with the Attorney General. It was over on [unclear] I know a couple of—

00:50:12 **MC: What was the Attorney General's name?**

AB: Maybe it was Galloway or one time I know it was several of them. Maybe it might come to me but... You didn't really have all the—you were making these reports but you wondered even sometimes how far they were going. Even these

fellows who were in office were *in* office as a result of the large majority of white votes. They weren't going to sacrifice those votes in order to accommodate you. They might sound like they will but a lot of time you know that they're a white votes job.

00:50:58 **MC: OK. Let me shift gears and we're going to look at perhaps one other issue. What was the Palmetto Voters Association? Are you familiar—**

AB: To be frank I'm not too familiar with that so I'd rather than attempting to comment maybe as a saw along the activities of the Progressive but I just can't place that...

00:51:22 **MC: Ok. Well let me ask you in summary, I guess, what were some of the shortcomings and achievements of the Progressive Democratic Party? What were some of the accomplishments and some of the shortcomings? Summing up the experience.**

AB: Well I don't know. It is kind of hard to say. I think some of the achievements would much overbalance the shortcomings. There had to be because they were human beings. Somewhere along there they made errors but I really can't put my hand on any major...

00:52:04 **MC: You mentioned finance. I mean, maybe that's not a shortcoming. That's just a fact they didn't have a finance—**

AB: Yes. They didn't have the finance to—and then here is another time... A situation Joe Oslo [spelling?] ran into—he was filing some...that you had to buck some of these so called pseudo self-appointed black leaders who were destined to carry out the dictates of what the plantation man wanted.

00:52:37 **MC: Was that a problem?**

AB: Oh yes. That was a problem.

00:52:39 **MC: You mean in other words bagmen?**

AB: Yes. Bagmen, if people wanted [laughs] to call them.

00:52:43 **MC: Were there any bagmen in the Progressive Democratic Party?**

AB: Well I couldn't say no. [laughs] There could have been some in there. They had infiltrated, you know what I mean. You had Judas infiltrate Jesus.

00:52:56 **MC: Well why should this not be true here?**

AB: Yes. You had some people in there that you only saw at election time when probably when money was going to be moving around. You know what I mean? Otherwise it was—they were always too busy but... It happened—our progress to a certain extent with some of these bag people. These politicians did it to us. I mean you put some money out there in a concentrated place that's thinking about right now. Penny for the soul that was all the struggle that we do have, we still have even today. Today, you have some blacks out here as soon as the political thing coming up they want to know how much I'm going to get paid. That's all the answers for them, never see them from one election to the other but 'What am I going to get paid'.

00:53:55 **MC: I talked to one person, he mentioned something which at first I didn't grasp. He said some people believe in silver rights.**

AB: Yes. [laughs] Some of them, I suppose. [laughs] I had never... silver rights, yes. [laughs]

00:54:08 **MC: Not civil rights, silver rights. S-i-l-v-e-r.**

AB: Yes. Well you had those type of... I can remember one time when—it was 1960, I remember distinctly. The NAACP National Convention was in Philadelphia and they shifted the whole convention over to Washington for a day and military of course were there. The purpose was to get together with your Congressman over in Washington so—it was just in the '60s at the time. Reverend Newman and I were assigned to—Newman, you know he just died not too long ago, he was the first black state Senator for a number of years. Newman and I were supposed to go over and call on Senator Strom Thurmond which you know so we really came out there, this was back in the [unclear] days. He was teaching us all about the Constitution all of a sudden he had to go and leave. He had a fellow by the name of Dent, Harry Dent I think was his name. It was his administrative assistant. So we started sitting there and talking and talking. We were telling him we have a situation in South Carolina. Did you know that we have two counties in South Carolina where there is not a negro registered voter. He said 'Oh that shouldn't be. No, no. No didn't know.' He said 'well you remember one of those two counties? Oh you remember?' 'Yes we remember.' We said 'McCormick county, and Calhoun county.' He said 'Oh well God damn I almost said Matthews.' [chuckles] That was his—one of them was his county. Well there was a time there was not a single black registered in either of those two counties but just like I said they were heavy rural counties where ninety percent of the occupants were sharecroppers.

00:56:14 **MC: I remember about McCormick specifically because I read an article—actually a book that mentioned that very same point. In fact it was two and I can't remember the other one but I know McCormick, right. McCormick.**

AB: Calhoun. That's right. The adjoining county to Orangeburg.

00:56:31 **MC: Well let's see. Any other thing you would like to add? I believe we covered much of the ground except for one little loose end which I should have brought up earlier. That is connected with your time at Avery Institute. Now I'm trying to remember what it was. I know it had some reference with Avery Institute. It just really has gone out of my head, that's really pretty bad for me. A historian...**

AB: Well, Avery was quite an institution of its time in this area. Just recently, I don't know how long you plan to be or to come back, we have recently a group—we don't keep it all to Avery but gotten to setting up a...set up down in the College of Charleston now called Afro American—they are trying to preserve...

00:57:33 **MC: It's a museum?**

AB: It's a museum.

00:57:34 **MC: I'm aware of that.**

AB: I'd just like to say, Avery played a great part in—

00:57:46 **MC: I guess what I'm trying to get at and it's kind of what I brought up first, that institute promoted the idea that blacks who graduated from that particular institution should be race leaders.**

AB: Well it's certainly—

00:57:59 **MC: It was kind of a school that perhaps fit in the mold of the talented ten. One of the things that was probably stressed was that, I guess, maybe I should stop talking here but I believe there does seem to be a—there sure are a lot of people from Avery Institute that are seen to be interested in black progress. It just can't be coincidence.**

AB: Well that's like I said, you had that freedom moment. Freedom of a faculty who were not chained to the system. You had teachers that they couldn't afford to come out and sing—I mean the 'Star Spangled Banner' alright, but don't you come out here singing no 'Lift Every Voice and Sing'. Well we did it down there. I was looking at an old program of 19—our graduation of 1933 at Avery not long ago. That was 1933. Well on graduation we had speakers, I mean the top pointers were the speakers, you know you had your val [valedictorian] and salutasal [salutatorian] but in between...there was something—they serve to me. I didn't partake in that, talking about the atomic bomb.

00:59:30 **MC: Let me ask you another question. Was there any concerted effort on the part of the teachers to talk about Afro-American history? Was there any Afro-American history course or Afro-American—**

AB: Well not per se. I can't remember it per se. But as I was saying you always had this exposure to a number of warm bodies who were...

00:59:55 **MC: People who were actually—**

AB: People actually...yes.

00:59:57 **MC: Out there...**

AB: Fighting for the types of things that we were wanting to think of exist.

01:00:04 **MC: So it wasn't a course but it was—**

AB: Yes. It was nothing like having James Allen Johnson to be a speaker. Mr. Cox had a knack. He was the principal, of finding out a lot of times when a lot of these people were coming through. Then he would write them and then we'd have maybe a bell ring and say they're calling a chapel. We would go on up there and there he was.

01:00:32 **MC: I believe we've covered most of the questions I had in mind. I really appreciate your help. I believe I did think of the question I wanted to ask and that was: was there any systematic attempt to talk about Afro-American history. It wasn't in that regard but people would have—bring people who were currently involved in the struggle [crosstalk] so that perhaps was just as effective, maybe more effective.**

AB: Just as...yes. It was not just a—yes. Yes because you saw they want more. They—

01:01:04 **MC: Versus reading about it. Here are the people who were actually making the strides toward black equality.**

AB: You see you had from time to time you had a lot of representatives even that came through. The number of them were white, I'll grant you that.

01:01:20 **MC: Were they Southerners or were they Northerners?**

AB: No. A lot of them were—very few...I can't remember too many Southerners but a lot of them were offices or deeply affiliated with the American Missionary Association. The America Missionary Association was the organization that went overboard to attempt to educate negros after the Emancipation.

01:01:48 **MC: Perhaps we should go back and study what were the—**

AB: Yes but was it—a lot of them came...from what we can understand a lot of them were of Quaker background.

01:01:59 **MC: I think perhaps we would learn a lot if we studied not only just Avery Institute but also look at what was the mission of the American Missionary Association.**

AB: Yes. When you look at a number of the schools—

01:02:12 **MC: And what were their goals? What were they trying to attempt to do by the—**

AB: Because educated, disfranchised, or [crosstalk]

01:02:23 **MC: But were they just simply educating or trying to motivate them to take the next step? That is to become more dynamic in their own behalf.**

AB: Well, I say that. You see, when you think of the type of institutions that they founded, you know. For instance like Knoxville College I understand was one of them. I know Fisk was. See back in those days you had a lot of common speakers from Fisk. You had the Famous [recording warps] Fisk Jubilee Singers who went all over the world. [recording stops]

01:03:02 [Recording resumes]

MC: You mentioned while we were off tape that it wasn't simply Avery Institute that was in the fore front in the black struggle. You mentioned that the black community of Charleston. Was there something in the black community that simply would no longer accept the past and the current position of black equality? Was there something that seemed to be generated within the community that was not just simply confined to Avery Institute but was prevailed throughout the whole black community?

AB: Well you had a number of situations that came—for instance I remember I...probably during this time was very active with the NAACP but also very active with me, I was from Avery, but also very active with me was Christopher Gantt, who is the father of Harvey Gantt who is the mayor of Charlotte [NC]. Harvey was quite an athlete, I knew him as a kid. Harvey was my Vice Chairman when we had the sit-ins. There was a stadium here used purely for whites and was a fancy stadium and everything, negro kids from Burks school, which is a public school, well Avery also—you played on an open field where you stood around the field. So then we decided to get this same Senator who I told you about, who was a fairly liberal guy, O.T. Wallace. We talked to him about it because he was one of those guys you could talk with about it. So he almost encouraged us. Said 'Lets get on them about the stadium.' So they said 'well ok, we'll decide to talk about it.' You had three schools here. You had Immaculate Conception which was a

Catholic School, you had Avery which was under the auspices... then you had Burk which was a public school. All three of them had football team but all three teams were subjected to this humiliation like that. We said well why can't we play up in the stadium. Well they had a fellow there who was chairman of the stadium committee, he said no, no, no. So we had a meeting one time with the Superintendent of Education. Told him that we want to play in the stadium. He said 'well they are going to have to do that. So we were getting ready so one day Harvey's daddy and a couple of people went... So we were going to use—Harvey was quite an athlete. So we were going to come up with a lawsuit and Harvey was going to be the litigant and ask well why couldn't he as a citizen of this community...you know. So it came to the thing. So one day we met with the Superintendent and he was telling us so I told him, I said 'I want you Mr. Dean to put me... I said please let Carol McAlister just go and find out about it. Know that we plan to play on the stadium. Oh let's say this, now quote me. Either we are going to play in that stadium or cancel of all the Citadel's games because Citadel isn't going to have any games since we are going to get a federal injunction on that stadium.' About two weeks later we went. [chuckles] They us go on and play.

01:06:51 **MC: Let me—I guess we have really looked at most of the issues here. Unless you can think of any other that has escaped our attention?**

AB: Well we did have several breakthroughs during that Civil Rights Movement. A number of other cities didn't see. For instance when the new library built and opened there on...street. We were able to maneuver and get that library opened.

01:07:25 **MC: Was that the Progressive Democratic Party?**

AB: No. This was after the Progressives, this was by the NAACP.

01:07:30 **MC: So many things you mentioned were not part of the Progressive Democratic activities.**

AB: But I will still say, as I said in the beginning, the leaders...leader in the role of registered in voting was basically the foundation laid by the Progressive Democrats. NAACP took it up for many years but back in those days...

01:07:55 **MC: Perhaps that's the best tribute we can give the Progressive Democratic Party. Perhaps we should end on that note. That's a pretty good note. That they were the precedent for many of the...**

AB: Yes. Because voting became the answer and they were the ones who were initially was putting, you know, kind of fighting for voter registration.

01:08:20 **MC: Well I thank you for your cooperation.**

AB: Okie Dokie. [chuckles]

01:08:23 **End of Interview.**