1999

Oral History Interview: Mrs. Ethel Porter and Mrs. Joan Porter-Green

Joan Porter-Green

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I, Ethel Porter, do hereby give to the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University the tape recordings and transcripts of my interview(s) on June 15, 1999.

I authorize the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University to use the tapes and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their Oral History Program.

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Louise D. Bone
(Agent of the Oral History of Appalachia Program)

Ethel Porter
(Donor)

6-15-99
(Date)

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Lucille D. Bone
(Agent of the Oral History of Appalachia Program)

Joan Porter Green
(Donor)

June 15, 1999
(Date)

TAPE #1

SUBJECT: LIFE HISTORIES - APPALACHIAN

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: MRS. ETHEL PORTER AND MRS. JOAN PORTER-GREEN

CONDUCTED BY: LUCILLE D. GORE

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JUNE 15, 1999

TRANSCRIPTIONIST/TYPIST: LUCILLE D. GORE

Interviewer: Hello, this is Lucille Gore and I'm interviewing Joan Porter Green and Ethel Porter in Charleston, West Virginia, about their childhood in the Appalachian region. Today is June 15, 1999, I'm going to ask them, do you understand that this is a oral history report and it will be archived in the Marshall University library?

Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Porter-Green: "Okay" (yes, yes)... Both ladies nodded in agreement.

Interviewer: And it will be opened to the general public to hear. Thank you.

Now I will talk with Mrs. Porter first, and ask her some questions about her childhood and how do you see yourself as an Appalachian?

Ms. Porter: I've been here most of my life, and my lively hood was here, and I've stayed here.

Interviewer: How have you perceived the stereotype over your life time, and can you give me some stories about being an Appalachian?

Ms. Porter: It was racist when I was young and still racist, I was discriminated and couldn't get into a hospital here in Charleston because I was black and I was due for surgery the next day so I had to go to the doctor to get into another hospital. I worked at a hospital where black children were not allowed in the nursery until it was desegregated by CORE.

Interviewer: What is CORE?

Mrs. Porter: Congress of Racial Equality.

Interviewer: Mrs. Porter, if you don't mind could you give me your age, please?

Mrs. Porter: I'm 80 years old.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. Did the stereotype effect your image in any particular way?

Mrs. Porter: Yes, as I said, I've been discriminated most of my life because being black, and some people have the nerve to ask me why my eyes were gray, they just don't understand.

Interviewer: Can you give me some background history of your childhood and growing up and one of the things we have discussed in class is that most of the history that we've read concerning Appalachian, African Americans weren't mentioned or either the slave history, so could you elaborate on that for us?

Mrs. Porter: I went to the public schools of Charleston, West Virginia and black history was never discussed even in black schools. We had, when I was in school, to go by the curriculum the county set down for us, and all the way through schools it's the same thing until 1954, and at that time they still had problems.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on your childhood, as well as growing up in Charleston, West Virginia.

Mrs. Porter: I was born in Louden Heights and I lived there until I was 8 years old, then I moved in the city and different places in the city. I've lived the rest of my life and I went to a segregated elementary school, a segregated junior high school and I was going to a segregated ...Garnet High School, then I went into nursing when I was 47, by an act of Congress that needed nurses.

Interviewer: Did the stereotype effect your ability to achieve in any particular way?

Mrs. Porter: Yes! I've been through the depression. Was even denied, my generation was denied the education that my father and his brother and all the rest of the family got and my children got, but our generation was in the 30's & 32's and we were denied that privilege.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents and their heritage?

Mrs. Porter: Both of my parents were born and raised in Charleston, my mother's mother and grandmother were both Charlestonians, my father's father , grandfather were Charlestonians, so as I said in the beginning, I'm the fourth generation Charlestonian. My great grandparent's on my father side are buried on Watts Hill on the west side of Charleston, which is no longer a cemetery and my mother's mother is buried behind the Mausoleum in the Spring Hill Cemetery, and my grandmother died at 65, my mother died at 94 and my father was 75 when he died and he comes from 14 children. Most of them were West Virginia State graduates and teachers.

Interviewer: Okay, you have anything else to add?

Mrs. Porter: Shook her head in the negative

Interviewer: Now, I'm going to be interviewing Joan Porter-Green. Mrs. Porter-Green, would you please talk about your life growing up in Charleston, West Virginia and also, being an Appalachian?

Mrs. Porter-Green: Well, I was born in Charleston and when I was a baby, we moved to Coal Branch Heights and I live in an integrated neighborhood, everybody was poor, I lived there until I was 12 years old and then we moved back to Charleston. That year we had a one room school, segregated school, there was a white school across the street that we could not attend and when I was in the 6th grade they built a one room school.

I went to Boyd Junior High from the first through the fifth, which was segregated on the corner of Jacob and Lewis Street. Then they built the one room school on Coal Branch and it just wasn't acceptable. They had outside toilet, but they did have running water, so that was my experience as a child.
I had some very good teachers and some very poor, but I learned a great deal because my mother always insisted that we read, so that was basically my childhood, but I did have a lot of white friends in the area that I lived then.

Interviewer: After attending junior high, could you elaborate some more where you went to high school?

Mrs. Porter-Green: After, I want to say a little more about my Junior High experience, I had some excellent teachers. I had one teacher named Mrs. Ethel Taylor, who played a significant role in my life. She was my civics teacher, and she had me enter a number of contests, Golden Horseshoe contest, and my sister had been a winner, and my cousin had been a winner, and I was the 3rd person in the family that were Golden Horseshoe winners, and I was in a number of contest for her and junior high was a very pleasant experience. I graduated from Boyd, I was an artist then, I was a cantankerous artist problem, I probably made horrible grades in art, because I was going to do my own thing.

Then I went to high school at Garnet. I was involved with in the student newspaper, the student government, future teachers. I was and...on a lot of programs , and Mary L. William's, was my mentor and I had Lewis Barnes, who someone said loved the Shakespearean life and was an excellent teacher, so Garnet was a great experience for me! Because Elsie Davis way my art teacher, and so she allowed me and the principle allowed, me to do a great deal in the arts.

Then in school year from 56 to 57, it was decided that the school would be integrated. I was a Junior so in my senior year I went to, from a black school to a white school. There was no such animal as integration, we were jut picked up and put into Charleston High and we encountered a great deal of discrimination that shook my life, teachers systematically tore us apart they were very subtle, but they were very destructive, many of us had very low self esteem when we left.

The kind of racism existed should not have happen to 16 and 17 year old kids at Charleston High, it was the worst experience of my life and it played a negative role in my development and it took me years to finally realize what happened and I was not at fault. I sincerely believe that there should have been the training of teachers of both black and white and students, or perhaps those of us that were in high school should have been allowed to graduate from our schools and gradually put children in integrated schools because they were not intergrated and some of my experiences were horrible. I had been elected president of the student government association by students from Stonewall Jackson, Charleston Catholic High and

Garnet High. The principal refused to allow me to serve because he said I was not a member student of Charleston High student government. I never resigned, but I could not go or attend any meetings and this took a great deal out of me. I would have been student editor of the newspaper at Garnet, but they allowed me to be on the student newspaper, but insisted I do printing, and I was only allowed to write one tiny article.

I was an excellent student, and I had real difficulties not because of my abilities, but because of the teacher who was blatantly racist, she said the problems the students had, that were excellerated was comprehension and speed reading. I was a speed reader and I had no problem with comprehension and after the semester was over, she had told me that my paper was perfect grammatically, but it was damn dull, and she gave me a D.

So, when I got to college, I had no self-esteem, I felt that I was a failure. I was not told I was a failure, but I was shown that I was a failure. In black schools we learned to respect our teachers, in the white schools it was, the first time I had the experience of students cursing teachers, and that did not happen in black schools, so it was a cultural shock.

Interviewer: Would you elaborate on more of your childhood after you left high school and your college years.

Ms. Porter-Green: I was a terrible college student. I rebelled, I didn't like my instructors, I felt that they were regurgitating, teaching us to regurgitate. I was not taught to think, I was not allowed to think, I was allowed to regurgitate everything that was in the book. Everything that I knew was not true and I was a history major and political science and I had very serious questions about the history I was being taught.

As a matter of fact, when I was in the second grade, I got a beaten because I told the kids after the teacher had left the room, that she had the wrong color for the inside of the trees, that no one saw bright

yellow inside, and so all the kids, I told what color to color it, and when she came in she tore me up. And she told me after I got older, I was right and she was wrong, but she was the teacher. So I always felt I'm not going to sit around and listen to anyone tell me anything, if I know they are incorrect. So, I had serious problems in undergraduate school.

Interviewer: Could you tell me where you attended college?

Ms. Porter-Green: West Virginia State College, then I was at Federal City, University of DC, I've been to George Washington University and The College of Graduate Studies.

Interviewer: You were talking about the integration aspect of your life, could you elaborate more on that, were there any organizations you belonged to?

Ms. Porter-Green: I belonged to, I was an officer in the County Future Teachers of America, and I was President, as I said of the Inter-City Government Association, I wasn't allowed to serve by the principal, but I lived in my black world, I did not live in a white world, but I did meet and talk to white students. When I was here in Appalachia, I never lived in a segregated neighborhood, I always lived in a integrated neighborhood, with a lot of diversity. Lebanese, Syrians, etc.,, whites, but even then, I have found out, there was a historian in Charleston who was not allowed to play with the black children or the Syrian children that lived in my neighborhood.

Interviewer: I understand that after you finished college, you left West Virginia, could you elaborate on that?

Ms. Porter-Green: Yes, I had left West Virginia before I finished college, than I came back and this Jewish man harassed me, to go back to college, he said, if I was so damn smart, I needed to get my degree, so I did get my degree, and than I left again and I moved to Washington DC, and I had a cultural shock in Washington, DC, because I had never lived in a black neighborhood and than all of a sudden, I don't see anything but black people. I had to walk all around to find individual houses because the houses were together, and I looked for single houses, a non-apartment buildings, and to see some white people, not in stores, but just living and that was rather difficult.

I had problems with my speech in DC, because the people thought, did not think, I was from the Appalachians, they thought I was from one of the northern states, or I was putting on. So I had a great deal of difficulty there, but I had speech therapy in my segregated school, so that was the reason why my speech was different.

Interviewer: Could you talk to us, concerning being in the city and moving from Appalachian. I know you said it was a cultural shock, but could you elaborate some more, what did, how did people make you feel about being in Washington, DC.

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, it was really exciting, because I guess I was angry about what had happen in high school, and I had not identified …I didn't understand the problem, but I was ready for civil rights movement. I did not believe in violence, but most of my friends were community organizers or civil rights organizers, and we strategized and we met and that was vastly different from my experience here in Charleston, we had a few people marching and what ever and they felt that they were great organizers and I still see that problem today.

It is a vast difference in organizing in rural Appalachians organizing, people are afraid of their jobs or they're into a me situation, and I find in the urban area, sometimes people are more concerned about the group instead of me. And, then I'm concerned about the poor whites, and their plight in West Virginia, I think that they are discriminated as much. They were taught that blacks had tails, then they got television

and found that blacks didn't have tails. They were taught that they were superior to blacks because they had white skin, and they had never been told their history, about many of them being indentured servants, they were never taught, that they came from England, many of them, their fore mothers were prostitutes, many people were let out of debtors jail, and shipped to this country to be someone's indentured servants, many of them escaped to the hills and hillbilly is nothing but old English and they didn't understand that, and it still occurs.

Interviewer: Could you talk about your early civil rights experience please?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, I was the youngest black elected to the Charleston Branch 3226, I was assistant secretary to Ms. Mary L. Williams, Ms. Mary L Witllams had been assistant secretary to the first secretary whose name was Mamie L Brown and then when Ms. Mamie decided to give up the office, Ms. Mary L Williams, who was one of my teachers, became secretary. When I joined at 23, I was nominated as assistant secretary and that was a big deal then. I was the first to be elected that did not have a college degree and at that time, I was 27 by the time I obtained my degree. After a while ...well we didn't, I didn't we were consider young turks in the NAACP, now that I'm 60 years old I realize we made a lot of errors.

Because the Charleston Branch was one of the most respected branches in the country, but we wanted change overnight, so many of us have used some tactics that today I would not have used, because I would say that we virtually destroyed the NAACP through our ignorance and our youth.

Interviewer: How do you see yourself as a Appalachian?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, I am a true Appalachian, I've been told who my father's family was, after 3 years they invited us to a family reunion, the last name is Holcomb from Clay County. And they had to recognize

us, my great grandmother was a Holcomb, she had 10 or 11 children by a black man and the late 1800's so my background you know, was extremely diverse. My genealogy is very interesting.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on that please?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, my mother talked about her grandmother, I have some very serious problem of who was her grandmother, really! I know that her grandmother's father was a white doctor, I've been told that he was Dr. Watkins and that he was a surgeon general in the confederacy. When my great-grandmother was a very young, she had a child and that child was by Watkins. I tend to believe that it was the nephew of Dr. Watkins, he looked like a white man, as a matter of fact, it is rather ironic, he looked like Herbert Hoover. During the depression, he was not accepted by whites in Kanawha county nor blacks, so he moved to Chicago and eventually passed as a white man, and that was pretty prevalent of people in the Charleston area that had the white background. As a matter of fact, I know a friend of mine whose uncle is in Columbus, Ohio, he is passing today, so that happens a great deal here. And I'm not sure who my great grandmother really was, she was in the middle of 10 children and she was the only one that last name was Watkins and during the time that she was born, there was a push to get Indians out of Kanawha County. I guess to march them to them to the reservation. And I'm not too sure, that she wasn't the child of the Indian and Dr. Watkins, but I just can't trace, I've been looking and I can't trace who she really was. But, all of her siblings were Browns, and she did not look like her siblings and she was allowed to take the Watkins last name and that did not always happen.

Interviewer: Okay, after you left Charleston ,West Virginia and went to Washington, DC you... I understand have come back, could you elaborate in being an Appalachian in Washington and then returning to the Appalachian region?

Ms. Porter-Green: I find that racism is still prevalent here, it very subtle, I think that something needs to be done, I see an increased in rebel flags, rebel signs on cars and I always predicted that those people from the hills would come down from the hills, and I never realized that they might direct their attention towards us black people.

This thing linked to divide and conquer and we all have a similar problem, and then too, with my great-grandmother she was not accepted , on my father side, her children were not accepted by whites or blacks and they became very dysfunctional, because being ostracized. Now I see a positive, I see grandparents, particularly grandfathers, with their biracial grandchildren, so that is a plus, that I see in Charleston. But, I see that accelerated quite a bit, of biracial children, have accelerated more, more so in the city, you rarely see that in the urban area.

Interviewer: Has the stereotype of being an Appalachian affected your self image in any particular way?

Ms. Porter-Green: No, being an Appalachian was not the problem, being black Appalachian was the problem. Black people in Appalachian were not supposed to be smart, they weren't suppose to be literate and we did not fit the mold, my brother is a good example.

My brother is a genius and he was abused quite a bit by his teachers, because this little nigger, that does not necessarily look like a nigger, is smart and so they did a job on him and he has never recovered. So we don't have...I mean, we are not identified as Appalachian...we were just identified as niggers.

Interviewer: Okay, so you never really felt that you were stereotyped as a Appalachian, as such?

Ms. Porter-Green: No, I didn't talk like an Appalachian, you know people used to tell me I had one leg shorter than the other, but I never has a problem with that, I just had a problem being black.

Interviewer: What was the driving force that made you leave West Virginia?

Ms. Porter-Green: I needed to get away, I would like to get away now, I've never seen a bunch of people so programmed, that they'd do anything to hurt anybody's feelings, because it's the wrong thing to do. You're suppose to be a good colored girl and that's just not me, I'm going to be myself, whoever I talk to, I'm not going to change, you know, sometimes I'm blunt, and sometimes you need blunt people. But, I don't believe in just spouting off and not knowing what I'm talking about, I read constantly, I do a great deal of research. I lectured Political Science on the college level, so I can understand a bit more than a lot of people and being a civil rights community organizer, I understand. I also understand, if certain people had not made stands, black people would still be in slavery or we would still have a apartheid system in this country. I see in returning to West Virginia, I see that we are doing some fast forwarding, back, I mean we're backing up and it's just as bad or worse even though it's subtle with the racism that exists.

Interviewer: So this stereotype, did this effect your ability to achieve?

Mrs. Porter-Green: No, because I was smart anyway and nothing could stop me from achieving, except I refused to go along with the system. So that stereotype, I mean, Appalachia was not my problem, being a Appalachian black was the problem and it's still the problem, you either play by the rules and I'm not going to allow myself to be put out.

Interviewer: Do you have anything to add?

Mrs. Porter-Green: No, I think I've said quite a bit.

Interviewer: Could you tell some more stories about your childhood or family stories?

Mrs. Joan Porter-Green: Well, I could tell you some family stories. Like my mother said, her aunts and uncles went to college, her grandmother went to college, so college was a way of life. Her father's mother had gone to college and so college was a way of life for them.

I'm not hung up on degrees, because I find some people you know if you play by the rules, you can get out of college, but that doesn't mean to say that you've learned anything. You know you learn from research, reading and meeting with people that are intelligent and quite often people just emphasis what they've learned in school and that's unfortunate.

My mother's grandfather was from Savannah, Georgia and he invented a space suit and he talked about interplanetary space travel. I thought that was very interesting and I really wish I had gotten the opportunity to have known him, because I found that even though he had been a slave, he was extremely progressive and extremely smart and he didn't have a college degree. Than my Uncle Anderson, I have to admire him, my great-great uncle, had a fourth grade education and was the oldest appraiser and had a real large estate company.

I find a difference in Appalachia and I'm really angry because of Shrewsbury Street. You had all types of black businesses on Shrewsbury Street and I have been trying to get it designated as the African American historical zone, I've been told that was in the past and it's not relevant today. But, I know red lining made a hotel go out, Smoot Construction Company had to leave Charleston, West Virginia because they were red lined and all of the businesses are gone. I would like to thank urban renewal, I mean across the nation, it been known as nigger removal. They, even though the red, Court Street was in the red light district, there were black businesses all gone. Shrewsbury Street is gone and you see very little of a black presence and now they plan to do the whole East End and that will take care of the rest of the presence.

And one thing that I find to be very interesting , in 1969 there was an eminent domain project and there was an urban renewal project, there was a highway project and there was a urban renewal project around the Court Street area and they did not, they all used the same stats for replacing housing and that caused an acute housing shortage. Someone mentioned to me today that they, the new police station being located where it is, that it is going to push people further up toward the Capital. Now down towards the Capital near the bridge you have a lot of houses that are unbelievable, and now if you push toward Franklin Avenue, Quarrier Street and whatever, you're going to find blacks all over that area and landlords will make

a fortune. So, you know there is irregular planning or inconsistent planning or no planning at all done by the Planning Commission, the urban renewal authority and the highway department, and to me that's, they've just pushed people out and that's frightening, we have blacks now in Putnam County, who would never have gone to Putnam County because of the racism, you have blacks all over South Charleston, St. Albans, you don't have as many in St. Albans, now as you once had, I don't know how they got out of St. Albans, you lived there, you probably know. But they're being pushed out and where they're going, I don't know. That's all I have to say.

Interviewer: Well, I've really enjoyed doing this interview, I noticed you mentioned the slavery issue, could you elaborate more on that?

Mrs. Joan Porter-Green: Well, slavery was a situation here. My great grandfather, we found him when he was eleven years old and he had been given as a gift to the, the, from MacCorkles, to the Noyes family. Arnold Noye's daughter married and Arnold and he was given as a gift and was taken to the Civil War, as a valet to Arnold and he named quite a few of his children after Arnold and whatever.

I really don't know that much about my grandmother's family. My maternal mother's family, but they were highly integrated and in Charleston, they had white Browns and black Browns and they were probably part of the Brown Plantation, that is where Town Center is located now. It should not have been destroyed, I'm sure lots of buildings and whatever have been destroyed for progress and we've lost a lot of history in Kanawha County. But, I just found out, with my paternal great-great grandfather was with the Holcombs, that there was a plantation in Clay County, but I can't find any information on the plantation, so was a great possibility that she met him and left. There is a question, the Holcombs say one story, we've heard another story, how she ended up with a black man. But, I do believe it could have been that he was on the plantation and she ran away with him, so that's about it now with slavery.

(Continued -Ms. Porter-Green)

Now, you had a large Indian population and I think that when the first white man came here, he assimilated with the Indians. When they wanted them out, they became black and there is a group of people that are obviously black and I wish I knew more about their story and I wonder who they came here with. But, there were blacks long before slavery, here in West Virginia, I know, I've heard little tiny tidbits about them and that might be an interesting subject for a student to look into. A friend of mine was suppose to send me the book and he hasn't sent it to me yet.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for you, Mrs. Porter and you Mrs. Green to allowing me to come and do this interview. This is a mother and daughter born and raised in Charleston, West Virginia, five generations. Thank you very much and Good Evening.

Appalachian American Indians of West Virginia
505 Virginia Avenue
Ranelle, WV 25962-1531
304-438-8902
e-mail:aaiwv@inetone.net
webpage:http://web.mountain.net/~rarring/AAIWV.html

AAIWV is an intertribal tribe of West Virginia American Indians officially recognized by the State of West Virginia coming together to share in and perpetuate the history, culture, and traditions of their Native American heritage.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Name: _____ Occupation: _____

Address: _____ City State Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ E-Mail Address: _____ Birth Date: _____

SS#: _____ County/State of Birth: _____ Are you a Veteran? ____

Tribal Lineage: _____ Indian Name: _____

Spouse's Name: _____ Occupation: _____

Date of Birth: _____ County/State of Birth: _____

Tribal Lineage: _____ SS#: _____

Are you a Veteran? _____ Indian Name: _____

Children: Name Date of Birth County/State of Birth Soc. Sec. # Tribe

_____

_____

_____

Please give a brief outline of your tribal lineage and why you wish to become a member of AAIWV on a separate sheet. It is required that you have the information provided on these forms notarized so you have a legal document showing your Native American ancestry. Do not list family members unless they wish to become tribal members.

There are no membership dues to belong to our Tribe; however, all contributions are appreciated and are used for Tribal operation and for promoting Native American awareness.

The information provided on the application for membership to Appalachian American Indians of West Virginia, Inc. and the accompanying genealogy sheet upon which my Native American ancestor is identified is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

The foregoing instrument was acknowledged before me this _____ day of _____, ____ by _____.

Notary Signature: _____ Commission expires: _____

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Now I will talk with Mrs. Porter first, and ask her some questions about her childhood and how do you see yourself as an Appalachian?

Ms. Porter: I've been here most of my life, and my lively hood was here, and I've stayed here.

Interviewer: How have you perceived the stereotype over your life time, and can you give me some stories about being an Appalachian?

Ms. Porter: It was racist when I was young and still racist, I was discriminated and couldn't get into a hospital here in Charleston because I was black and I was due for surgery the next day so I had to go to the doctor to get into another hospital. I worked at a hospital where black children were not allowed in the nursery until it was desegregated by CORE.

Interviewer: What is CORE?

Mrs. Porter: Congress of Racial Equality.

Interviewer: Mrs. Porter, if you don't mind could you give me your age, please?

Mrs. Porter: I'm 80 years old.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. Did the stereotype effect your image in any particular way?

Mrs. Porter: Yes, as I said, I've been discriminated most of my life because being black, and some people have the nerve to ask me why my eyes were gray, they just don't understand.

Interviewer: Can you give me some background history of your childhood and growing up and one of the things we have discussed in class is that most of the history that we've read concerning Appalachian, African Americans weren't mentioned or either the slave history, so could you elaborate on that for us?

Mrs. Porter: I went to the public schools of Charleston, West Virginia and black history was never discussed even in black schools. We had, when I was in school, to go by the curriculum the county set down for us, and all the way through schools it's the same thing until 1954, and at that time they still had problems.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on your childhood, as well as growing up in Charleston, West Virginia.

Mrs. Porter: I was born in Louden Heights and I lived there until I was 8 years old, then I moved in the city and different places in the city. I've lived the rest of my life and I went to a segregated elementary school, a segregated junior high school and I was going to a segregated ...Garnet High School, then I went into nursing when I was 47, by an act of Congress that needed nurses.

Interviewer: Did the stereotype effect your ability to achieve in any particular way?

Mrs. Porter: Yes! I've been through the depression. Was even denied, my generation was denied the education that my father and his brother and all the rest of the family got and my children got, but our generation was in the 30's & 32's and we were denied that privilege.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents and their heritage?

Mrs. Porter: Both of my parents were born and raised in Charleston, my mother's mother and grandmother were both Charlestonians, my father's father , grandfather were Charlestonians, so as I said in the beginning, I'm the fourth generation Charlestonian. My great grandparent's on my father side are buried on Watts Hill on the west side of Charleston, which is no longer a cemetery and my mother's mother is buried behind the Mausoleum in the Spring Hill Cemetery, and my grandmother died at 65, my mother died at 94 and my father was 75 when he died and he comes from 14 children. Most of them were West Virginia State graduates and teachers.

Interviewer: Okay, you have anything else to add?

Mrs. Porter: Shook her head in the negative

Interviewer: Now, I'm going to be interviewing Joan Porter-Green. Mrs. Porter-Green, would you please talk about your life growing up in Charleston, West Virginia and also, being an Appalachian?

Mrs. Porter-Green: Well, I was born in Charleston and when I was a baby, we moved to Coal Branch Heights and I live in an integrated neighborhood, everybody was poor, I lived there until I was 12 years old and then we moved back to Charleston. That year we had a one room school, segregated school, there was a white school across the street that we could not attend and when I was in the 6th grade they built a one room school.

I went to Boyd Junior High from the first through the fifth, which was segregated on the corner of Jacob and Lewis Street. Then they built the one room school on Coal Branch and it just wasn't acceptable. They had outside toilet, but they did have running water, so that was my experience as a child.
I had some very good teachers and some very poor, but I learned a great deal because my mother always insisted that we read, so that was basically my childhood, but I did have a lot of white friends in the area that I lived then.

Interviewer: After attending junior high, could you elaborate some more where you went to high school?

Mrs. Porter-Green: After, I want to say a little more about my Junior High experience, I had some excellent teachers. I had one teacher named Mrs. Ethel Taylor, who played a significant role in my life. She was my civics teacher, and she had me enter a number of contests, Golden Horseshoe contest, and my sister had been a winner, and my cousin had been a winner, and I was the 3rd person in the family that were Golden Horseshoe winners, and I was in a number of contest for her and junior high was a very pleasant experience. I graduated from Boyd, I was an artist then, I was a cantankerous artist problem, I probably made horrible grades in art, because I was going to do my own thing.

Then I went to high school at Garnet. I was involved with in the student newspaper, the student government, future teachers. I was and...on a lot of programs , and Mary L. William's, was my mentor and I had Lewis Barnes, who someone said loved the Shakespearean life and was an excellent teacher, so Garnet was a great experience for me! Because Elsie Davis way my art teacher, and so she allowed me and the principle allowed, me to do a great deal in the arts.

Then in school year from 56 to 57, it was decided that the school would be integrated. I was a Junior so in my senior year I went to, from a black school to a white school. There was no such animal as integration, we were jut picked up and put into Charleston High and we encountered a great deal of discrimination that shook my life, teachers systematically tore us apart they were very subtle, but they were very destructive, many of us had very low self esteem when we left.

The kind of racism existed should not have happen to 16 and 17 year old kids at Charleston High, it was the worst experience of my life and it played a negative role in my development and it took me years to finally realize what happened and I was not at fault. I sincerely believe that there should have been the training of teachers of both black and white and students, or perhaps those of us that were in high school should have been allowed to graduate from our schools and gradually put children in integrated schools because they were not intergrated and some of my experiences were horrible. I had been elected president of the student government association by students from Stonewall Jackson, Charleston Catholic High and

yellow inside, and so all the kids, I told what color to color it, and when she came in she tore me up. And she told me after I got older, I was right and she was wrong, but she was the teacher. So I always felt I'm not going to sit around and listen to anyone tell me anything, if I know they are incorrect. So, I had serious problems in undergraduate school.

Interviewer: Could you tell me where you attended college?

Ms. Porter-Green: West Virginia State College, then I was at Federal City, University of DC, I've been to George Washington University and The College of Graduate Studies.

Interviewer: You were talking about the integration aspect of your life, could you elaborate more on that, were there any organizations you belonged to?

Ms. Porter-Green: I belonged to, I was an officer in the County Future Teachers of America, and I was President, as I said of the Inter-City Government Association, I wasn't allowed to serve by the principal, but I lived in my black world, I did not live in a white world, but I did meet and talk to white students. When I was here in Appalachia, I never lived in a segregated neighborhood, I always lived in a integrated neighborhood, with a lot of diversity. Lebanese, Syrians, etc.,, whites, but even then, I have found out, there was a historian in Charleston who was not allowed to play with the black children or the Syrian children that lived in my neighborhood.

Interviewer: I understand that after you finished college, you left West Virginia, could you elaborate on that?

Garnet High. The principal refused to allow me to serve because he said I was not a member student of Charleston High student government. I never resigned, but I could not go or attend any meetings and this took a great deal out of me. I would have been student editor of the newspaper at Garnet, but they allowed me to be on the student newspaper, but insisted I do printing, and I was only allowed to write one tiny article.

I was an excellent student, and I had real difficulties not because of my abilities, but because of the teacher who was blatantly racist, she said the problems the students had, that were excellerated was comprehension and speed reading. I was a speed reader and I had no problem with comprehension and after the semester was over, she had told me that my paper was perfect grammatically, but it was damn dull, and she gave me a D.

So, when I got to college, I had no self-esteem, I felt that I was a failure. I was not told I was a failure, but I was shown that I was a failure. In black schools we learned to respect our teachers, in the white schools it was, the first time I had the experience of students cursing teachers, and that did not happen in black schools, so it was a cultural shock.

Interviewer: Would you elaborate on more of your childhood after you left high school and your college years.

Ms. Porter-Green: I was a terrible college student. I rebelled, I didn't like my instructors, I felt that they were regurgitating, teaching us to regurgitate. I was not taught to think, I was not allowed to think, I was allowed to regurgitate everything that was in the book. Everything that I knew was not true and I was a history major and political science and I had very serious questions about the history I was being taught.

As a matter of fact, when I was in the second grade, I got a beaten because I told the kids after the teacher had left the room, that she had the wrong color for the inside of the trees, that no one saw bright

Ms. Porter-Green: Yes, I had left West Virginia before I finished college, than I came back and this Jewish man harassed me, to go back to college, he said, if I was so damn smart, I needed to get my degree, so I did get my degree, and than I left again and I moved to Washington DC, and I had a cultural shock in Washington, DC, because I had never lived in a black neighborhood and than all of a sudden, I don't see anything but black people. I had to walk all around to find individual houses because the houses were together, and I looked for single houses, a non-apartment buildings, and to see some white people, not in stores, but just living and that was rather difficult.

I had problems with my speech in DC, because the people thought, did not think, I was from the Appalachians, they thought I was from one of the northern states, or I was putting on. So I had a great deal of difficulty there, but I had speech therapy in my segregated school, so that was the reason why my speech was different.

Interviewer: Could you talk to us, concerning being in the city and moving from Appalachian. I know you said it was a cultural shock, but could you elaborate some more, what did, how did people make you feel about being in Washington, DC.

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, it was really exciting, because I guess I was angry about what had happen in high school, and I had not identified ...I didn't understand the problem, but I was ready for civil rights movement. I did not believe in violence, but most of my friends were community organizers or civil rights organizers, and we strategized and we met and that was vastly different from my experience here in Charleston, we had a few people marching and what ever and they felt that they were great organizers and I still see that problem today.

It is a vast difference in organizing in rural Appalachians organizing, people are afraid of their jobs or they're into a me situation, and I find in the urban area, sometimes people are more concerned about the group instead of me. And, then I'm concerned about the poor whites, and their plight in West Virginia, I think that they are discriminated as much. They were taught that blacks had tails, then they got television

and found that blacks didn't have tails. They were taught that they were superior to blacks because they had white skin, and they had never been told their history, about many of them being indentured servants, they were never taught, that they came from England, many of them, their fore mothers were prostitutes, many people were let out of debtors jail, and shipped to this country to be someone's indentured servants, many of them escaped to the hills and hillbilly is nothing but old English and they didn't understand that, and it still occurs.

Interviewer: Could you talk about your early civil rights experience please?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, I was the youngest black elected to the Charleston Branch 3226, I was assistant secretary to Ms. Mary L. Williams, Ms. Mary L Witllams had been assistant secretary to the first secretary whose name was Mamie L Brown and then when Ms. Mamie decided to give up the office, Ms. Mary L Williams, who was one of my teachers, became secretary. When I joined at 23, I was nominated as assistant secretary and that was a big deal then. I was the first to be elected that did not have a college degree and at that time, I was 27 by the time I obtained my degree. After a while ...well we didn't, I didn't we were consider young turks in the NAACP, now that I'm 60 years old I realize we made a lot of errors.

Because the Charleston Branch was one of the most respected branches in the country, but we wanted change overnight, so many of us have used some tactics that today I would not have used, because I would say that we virtually destroyed the NAACP through our ignorance and our youth.

Interviewer: How do you see yourself as a Appalachian?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, I am a true Appalachian, I've been told who my father's family was, after 3 years they invited us to a family reunion, the last name is Holcomb from Clay County. And they had to recognize

us, my great grandmother was a Holcomb, she had 10 or 11 children by a black man and the late 1800's so my background you know, was extremely diverse. My genealogy is very interesting.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on that please?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, my mother talked about her grandmother, I have some very serious problem of who was her grandmother, really! I know that her grandmother's father was a white doctor, I've been told that he was Dr. Watkins and that he was a surgeon general in the confederacy. When my great-grandmother was a very young, she had a child and that child was by Watkins. I tend to believe that it was the nephew of Dr. Watkins, he looked like a white man, as a matter of fact, it is rather ironic, he looked like Herbert Hoover. During the depression, he was not accepted by whites in Kanawha county nor blacks, so he moved to Chicago and eventually passed as a white man, and that was pretty prevalent of people in the Charleston area that had the white background. As a matter of fact, I know a friend of mine whose uncle is in Columbus, Ohio, he is passing today, so that happens a great deal here. And I'm not sure who my great grandmother really was, she was in the middle of 10 children and she was the only one that last name was Watkins and during the time that she was born, there was a push to get Indians out of Kanawha County. I guess to march them to them to the reservation. And I'm not too sure, that she wasn't the child of the Indian and Dr. Watkins, but I just can't trace, I've been looking and I can't trace who she really was. But, all of her siblings were Browns, and she did not look like her siblings and she was allowed to take the Watkins last name and that did not always happen.

Interviewer: Okay, after you left Charleston ,West Virginia and went to Washington, DC you... I understand have come back, could you elaborate in being an Appalachian in Washington and then returning to the Appalachian region?

Ms. Porter-Green: I find that racism is still prevalent here, it very subtle, I think that something needs to be done, I see an increased in rebel flags, rebel signs on cars and I always predicted that those people from the hills would come down from the hills, and I never realized that they might direct their attention towards us black people.

This thing linked to divide and conquer and we all have a similar problem, and then too, with my great-grandmother she was not accepted , on my father side, her children were not accepted by whites or blacks and they became very dysfunctional, because being ostracized. Now I see a positive, I see grandparents, particularly grandfathers, with their biracial grandchildren, so that is a plus, that I see in Charleston. But, I see that accelerated quite a bit, of biracial children, have accelerated more, more so in the city, you rarely see that in the urban area.

Interviewer: Has the stereotype of being an Appalachian affected your self image in any particular way?

Ms. Porter-Green: No, being an Appalachian was not the problem, being black Appalachian was the problem. Black people in Appalachian were not supposed to be smart, they weren't suppose to be literate and we did not fit the mold, my brother is a good example.

My brother is a genius and he was abused quite a bit by his teachers, because this little nigger, that does not necessarily look like a nigger, is smart and so they did a job on him and he has never recovered. So we don't have...I mean, we are not identified as Appalachian...we were just identified as niggers.

Interviewer: Okay, so you never really felt that you were stereotyped as a Appalachian, as such?

Ms. Porter-Green: No, I didn't talk like an Appalachian, you know people used to tell me I had one leg shorter than the other, but I never has a problem with that, I just had a problem being black.

Interviewer: What was the driving force that made you leave West Virginia?

Ms. Porter-Green: I needed to get away, I would like to get away now, I've never seen a bunch of people so programmed, that they'd do anything to hurt anybody's feelings, because it's the wrong thing to do. You're suppose to be a good colored girl and that's just not me, I'm going to be myself, whoever I talk to, I'm not going to change, you know, sometimes I'm blunt, and sometimes you need blunt people. But, I don't believe in just spouting off and not knowing what I'm talking about, I read constantly, I do a great deal of research. I lectured Political Science on the college level, so I can understand a bit more than a lot of people and being a civil rights community organizer, I understand. I also understand, if certain people had not made stands, black people would still be in slavery or we would still have a apartheid system in this country. I see in returning to West Virginia, I see that we are doing some fast forwarding, back, I mean we're backing up and it's just as bad or worse even though it's subtle with the racism that exists.

Interviewer: So this stereotype, did this effect your ability to achieve?

Mrs. Porter-Green: No, because I was smart anyway and nothing could stop me from achieving, except I refused to go along with the system. So that stereotype, I mean, Appalachia was not my problem, being a Appalachian black was the problem and it's still the problem, you either play by the rules and I'm not going to allow myself to be put out.

Interviewer: Do you have anything to add?

Mrs. Porter-Green: No, I think I've said quite a bit.

Interviewer: Could you tell some more stories about your childhood or family stories?

Mrs. Joan Porter-Green: Well, I could tell you some family stories. Like my mother said, her aunts and uncles went to college, her grandmother went to college, so college was a way of life. Her father's mother had gone to college and so college was a way of life for them.

(Continued - Ms. Porter-Green)

I'm not hung up on degrees, because I find some people you know if you play by the rules, you can get out of college, but that doesn't mean to say that you've learned anything. You know you learn from research, reading and meeting with people that are intelligent and quite often people just emphasis what they've learned in school and that's unfortunate.

My mother's grandfather was from Savannah, Georgia and he invented a space suit and he talked about interplanetary space travel. I thought that was very interesting and I really wish I had gotten the opportunity to have known him, because I found that even though he had been a slave, he was extremely progressive and extremely smart and he didn't have a college degree. Than my Uncle Anderson, I have to admire him, my great-great uncle, had a fourth grade education and was the oldest appraiser and had a real large estate company.

I find a difference in Appalachia and I'm really angry because of Shrewsbury Street. You had all types of black businesses on Shrewsbury Street and I have been trying to get it designated as the African American historical zone, I've been told that was in the past and it's not relevant today. But, I know red lining made a hotel go out, Smoot Construction Company had to leave Charleston, West Virginia because they were red lined and all of the businesses are gone. I would like to thank urban renewal, I mean across the nation, it been known as nigger removal. They, even though the red, Court Street was in the red light district, there were black businesses all gone. Shrewsbury Street is gone and you see very little of a black presence and now they plan to do the whole East End and that will take care of the rest of the presence.

And one thing that I find to be very interesting , in 1969 there was an eminent domain project and there was an urban renewal project, there was a highway project and there was a urban renewal project around the Court Street area and they did not, they all used the same stats for replacing housing and that caused an acute housing shortage. Someone mentioned to me today that they, the new police station being located where it is, that it is going to push people further up toward the Capital. Now down towards the Capital near the bridge you have a lot of houses that are unbelievable, and now if you push toward Franklin Avenue, Quarrier Street and whatever, you're going to find blacks all over that area and landlords will make

a fortune. So, you know there is irregular planning or inconsistent planning or no planning at all done by the Planning Commission, the urban renewal authority and the highway department, and to me that's, they've just pushed people out and that's frightening, we have blacks now in Putnam County, who would never have gone to Putnam County because of the racism, you have blacks all over South Charleston, St. Albans, you don't have as many in St. Albans, now as you once had, I don't know how they got out of St. Albans, you lived there, you probably know. But they're being pushed out and where they're going, I don't know. That's all I have to say.

Interviewer: Well, I've really enjoyed doing this interview, I noticed you mentioned the slavery issue, could you elaborate more on that?

Mrs. Joan Porter-Green: Well, slavery was a situation here. My great grandfather, we found him when he was eleven years old and he had been given as a gift to the, the, from MacCorkles, to the Noyes family. Arnold Noye's daughter married and Arnold and he was given as a gift and was taken to the Civil War, as a valet to Arnold and he named quite a few of his children after Arnold and whatever.

I really don't know that much about my grandmother's family. My maternal mother's family, but they were highly integrated and in Charleston, they had white Browns and black Browns and they were probably part of the Brown Plantation, that is where Town Center is located now. It should not have been destroyed, I'm sure lots of buildings and whatever have been destroyed for progress and we've lost a lot of history in Kanawha County. But, I just found out, with my paternal great-great grandfather was with the Holcombs, that there was a plantation in Clay County, but I can't find any information on the plantation, so was a great possibility that she met him and left. There is a question, the Holcombs say one story, we've heard another story, how she ended up with a black man. But, I do believe it could have been that he was on the plantation and she ran away with him, so that's about it now with slavery.

Now, you had a large Indian population and I think that when the first white man came here, he assimilated with the Indians. When they wanted them out, they became black and there is a group of people that are obviously black and I wish I knew more about their story and I wonder who they came here with. But, there were blacks long before slavery, here in West Virginia, I know, I've heard little tiny tidbits about them and that might be an interesting subject for a student to look into. A friend of mine was suppose to send me the book and he hasn't sent it to me yet.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for you, Mrs. Porter and you Mrs. Green to allowing me to come and do this interview. This is a mother and daughter born and raised in Charleston, West Virginia, five generations. Thank you very much and Good Evening.

TAPE #1

SUBJECT: LIFE HISTORIES - APPALACHIAN

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: MRS. ETHEL PORTER AND MRS. JOAN PORTER-GREEN

CONDUCTED BY: LUCILLE D. GORE

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JUNE 15, 1999

TRANSCRIPTIONIST/TYPIST: LUCILLE D. GORE

Oral History Project

Abstract

Interview - Fourth and Fifth Generation Appalachians

This is an interview with a African American mother and daughter, both born in Charleston, West Virginia, the fourth and fifth generation Appalachians. They are discussing their experiences being raised in Appalachia. Their early childhood, family history, experiences in school before and after integration. The daughter will discuss her life after leaving the Appalachian region, and migrating to a large urban area, the nation's capitol, Washington, D.C.. The cultural differences she encountered being from a small rural community in the Appalachian mountains. Also included in this interview, her reactions, since returning back to Appalachia. Very interesting, the discussion concerning not feeling the impact of being stereotyped because of the Appalachian culture, but experiencing problems being African American.

Fourth and Fifth generation in Charleston, WV.
Native American ancestry.

Interviewer: Hello, this is Lucille Gore and I'm interviewing Joan Porter Green and Ethel Porter in Charleston, West Virginia, about their childhood in the Appalachian region. Today is June 15, 1999, I'm going to ask them, do you understand that this is a oral history report and it will be archived in the Marshall University library?

Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Porter-Green: "Okay" (yes, yes)... Both ladies nodded in agreement.

Interviewer: And it will be opened to the general public to hear. Thank you.

Now I will talk with Mrs. Porter first, and ask her some questions about her childhood and how do you see yourself as an Appalachian?

Ms. Porter: I've been here most of my life, and my lively hood was here, and I've stayed here.

Interviewer: How have you perceived the stereotype over your life time, and can you give me some stories about being an Appalachian?

Ms. Porter: It was racist when I was young and still racist, I was discriminated and couldn't get into a hospital here in Charleston because I was black and I was due for surgery the next day so I had to go to the doctor to get into another hospital. I worked at a hospital where black children were not allowed in the nursery until it was desegregated by CORE.

Interviewer: What is CORE?

Mrs. Porter: Congress of Racial Equality.

Interviewer: Mrs. Porter, if you don't mind could you give me your age, please?

Mrs. Porter: I'm 80 years old.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. Did the stereotype effect your image in any particular way?

Mrs. Porter: Yes, as I said, I've been discriminated most of my life because being black, and some people have the nerve to ask me why my eyes were gray, they just don't understand.

Interviewer: Can you give me some background history of your childhood and growing up and one of the things we have discussed in class is that most of the history that we've read concerning Appalachian, African Americans weren't mentioned or either the slave history, so could you elaborate on that for us?

Mrs. Porter: I went to the public schools of Charleston, West Virginia and black history was never discussed even in black schools. We had, when I was in school, to go by the curriculum the county set down for us, and all the way through schools it's the same thing until 1954, and at that time they still had problems.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on your childhood, as well as growing up in Charleston, West Virginia.

Mrs. Porter: I was born in Louden Heights and I lived there until I was 8 years old, then I moved in the city and different places in the city. I've lived the rest of my life and I went to a segregated elementary school, a segregated junior high school and I was going to a segregated ...Garnet High School, then I went into nursing when I was 47, by an act of Congress that needed nurses.

Interviewer: Did the stereotype effect your ability to achieve in any particular way?

Mrs. Porter: Yes! I've been through the depression. Was even denied, my generation was denied the education that my father and his brother and all the rest of the family got and my children got, but our generation was in the 30's & 32's and we were denied that privilege.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents and their heritage?

Mrs. Porter: Both of my parents were born and raised in Charleston, my mother's mother and grandmother were both Charlestonians, my father's father , grandfather were Charlestonians, so as I said in the beginning, I'm the fourth generation Charlestonian. My great grandparent's on my father side are buried on Watts Hill on the west side of Charleston, which is no longer a cemetery and my mother's mother is buried behind the Mausoleum in the Spring Hill Cemetery, and my grandmother died at 65, my mother died at 94 and my father was 75 when he died and he comes from 14 children. Most of them were West Virginia State graduates and teachers.

Interviewer: Okay, you have anything else to add?

Mrs. Porter: Shook her head in the negative

Interviewer: Now, I'm going to be interviewing Joan Porter-Green. Mrs. Porter-Green, would you please talk about your life growing up in Charleston, West Virginia and also, being an Appalachian?

Mrs. Porter-Green: Well, I was born in Charleston and when I was a baby, we moved to Coal Branch Heights and I live in an integrated neighborhood, everybody was poor, I lived there until I was 12 years old and then we moved back to Charleston. That year we had a one room school, segregated school, there was a white school across the street that we could not attend and when I was in the 6th grade they built a one room school.

I went to Boyd Junior High from the first through the fifth, which was segregated on the corner of Jacob and Lewis Street. Then they built the one room school on Coal Branch and it just wasn't acceptable. They had outside toilet, but they did have running water, so that was my experience as a child.
I had some very good teachers and some very poor, but I learned a great deal because my mother always insisted that we read, so that was basically my childhood, but I did have a lot of white friends in the area that I lived then.

Interviewer: After attending junior high, could you elaborate some more where you went to high school?

Mrs. Porter-Green: After, I want to say a little more about my Junior High experience, I had some excellent teachers. I had one teacher named Mrs. Ethel Taylor, who played a significant role in my life. She was my civics teacher, and she had me enter a number of contests, Golden Horseshoe contest, and my sister had been a winner, and my cousin had been a winner, and I was the 3rd person in the family that were Golden Horseshoe winners, and I was in a number of contest for her and junior high was a very pleasant experience. I graduated from Boyd, I was an artist then, I was a cantankerous artist problem, I probably made horrible grades in art, because I was going to do my own thing.

Then I went to high school at Garnet. I was involved with in the student newspaper, the student government, future teachers. I was and...on a lot of programs , and Mary L. William's, was my mentor and I had Lewis Barnes, who someone said loved the Shakespearean life and was an excellent teacher, so Garnet was a great experience for me! Because Elsie Davis way my art teacher, and so she allowed me and the principle allowed, me to do a great deal in the arts.

Then in school year from 56 to 57, it was decided that the school would be integrated. I was a Junior so in my senior year I went to, from a black school to a white school. There was no such animal as integration, we were jut picked up and put into Charleston High and we encountered a great deal of discrimination that shook my life, teachers systematically tore us apart they were very subtle, but they were very destructive, many of us had very low self esteem when we left.

The kind of racism existed should not have happen to 16 and 17 year old kids at Charleston High, it was the worst experience of my life and it played a negative role in my development and it took me years to finally realize what happened and I was not at fault. I sincerely believe that there should have been the training of teachers of both black and white and students, or perhaps those of us that were in high school should have been allowed to graduate from our schools and gradually put children in integrated schools because they were not intergrated and some of my experiences were horrible. I had been elected president of the student government association by students from Stonewall Jackson, Charleston Catholic High and

Garnet High. The principal refused to allow me to serve because he said I was not a member student of Charleston High student government. I never resigned, but I could not go or attend any meetings and this took a great deal out of me. I would have been student editor of the newspaper at Garnet, but they allowed me to be on the student newspaper, but insisted I do printing, and I was only allowed to write one tiny article.

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Interviewer: I understand that after you finished college, you left West Virginia, could you elaborate on that?

Ms. Porter-Green: Yes, I had left West Virginia before I finished college, than I came back and this Jewish man harassed me, to go back to college, he said, if I was so damn smart, I needed to get my degree, so I did get my degree, and than I left again and I moved to Washington DC, and I had a cultural shock in Washington, DC, because I had never lived in a black neighborhood and than all of a sudden, I don't see anything but black people. I had to walk all around to find individual houses because the houses were together, and I looked for single houses, a non-apartment buildings, and to see some white people, not in stores, but just living and that was rather difficult.

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Because the Charleston Branch was one of the most respected branches in the country, but we wanted change overnight, so many of us have used some tactics that today I would not have used, because I would say that we virtually destroyed the NAACP through our ignorance and our youth.

Interviewer: How do you see yourself as a Appalachian?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, I am a true Appalachian, I've been told who my father's family was, after 3 years they invited us to a family reunion, the last name is Holcomb from Clay County. And they had to recognize

us, my great grandmother was a Holcomb, she had 10 or 11 children by a black man and the late 1800's so my background you know, was extremely diverse. My genealogy is very interesting.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on that please?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, my mother talked about her grandmother, I have some very serious problem of who was her grandmother, really! I know that her grandmother's father was a white doctor, I've been told that he was Dr. Watkins and that he was a surgeon general in the confederacy. When my great-grandmother was a very young, she had a child and that child was by Watkins. I tend to believe that it was the nephew of Dr. Watkins, he looked like a white man, as a matter of fact, it is rather ironic, he looked like Herbert Hoover. During the depression, he was not accepted by whites in Kanawha county nor blacks, so he moved to Chicago and eventually passed as a white man, and that was pretty prevalent of people in the Charleston area that had the white background. As a matter of fact, I know a friend of mine whose uncle is in Columbus, Ohio, he is passing today, so that happens a great deal here. And I'm not sure who my great grandmother really was, she was in the middle of 10 children and she was the only one that last name was Watkins and during the time that she was born, there was a push to get Indians out of Kanawha County. I guess to march them to them to the reservation. And I'm not too sure, that she wasn't the child of the Indian and Dr. Watkins, but I just can't trace, I've been looking and I can't trace who she really was. But, all of her siblings were Browns, and she did not look like her siblings and she was allowed to take the Watkins last name and that did not always happen.

Interviewer: Okay, after you left Charleston ,West Virginia and went to Washington, DC you... I understand have come back, could you elaborate in being an Appalachian in Washington and then returning to the Appalachian region?

Ms. Porter-Green: I find that racism is still prevalent here, it very subtle, I think that something needs to be done, I see an increased in rebel flags, rebel signs on cars and I always predicted that those people from the hills would come down from the hills, and I never realized that they might direct their attention towards us black people.

This thing linked to divide and conquer and we all have a similar problem, and then too, with my great-grandmother she was not accepted , on my father side, her children were not accepted by whites or blacks and they became very dysfunctional, because being ostracized. Now I see a positive, I see grandparents, particularly grandfathers, with their biracial grandchildren, so that is a plus, that I see in Charleston. But, I see that accelerated quite a bit, of biracial children, have accelerated more, more so in the city, you rarely see that in the urban area.

Interviewer: Has the stereotype of being an Appalachian affected your self image in any particular way?

Ms. Porter-Green: No, being an Appalachian was not the problem, being black Appalachian was the problem. Black people in Appalachian were not supposed to be smart, they weren't suppose to be literate and we did not fit the mold, my brother is a good example.

My brother is a genius and he was abused quite a bit by his teachers, because this little nigger, that does not necessarily look like a nigger, is smart and so they did a job on him and he has never recovered. So we don't have…I mean, we are not identified as Appalachian…we were just identified as niggers.

Interviewer: Okay, so you never really felt that you were stereotyped as a Appalachian, as such?

Ms. Porter-Green: No, I didn't talk like an Appalachian, you know people used to tell me I had one leg shorter than the other, but I never has a problem with that, I just had a problem being black.

Interviewer: What was the driving force that made you leave West Virginia?

Ms. Porter-Green: I needed to get away, I would like to get away now, I've never seen a bunch of people so programmed, that they'd do anything to hurt anybody's feelings, because it's the wrong thing to do. You're suppose to be a good colored girl and that's just not me, I'm going to be myself, whoever I talk to, I'm not going to change, you know, sometimes I'm blunt, and sometimes you need blunt people. But, I don't believe in just spouting off and not knowing what I'm talking about, I read constantly, I do a great deal of research. I

lectured Political Science on the college level, so I can understand a bit more than a lot of people and being a civil rights community organizer, I understand. I also understand, if certain people had not made stands,

black people would still be in slavery or we would still have a apartheid system in this country. I see in returning to West Virginia, I see that we are doing some fast forwarding, back, I mean we're backing up and it's just as bad or worse even though it's subtle with the racism that exists.

Interviewer: So this stereotype, did this effect your ability to achieve?

Mrs. Porter-Green: No, because I was smart anyway and nothing could stop me from achieving, except I refused to go along with the system. So that stereotype, I mean, Appalachia was not my problem, being a Appalachian black was the problem and it's still the problem, you either play by the rules and I'm not going to allow myself to be put out.

Interviewer: Do you have anything to add?

Mrs. Porter-Green: No, I think I've said quite a bit.

Interviewer: Could you tell some more stories about your childhood or family stories?

Mrs. Joan Porter-Green: Well, I could tell you some family stories. Like my mother said, her aunts and uncles went to college, her grandmother went to college, so college was a way of life. Her father's mother had gone to college and so college was a way of life for them.

(Continued - Ms. Porter-Green)

I'm not hung up on degrees, because I find some people you know if you play by the rules, you can get out of college, but that doesn't mean to say that you've learned anything. You know you learn from research, reading and meeting with people that are intelligent and quite often people just emphasis what they've learned in school and that's unfortunate.

My mother's grandfather was from Savannah, Georgia and he invented a space suit and he talked about interplanetary space travel. I thought that was very interesting and I really wish I had gotten the opportunity to have known him, because I found that even though he had been a slave, he was extremely progressive and extremely smart and he didn't have a college degree. Than my Uncle Anderson, I have to admire him, my great-great uncle, had a fourth grade education and was the oldest appraiser and had a real large estate company.

I find a difference in Appalachia and I'm really angry because of Shrewsbury Street. You had all types of black businesses on Shrewsbury Street and I have been trying to get it designated as the African American historical zone, I've been told that was in the past and it's not relevant today. But, I know red lining made a hotel go out, Smoot Construction Company had to leave Charleston, West Virginia because they were red lined and all of the businesses are gone. I would like to thank urban renewal, I mean across the nation, it been known as nigger removal. They, even though the red, Court Street was in the red light district, there were black businesses all gone. Shrewsbury Street is gone and you see very little of a black presence and now they plan to do the whole East End and that will take care of the rest of the presence.

And one thing that I find to be very interesting , in 1969 there was an eminent domain project and there was an urban renewal project, there was a highway project and there was a urban renewal project around the Court Street area and they did not, they all used the same stats for replacing housing and that caused an acute housing shortage. Someone mentioned to me today that they, the new police station being

located where it is, that it is going to push people further up toward the Capital. Now down towards the Capital near the bridge you have a lot of houses that are unbelievable, and now if you push toward Franklin Avenue, Quarrier Street and whatever, you're going to find blacks all over that area and landlords will make

(Continued - Ms. Porter-Green)

a fortune. So, you know there is irregular planning or inconsistent planning or no planning at all done by the Planning Commission, the urban renewal authority and the highway department, and to me that's, they've just pushed people out and that's frightening, we have blacks now in Putnam County, who would never have

gone to Putnam County because of the racism, you have blacks all over South Charleston, St. Albans, you don't have as many in St. Albans, now as you once had, I don't know how they got out of St. Albans, you lived there, you probably know. But they're being pushed out and where they're going, I don't know. That's all I have to say.

Interviewer: Well, I've really enjoyed doing this interview, I noticed you mentioned the slavery issue, could you elaborate more on that?

Mrs. Joan Porter-Green: Well, slavery was a situation here. My great grandfather, we found him when he was eleven years old and he had been given as a gift to the, the, from MacCorkles, to the Noyes family. Arnold Noye's daughter married and Arnold and he was given as a gift and was taken to the Civil War, as a valet to Arnold and he named quite a few of his children after Arnold and whatever.

I really don't know that much about my grandmother's family. My maternal mother's family, but they were highly integrated and in Charleston, they had white Browns and black Browns and they were probably part of the Brown Plantation, that is where Town Center is located now. It should not have been destroyed, I'm sure lots of buildings and whatever have been destroyed for progress and we've lost a lot of history in Kanawha County. But, I just found out, with my paternal great-great grandfather was with the

TAPE #1

SUBJECT: LIFE HISTORIES - APPALACHIAN

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: MRS. ETHEL PORTER AND MRS. JOAN PORTER-GREEN

CONDUCTED BY: LUCILLE D. GORE

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JUNE 15, 1999

TRANSCRIPTIONIST/TYPIST: LUCILLE D. GORE

Interviewer: Hello, this is Lucille Gore and I'm interviewing Joan Porter Green and Ethel Porter in Charleston, West Virginia, about their childhood in the Appalachian region. Today is June 15, 1999, I'm going to ask them, do you understand that this is a oral history report and it will be archived in the Marshall University library?

Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Porter-Green: "Okay" (yes, yes)... Both ladies nodded in agreement.

Interviewer: And it will be opened to the general public to hear. Thank you.

Now I will talk with Mrs. Porter first, and ask her some questions about her childhood and how do you see yourself as an Appalachian?

Ms. Porter: I've been here most of my life, and my lively hood was here, and I've stayed here.

Interviewer: How have you perceived the stereotype over your life time, and can you give me some stories about being an Appalachian?

Ms. Porter: It was racist when I was young and still racist, I was discriminated and couldn't get into a hospital here in Charleston because I was black and I was due for surgery the next day so I had to go to the doctor to get into another hospital. I worked at a hospital where black children were not allowed in the nursery until it was desegregated by CORE.

Interviewer: What is CORE?

Mrs. Porter: Congress of Racial Equality.

Interviewer: Mrs. Porter, if you don't mind could you give me your age, please?

Mrs. Porter: I'm 80 years old.

Holcombs, that there was a plantation in Clay County, but I can't find any information on the plantation, so was a great possibility that she met him and left. There is a question, the Holcombs say one story, we've heard another story, how she ended up with a black man. But, I do believe it could have been that he was on the plantation and she ran away with him, so that's about it now with slavery.

(Continued -Ms. Porter-Green)

Now, you had a large Indian population and I think that when the first white man came here, he assimilated with the Indians. When they wanted them out, they became black and there is a group of people that are obviously black and I wish I knew more about their story and I wonder who they came here with. But, there were blacks long before slavery, here in West Virginia, I know, I've heard little tiny tidbits about them and that might be an interesting subject for a student to look into. A friend of mine was suppose to send me the book and he hasn't sent it to me yet.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for you, Mrs. Porter and you Mrs. Green to allowing me to come and do this interview. This is a mother and daughter born and raised in Charleston, West Virginia, five generations.

Thank you very much and Good Evening.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. Did the stereotype effect your image in any particular way?

Mrs. Porter: Yes, as I said, I've been discriminated most of my life because being black, and some people have the nerve to ask me why my eyes were gray, they just don't understand.

Interviewer: Can you give me some background history of your childhood and growing up and one of the things we have discussed in class is that most of the history that we've read concerning Appalachian, African Americans weren't mentioned or either the slave history, so could you elaborate on that for us?

Mrs. Porter: I went to the public schools of Charleston, West Virginia and black history was never discussed even in black schools. We had, when I was in school, to go by the curriculum the county set down for us, and all the way through schools it's the same thing until 1954, and at that time they still had problems.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on your childhood, as well as growing up in Charleston, West Virginia.

Mrs. Porter: I was born in Louden Heights and I lived there until I was 8 years old, then I moved in the city and different places in the city. I've lived the rest of my life and I went to a segregated elementary school, a segregated junior high school and I was going to a segregated ...Garnet High School, then I went into nursing when I was 47, by an act of Congress that needed nurses.

Interviewer: Did the stereotype effect your ability to achieve in any particular way?

Mrs. Porter: Yes! I've been through the depression. Was even denied, my generation was denied the education that my father and his brother and all the rest of the family got and my children got, but our generation was in the 30's & 32's and we were denied that privilege.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents and their heritage?

Mrs. Porter: Both of my parents were born and raised in Charleston, my mother's mother and grandmother were both Charlestonians, my father's father , grandfather were Charlestonians, so as I said in the beginning, I'm the fourth generation Charlestonian. My great grandparent's on my father side are buried on Watts Hill on the west side of Charleston, which is no longer a cemetery and my mother's mother is buried behind the Mausoleum in the Spring Hill Cemetery, and my grandmother died at 65, my mother died at 94 and my father was 75 when he died and he comes from 14 children. Most of them were West Virginia State graduates and teachers.

Interviewer: Okay, you have anything else to add?

Mrs. Porter: Shook her head in the negative

Interviewer: Now, I'm going to be interviewing Joan Porter-Green. Mrs. Porter-Green, would you please talk about your life growing up in Charleston, West Virginia and also, being an Appalachian?

Mrs. Porter-Green: Well, I was born in Charleston and when I was a baby, we moved to Coal Branch Heights and I live in an integrated neighborhood, everybody was poor, I lived there until I was 12 years old and then we moved back to Charleston. That year we had a one room school, segregated school, there was a white school across the street that we could not attend and when I was in the 6th grade they built a one room school.

I went to Boyd Junior High from the first through the fifth, which was segregated on the corner of Jacob and Lewis Street. Then they built the one room school on Coal Branch and it just wasn't acceptable. They had outside toilet, but they did have running water, so that was my experience as a child.
I had some very good teachers and some very poor, but I learned a great deal because my mother always insisted that we read, so that was basically my childhood, but I did have a lot of white friends in the area that I lived then.

Interviewer: After attending junior high, could you elaborate some more where you went to high school?

Mrs. Porter-Green: After, I want to say a little more about my Junior High experience, I had some excellent teachers. I had one teacher named Mrs. Ethel Taylor, who played a significant role in my life. She was my civics teacher, and she had me enter a number of contests, Golden Horseshoe contest, and my sister had been a winner, and my cousin had been a winner, and I was the 3rd person in the family that were Golden Horseshoe winners, and I was in a number of contest for her and junior high was a very pleasant experience. I graduated from Boyd, I was an artist then, I was a cantankerous artist problem, I probably made horrible grades in art, because I was going to do my own thing.

Then I went to high school at Garnet. I was involved with in the student newspaper, the student government, future teachers. I was and...on a lot of programs , and Mary L. William's, was my mentor and I had Lewis Barnes, who someone said loved the Shakespearean life and was an excellent teacher, so Garnet was a great experience for me! Because Elsie Davis way my art teacher, and so she allowed me and the principle allowed, me to do a great deal in the arts.

Then in school year from 56 to 57, it was decided that the school would be integrated. I was a Junior so in my senior year I went to, from a black school to a white school. There was no such animal as integration, we were jut picked up and put into Charleston High and we encountered a great deal of discrimination that shook my life, teachers systematically tore us apart they were very subtle, but they were very destructive, many of us had very low self esteem when we left.

The kind of racism existed should not have happen to 16 and 17 year old kids at Charleston High, it was the worst experience of my life and it played a negative role in my development and it took me years to finally realize what happened and I was not at fault. I sincerely believe that there should have been the training of teachers of both black and white and students, or perhaps those of us that were in high school should have been allowed to graduate from our schools and gradually put children in integrated schools because they were not intergrated and some of my experiences were horrible. I had been elected president of the student government association by students from Stonewall Jackson, Charleston Catholic High and

Garnet High. The principal refused to allow me to serve because he said I was not a member student of Charleston High student government. I never resigned, but I could not go or attend any meetings and this took a great deal out of me. I would have been student editor of the newspaper at Garnet, but they allowed me to be on the student newspaper, but insisted I do printing, and I was only allowed to write one tiny article.

I was an excellent student, and I had real difficulties not because of my abilities, but because of the teacher who was blatantly racist, she said the problems the students had, that were excellerated was comprehension and speed reading. I was a speed reader and I had no problem with comprehension and after the semester was over, she had told me that my paper was perfect grammatically, but it was damn dull, and she gave me a D.

So, when I got to college, I had no self-esteem, I felt that I was a failure. I was not told I was a failure, but I was shown that I was a failure. In black schools we learned to respect our teachers, in the white schools it was, the first time I had the experience of students cursing teachers, and that did not happen in black schools, so it was a cultural shock.

Interviewer: Would you elaborate on more of your childhood after you left high school and your college years.

Ms. Porter-Green: I was a terrible college student. I rebelled, I didn't like my instructors, I felt that they were regurgitating, teaching us to regurgitate. I was not taught to think, I was not allowed to think, I was allowed to regurgitate everything that was in the book. Everything that I knew was not true and I was a history major and political science and I had very serious questions about the history I was being taught.

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Ms. Porter-Green: No, I didn't talk like an Appalachian, you know people used to tell me I had one leg shorter than the other, but I never has a problem with that, I just had a problem being black.

Interviewer: What was the driving force that made you leave West Virginia?

us, my great grandmother was a Holcomb, she had 10 or 11 children by a black man and the late 1800's so my background you know, was extremely diverse. My genealogy is very interesting.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on that please?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, my mother talked about her grandmother, I have some very serious problem of who was her grandmother, really! I know that her grandmother's father was a white doctor, I've been told that he was Dr. Watkins and that he was a surgeon general in the confederacy. When my great-grandmother was a very young, she had a child and that child was by Watkins. I tend to believe that it was the nephew of Dr. Watkins, he looked like a white man, as a matter of fact, it is rather ironic, he looked like Herbert Hoover. During the depression, he was not accepted by whites in Kanawha county nor blacks, so he moved to Chicago and eventually passed as a white man, and that was pretty prevalent of people in the Charleston area that had the white background. As a matter of fact, I know a friend of mine whose uncle is in Columbus, Ohio, he is passing today, so that happens a great deal here. And I'm not sure who my great grandmother really was, she was in the middle of 10 children and she was the only one that last name was Watkins and during the time that she was born, there was a push to get Indians out of Kanawha County. I guess to march them to them to the reservation. And I'm not too sure, that she wasn't the child of the Indian and Dr. Watkins, but I just can't trace, I've been looking and I can't trace who she really was. But, all of her siblings were Browns, and she did not look like her siblings and she was allowed to take the Watkins last name and that did not always happen.

Interviewer: Okay, after you left Charleston ,West Virginia and went to Washington, DC you... I understand have come back, could you elaborate in being an Appalachian in Washington and then returning to the Appalachian region?

Ms. Porter-Green: I needed to get away, I would like to get away now, I've never seen a bunch of people so programmed, that they'd do anything to hurt anybody's feelings, because it's the wrong thing to do. You're suppose to be a good colored girl and that's just not me, I'm going to be myself, whoever I talk to, I'm not going to change, you know, sometimes I'm blunt, and sometimes you need blunt people. But, I don't believe in just spouting off and not knowing what I'm talking about, I read constantly, I do a great deal of research. I lectured Political Science on the college level, so I can understand a bit more than a lot of people and being a civil rights community organizer, I understand. I also understand, if certain people had not made stands, black people would still be in slavery or we would still have a apartheid system in this country. I see in returning to West Virginia, I see that we are doing some fast forwarding, back, I mean we're backing up and it's just as bad or worse even though it's subtle with the racism that exists.

Interviewer: So this stereotype, did this effect your ability to achieve?

Mrs. Porter-Green: No, because I was smart anyway and nothing could stop me from achieving, except I refused to go along with the system. So that stereotype, I mean, Appalachia was not my problem, being a Appalachian black was the problem and it's still the problem, you either play by the rules and I'm not going to allow myself to be put out.

Interviewer: Do you have anything to add?

Mrs. Porter-Green: No, I think I've said quite a bit.

Interviewer: Could you tell some more stories about your childhood or family stories?

Mrs. Joan Porter-Green: Well, I could tell you some family stories. Like my mother said, her aunts and uncles went to college, her grandmother went to college, so college was a way of life. Her father's mother had gone to college and so college was a way of life for them.

(Continued - Ms. Porter-Green)

I'm not hung up on degrees, because I find some people you know if you play by the rules, you can get out of college, but that doesn't mean to say that you've learned anything. You know you learn from research, reading and meeting with people that are intelligent and quite often people just emphasis what they've learned in school and that's unfortunate.

My mother's grandfather was from Savannah, Georgia and he invented a space suit and he talked about interplanetary space travel. I thought that was very interesting and I really wish I had gotten the opportunity to have known him, because I found that even though he had been a slave, he was extremely progressive and extremely smart and he didn't have a college degree. Than my Uncle Anderson, I have to admire him, my great-great uncle, had a fourth grade education and was the oldest appraiser and had a real large estate company.

I find a difference in Appalachia and I'm really angry because of Shrewsbury Street. You had all types of black businesses on Shrewsbury Street and I have been trying to get it designated as the African American historical zone, I've been told that was in the past and it's not relevant today. But, I know red lining made a hotel go out, Smoot Construction Company had to leave Charleston, West Virginia because they were red lined and all of the businesses are gone. I would like to thank urban renewal, I mean across the nation, it been known as nigger removal. They, even though the red, Court Street was in the red light district, there were black businesses all gone. Shrewsbury Street is gone and you see very little of a black presence and now they plan to do the whole East End and that will take care of the rest of the presence.

And one thing that I find to be very interesting , in 1969 there was an eminent domain project and there was an urban renewal project, there was a highway project and there was a urban renewal project around the Court Street area and they did not, they all used the same stats for replacing housing and that caused an acute housing shortage. Someone mentioned to me today that they, the new police station being located where it is, that it is going to push people further up toward the Capital. Now down towards the Capital near the bridge you have a lot of houses that are unbelievable, and now if you push toward Franklin Avenue, Quarrier Street and whatever, you're going to find blacks all over that area and landlords will make

a fortune. So, you know there is irregular planning or inconsistent planning or no planning at all done by the Planning Commission, the urban renewal authority and the highway department, and to me that's, they've just pushed people out and that's frightening, we have blacks now in Putnam County, who would never have gone to Putnam County because of the racism, you have blacks all over South Charleston, St. Albans, you don't have as many in St. Albans, now as you once had, I don't know how they got out of St. Albans, you lived there, you probably know. But they're being pushed out and where they're going, I don't know. That's all I have to say.

Interviewer: Well, I've really enjoyed doing this interview, I noticed you mentioned the slavery issue, could you elaborate more on that?

Mrs. Joan Porter-Green: Well, slavery was a situation here. My great grandfather, we found him when he was eleven years old and he had been given as a gift to the, the, from MacCorkles, to the Noyes family. Arnold Noye's daughter married and Arnold and he was given as a gift and was taken to the Civil War, as a valet to Arnold and he named quite a few of his children after Arnold and whatever.

I really don't know that much about my grandmother's family. My maternal mother's family, but they were highly integrated and in Charleston, they had white Browns and black Browns and they were probably part of the Brown Plantation, that is where Town Center is located now. It should not have been destroyed, I'm sure lots of buildings and whatever have been destroyed for progress and we've lost a lot of history in Kanawha County. But, I just found out, with my paternal great-great grandfather was with the Holcombs, that there was a plantation in Clay County, but I can't find any information on the plantation, so was a great possibility that she met him and left. There is a question, the Holcombs say one story, we've heard another story, how she ended up with a black man. But, I do believe it could have been that he was on the plantation and she ran away with him, so that's about it now with slavery.

(Continued -Ms. Porter-Green)

Now, you had a large Indian population and I think that when the first white man came here, he assimilated with the Indians. When they wanted them out, they became black and there is a group of people that are obviously black and I wish I knew more about their story and I wonder who they came here with. But, there were blacks long before slavery, here in West Virginia, I know, I've heard little tiny tidbits about them and that might be an interesting subject for a student to look into. A friend of mine was suppose to send me the book and he hasn't sent it to me yet.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for you, Mrs. Porter and you Mrs. Green to allowing me to come and do this interview. This is a mother and daughter born and raised in Charleston, West Virginia, five generations. Thank you very much and Good Evening.

Assignment 10

We have discussed all summer what Appalachians are not, but what are they? Appalachians are very proud people, and they stand up for their rights and when they see an issue of importance, will bring that issue to the forefront. In reading Sustaining the Myth of the " Black Underclass" there are references to one a the most significant social movements in the country, the organizing of Miners for Democracy and electing a new generation of union leadership. This leadership led them into economic prosperity, that included higher wages, safe working conditions, retirement benefits and black lung payments.

Appalachians, like Native Americans, have traditionally "held claim to the land" which became valuable as development occurred. They were deceived by outsiders and tricked into ceding land rights to them and forced into labor in order to make money for these outside interests. The stereotype that Appalachians are violent -- not so, just tired of the oppression, exploitation, degradation and decided to fight back. The Appalachian people have a long and proud history of resistance, Cherokee resistance to loss of land, John Brown's rebellion and the secession of West Virginia from the union, etc. Another classical example of this is, three years after the Buffalo Creek Disaster, the United Mineworkers' local at Buffalo Creek launched the largest wildcat strike of the century. This strike spread over the coal fields of America and lasted 2 years, when it ended, miners had won an apology from a Federal Judge (K.K. Hall) and had forced the mining companies to abandon federal injunctions as a mechanism for arbitration. This was an example of protest because of the neglect and exploitation from the large coal company.

These miners, families, and friends suffered the lost of 100 lives at Buffalo Creek in 1972.

Though the union is weakened by layoffs, they have found other ways to make their voices heard, through the power of election. Charlotte Pritt, a school teacher of English and creative writing, but of most significance, a coal miner's daughter ran for Governor of this state against a multimillionaire. Had the election been honest, she would have won, losing only by 7 votes a precinct, this was not a campaign, but a social issue and protest.

Appalachians are proud and intelligent people who have been stereotyped as a people who are genetically or culturally inferior. Poverty in this state was created by a system that exploits, oppresses and degrades the people. This stereotype was based on historical cultural differences of the West Virginian people, who are of Irish, Welsh, Scots and Northern German descents, not Anglo-Saxon. This ancestry shows the ties to the land and mountains that we "Mountaineers" so proudly claim and display.

So enters another battle that is raging in West Virginia, the raping of the mountains by large coal interests, a quicker way of extracting coal from the mountains " Mountaintop Mining". This issue is a raging controversy, the miners desperately needing the work to take care of their families and the conservationists, proud Appalachians also, trying to preserve the mountains for the generations to come. Many Appalachians have lived on these lands for more than four generations, creating bonds through farming, hiking, camping, fishing and just enjoying the land. I always enjoy every 2nd Sunday in August, going to the family reunion at Cassuis Hill, the homeplace, for good food, church service and hearing the old stories about family members from the past.

Just like Native Americans, the land holds the family dead and these lands are sacred to them, this is another aspect of religious identification to the land, God's presence is in the beauty of the mountains.

To Appalachians, family is very important, "kin" is the term we so often hear. This very often extends to 3rd and 4th cousins removed. Children are valued, the elderly members of the family are respected and taken care.

This is what being Appalachian is !!!!!!!!

TAPE #1

SUBJECT: LIFE HISTORIES - APPALACHIAN

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: MRS. ETHEL PORTER AND MRS. JOAN PORTER-GREEN

CONDUCTED BY: LUCILLE D. GORE

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JUNE 15, 1999

TRANSCRIPTIONIST/TYPIST: LUCILLE D. GORE

Oral History Project

Abstract

Interview - Fourth and Fifth Generation Appalachians

This is an interview with a African American mother and daughter, both born in Charleston, West Virginia, the fourth and fifth generation Appalachians. They are discussing their experiences being raised in Appalachia. Their early childhood, family history, experiences in school before and after integration. The daughter will discuss her life after leaving the Appalachian region, and migrating to a large urban area, the nation's capitol, Washington, D.C.. The cultural differences she encountered being from a small rural community in the Appalachian mountains. Also included in this interview, her reactions, since returning back to Appalachia. Very interesting, the discussion concerning not feeling the impact of being stereotyped because of the Appalachian culture, but experiencing problems being African American.

Fourth and Fifth generation in Charleston, WV.
Native American ancestry.

Interviewer: Hello, this is Lucille Gore and I'm interviewing Joan Porter Green and Ethel Porter in Charleston, West Virginia, about their childhood in the Appalachian region. Today is June 15, 1999, I'm going to ask them, do you understand that this is a oral history report and it will be archived in the Marshall University library?

Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Porter-Green: "Okay" (yes, yes)… Both ladies nodded in agreement.

Interviewer: And it will be opened to the general public to hear. Thank you.

Now I will talk with Mrs. Porter first, and ask her some questions about her childhood and how do you see yourself as an Appalachian?

Ms. Porter: I've been here most of my life, and my lively hood was here, and I've stayed here.

Interviewer: How have you perceived the stereotype over your life time, and can you give me some stories about being an Appalachian?

Ms. Porter: It was racist when I was young and still racist, I was discriminated and couldn't get into a hospital here in Charleston because I was black and I was due for surgery the next day so I had to go to the doctor to get into another hospital. I worked at a hospital where black children were not allowed in the nursery until it was desegregated by CORE.

Interviewer: What is CORE?

Mrs. Porter: Congress of Racial Equality.

Interviewer: Mrs. Porter, if you don't mind could you give me your age, please?

Mrs. Porter: I'm 80 years old.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. Did the stereotype effect your image in any particular way?

Mrs. Porter: Yes, as I said, I've been discriminated most of my life because being black, and some people have the nerve to ask me why my eyes were gray, they just don't understand.

Interviewer: Can you give me some background history of your childhood and growing up and one of the things we have discussed in class is that most of the history that we've read concerning Appalachian, African Americans weren't mentioned or either the slave history, so could you elaborate on that for us?

Mrs. Porter: I went to the public schools of Charleston, West Virginia and black history was never discussed even in black schools. We had, when I was in school, to go by the curriculum the county set down for us, and all the way through schools it's the same thing until 1954, and at that time they still had problems.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on your childhood, as well as growing up in Charleston, West Virginia.

Mrs. Porter: I was born in Louden Heights and I lived there until I was 8 years old, then I moved in the city and different places in the city. I've lived the rest of my life and I went to a segregated elementary school, a segregated junior high school and I was going to a segregated …Garnet High School, then I went into nursing when I was 47, by an act of Congress that needed nurses.

Interviewer: Did the stereotype effect your ability to achieve in any particular way?

Mrs. Porter: Yes! I've been through the depression. Was even denied, my generation was denied the education that my father and his brother and all the rest of the family got and my children got, but our generation was in the 30's & 32's and we were denied that privilege.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents and their heritage?

Mrs. Porter: Both of my parents were born and raised in Charleston, my mother's mother and grandmother were both Charlestonians, my father's father , grandfather were Charlestonians, so as I said in the beginning, I'm the fourth generation Charlestonian. My great grandparent's on my father side are buried on Watts Hill on the west side of Charleston, which is no longer a cemetery and my mother's mother is buried behind the Mausoleum in the Spring Hill Cemetery, and my grandmother died at 65, my mother died at 94 and my father was 75 when he died and he comes from 14 children. Most of them were West Virginia State graduates and teachers.

Interviewer: Okay, you have anything else to add?

Mrs. Porter: Shook her head in the negative

Interviewer: Now, I'm going to be interviewing Joan Porter-Green. Mrs. Porter-Green, would you please talk about your life growing up in Charleston, West Virginia and also, being an Appalachian?

Mrs. Porter-Green: Well, I was born in Charleston and when I was a baby, we moved to Coal Branch Heights and I live in an integrated neighborhood, everybody was poor, I lived there until I was 12 years old and then we moved back to Charleston. That year we had a one room school, segregated school, there was a white school across the street that we could not attend and when I was in the 6th grade they built a one room school.

I went to Boyd Junior High from the first through the fifth, which was segregated on the corner of Jacob and Lewis Street. Then they built the one room school on Coal Branch and it just wasn't acceptable. They had outside toilet, but they did have running water, so that was my experience as a child.
I had some very good teachers and some very poor, but I learned a great deal because my mother always insisted that we read, so that was basically my childhood, but I did have a lot of white friends in the area that I lived then.

Interviewer: After attending junior high, could you elaborate some more where you went to high school?

Mrs. Porter-Green: After, I want to say a little more about my Junior High experience, I had some excellent teachers. I had one teacher named Mrs. Ethel Taylor, who played a significant role in my life. She was my civics teacher, and she had me enter a number of contests, Golden Horseshoe contest, and my sister had been a winner, and my cousin had been a winner, and I was the 3rd person in the family that were Golden Horseshoe winners, and I was in a number of contest for her and junior high was a very pleasant experience. I graduated from Boyd, I was an artist then, I was a cantankerous artist problem, I probably made horrible grades in art, because I was going to do my own thing.

Then I went to high school at Garnet. I was involved with in the student newspaper, the student government, future teachers. I was and…on a lot of programs , and Mary L. William's, was my mentor and I had Lewis Barnes, who someone said loved the Shakespearean life and was an excellent teacher, so Garnet was a great experience for me! Because Elsie Davis way my art teacher, and so she allowed me and the principle allowed, me to do a great deal in the arts.

Then in school year from 56 to 57, it was decided that the school would be integrated. I was a Junior so in my senior year I went to, from a black school to a white school. There was no such animal as integration, we were jut picked up and put into Charleston High and we encountered a great deal of discrimination that shook my life, teachers systematically tore us apart they were very subtle, but they were very destructive, many of us had very low self esteem when we left.

The kind of racism existed should not have happen to 16 and 17 year old kids at Charleston High, it was the worst experience of my life and it played a negative role in my development and it took me years to finally realize what happened and I was not at fault. I sincerely believe that there should have been the training of teachers of both black and white and students, or perhaps those of us that were in high school should have been allowed to graduate from our schools and gradually put children in integrated schools because they were not intergrated and some of my experiences were horrible. I had been elected president of the student government association by students from Stonewall Jackson, Charleston Catholic High and

Garnet High. The principal refused to allow me to serve because he said I was not a member student of Charleston High student government. I never resigned, but I could not go or attend any meetings and this took a great deal out of me. I would have been student editor of the newspaper at Garnet, but they allowed me to be on the student newspaper, but insisted I do printing, and I was only allowed to write one tiny article.

I was an excellent student, and I had real difficulties not because of my abilities, but because of the teacher who was blatantly racist, she said the problems the students had, that were excellerated was comprehension and speed reading. I was a speed reader and I had no problem with comprehension and after the semester was over, she had told me that my paper was perfect grammatically, but it was damn dull, and she gave me a D.

So, when I got to college, I had no self-esteem, I felt that I was a failure. I was not told I was a failure, but I was shown that I was a failure. In black schools we learned to respect our teachers, in the white schools it was, the first time I had the experience of students cursing teachers, and that did not happen in black schools, so it was a cultural shock.

Interviewer: Would you elaborate on more of your childhood after you left high school and your college years.

Ms. Porter-Green: I was a terrible college student. I rebelled, I didn't like my instructors, I felt that they were regurgitating, teaching us to regurgitate. I was not taught to think, I was not allowed to think, I was allowed to regurgitate everything that was in the book. Everything that I knew was not true and I was a history major and political science and I had very serious questions about the history I was being taught.

As a matter of fact, when I was in the second grade, I got a beaten because I told the kids after the teacher had left the room, that she had the wrong color for the inside of the trees, that no one saw bright

yellow inside, and so all the kids, I told what color to color it, and when she came in she tore me up. And she told me after I got older, I was right and she was wrong, but she was the teacher. So I always felt I'm not going to sit around and listen to anyone tell me anything, if I know they are incorrect. So, I had serious problems in undergraduate school.

Interviewer: Could you tell me where you attended college?

Ms. Porter-Green: West Virginia State College, then I was at Federal City, University of DC, I've been to George Washington University and The College of Graduate Studies.

Interviewer: You were talking about the integration aspect of your life, could you elaborate more on that, were there any organizations you belonged to?

Ms. Porter-Green: I belonged to, I was an officer in the County Future Teachers of America, and I was President, as I said of the Inter-City Government Association, I wasn't allowed to serve by the principal, but I lived in my black world, I did not live in a white world, but I did meet and talk to white students. When I was here in Appalachia, I never lived in a segregated neighborhood, I always lived in a integrated neighborhood, with a lot of diversity. Lebanese, Syrians, etc.,, whites, but even then, I have found out, there was a historian in Charleston who was not allowed to play with the black children or the Syrian children that lived in my neighborhood.

Interviewer: I understand that after you finished college, you left West Virginia, could you elaborate on that?

Ms. Porter-Green: Yes, I had left West Virginia before I finished college, than I came back and this Jewish man harassed me, to go back to college, he said, if I was so damn smart, I needed to get my degree, so I did get my degree, and than I left again and I moved to Washington DC, and I had a cultural shock in Washington, DC, because I had never lived in a black neighborhood and than all of a sudden, I don't see anything but black people. I had to walk all around to find individual houses because the houses were together, and I looked for single houses, a non-apartment buildings, and to see some white people, not in stores, but just living and that was rather difficult.

I had problems with my speech in DC, because the people thought, did not think, I was from the Appalachians, they thought I was from one of the northern states, or I was putting on. So I had a great deal of difficulty there, but I had speech therapy in my segregated school, so that was the reason why my speech was different.

Interviewer: Could you talk to us, concerning being in the city and moving from Appalachian. I know you said it was a cultural shock, but could you elaborate some more, what did, how did people make you feel about being in Washington, DC.

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, it was really exciting, because I guess I was angry about what had happen in high school, and I had not identified …I didn't understand the problem, but I was ready for civil rights movement. I did not believe in violence, but most of my friends were community organizers or civil rights organizers, and we strategized and we met and that was vastly different from my experience here in Charleston, we had a few people marching and what ever and they felt that they were great organizers and I still see that problem today.

It is a vast difference in organizing in rural Appalachians organizing, people are afraid of their jobs or they're into a me situation, and I find in the urban area, sometimes people are more concerned about the group instead of me. And, then I'm concerned about the poor whites, and their plight in West Virginia, I think that they are discriminated as much. They were taught that blacks had tails, then they got television

and found that blacks didn't have tails. They were taught that they were superior to blacks because they had white skin, and they had never been told their history, about many of them being indentured servants, they were never taught, that they came from England, many of them, their fore mothers were prostitutes, many people were let out of debtors jail, and shipped to this country to be someone's indentured servants, many of them escaped to the hills and hillbilly is nothing but old English and they didn't understand that, and it still occurs.

Interviewer: Could you talk about your early civil rights experience please?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, I was the youngest black elected to the Charleston Branch 3226, I was assistant secretary to Ms. Mary L. Williams, Ms. Mary L Witllams had been assistant secretary to the first secretary whose name was Mamie L Brown and then when Ms. Mamie decided to give up the office, Ms. Mary L Williams, who was one of my teachers, became secretary. When I joined at 23, I was nominated as assistant secretary and that was a big deal then. I was the first to be elected that did not have a college degree and at that time, I was 27 by the time I obtained my degree. After a while …well we didn't, I didn't we were consider young turks in the NAACP, now that I'm 60 years old I realize we made a lot of errors.

Because the Charleston Branch was one of the most respected branches in the country, but we wanted change overnight, so many of us have used some tactics that today I would not have used, because I would say that we virtually destroyed the NAACP through our ignorance and our youth.

Interviewer: How do you see yourself as a Appalachian?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, I am a true Appalachian, I've been told who my father's family was, after 3 years they invited us to a family reunion, the last name is Holcomb from Clay County. And they had to recognize

us, my great grandmother was a Holcomb, she had 10 or 11 children by a black man and the late 1800's so my background you know, was extremely diverse. My genealogy is very interesting.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on that please?

Ms. Porter-Green: Well, my mother talked about her grandmother, I have some very serious problem of who was her grandmother, really! I know that her grandmother's father was a white doctor, I've been told that he was Dr. Watkins and that he was a surgeon general in the confederacy. When my great-grandmother was a very young, she had a child and that child was by Watkins. I tend to believe that it was the nephew of Dr. Watkins, he looked like a white man, as a matter of fact, it is rather ironic, he looked like Herbert Hoover. During the depression, he was not accepted by whites in Kanawha county nor blacks, so he moved to Chicago and eventually passed as a white man, and that was pretty prevalent of people in the Charleston area that had the white background. As a matter of fact, I know a friend of mine whose uncle is in Columbus, Ohio, he is passing today, so that happens a great deal here. And I'm not sure who my great grandmother really was, she was in the middle of 10 children and she was the only one that last name was Watkins and during the time that she was born, there was a push to get Indians out of Kanawha County. I guess to march them to them to the reservation. And I'm not too sure, that she wasn't the child of the Indian and Dr. Watkins, but I just can't trace, I've been looking and I can't trace who she really was. But, all of her siblings were Browns, and she did not look like her siblings and she was allowed to take the Watkins last name and that did not always happen.

Interviewer: Okay, after you left Charleston ,West Virginia and went to Washington, DC you… I understand have come back, could you elaborate in being an Appalachian in Washington and then returning to the Appalachian region?

Ms. Porter-Green: I find that racism is still prevalent here, it very subtle, I think that something needs to be done, I see an increased in rebel flags, rebel signs on cars and I always predicted that those people from the hills would come down from the hills, and I never realized that they might direct their attention towards us black people.

This thing linked to divide and conquer and we all have a similar problem, and then too, with my great-grandmother she was not accepted , on my father side, her children were not accepted by whites or blacks and they became very dysfunctional, because being ostracized. Now I see a positive, I see grandparents, particularly grandfathers, with their biracial grandchildren, so that is a plus, that I see in Charleston. But, I see that accelerated quite a bit, of biracial children, have accelerated more, more so in the city, you rarely see that in the urban area.

Interviewer: Has the stereotype of being an Appalachian affected your self image in any particular way?

Ms. Porter-Green: No, being an Appalachian was not the problem, being black Appalachian was the problem. Black people in Appalachian were not supposed to be smart, they weren't suppose to be literate and we did not fit the mold, my brother is a good example.

My brother is a genius and he was abused quite a bit by his teachers, because this little nigger, that does not necessarily look like a nigger, is smart and so they did a job on him and he has never recovered. So we don't have…I mean, we are not identified as Appalachian…we were just identified as niggers.

Interviewer: Okay, so you never really felt that you were stereotyped as a Appalachian, as such?

Ms. Porter-Green: No, I didn't talk like an Appalachian, you know people used to tell me I had one leg shorter than the other, but I never has a problem with that, I just had a problem being black.

Interviewer: What was the driving force that made you leave West Virginia?

Ms. Porter-Green: I needed to get away, I would like to get away now, I've never seen a bunch of people so programmed, that they'd do anything to hurt anybody's feelings, because it's the wrong thing to do. You're suppose to be a good colored girl and that's just not me, I'm going to be myself, whoever I talk to, I'm not going to change, you know, sometimes I'm blunt, and sometimes you need blunt people. But, I don't believe in just spouting off and not knowing what I'm talking about, I read constantly, I do a great deal of research. I

lectured Political Science on the college level, so I can understand a bit more than a lot of people and being a civil rights community organizer, I understand. I also understand, if certain people had not made stands,

black people would still be in slavery or we would still have a apartheid system in this country. I see in returning to West Virginia, I see that we are doing some fast forwarding, back, I mean we're backing up and it's just as bad or worse even though it's subtle with the racism that exists.

Interviewer: So this stereotype, did this effect your ability to achieve?

Mrs. Porter-Green: No, because I was smart anyway and nothing could stop me from achieving, except I refused to go along with the system. So that stereotype, I mean, Appalachia was not my problem, being a Appalachian black was the problem and it's still the problem, you either play by the rules and I'm not going to allow myself to be put out.

Interviewer: Do you have anything to add?

Mrs. Porter-Green: No, I think I've said quite a bit.

Interviewer: Could you tell some more stories about your childhood or family stories?

Mrs. Joan Porter-Green: Well, I could tell you some family stories. Like my mother said, her aunts and uncles went to college, her grandmother went to college, so college was a way of life. Her father's mother had gone to college and so college was a way of life for them.

(Continued - Ms. Porter-Green)

I'm not hung up on degrees, because I find some people you know if you play by the rules, you can get out of college, but that doesn't mean to say that you've learned anything. You know you learn from research, reading and meeting with people that are intelligent and quite often people just emphasis what they've learned in school and that's unfortunate.

My mother's grandfather was from Savannah, Georgia and he invented a space suit and he talked about interplanetary space travel. I thought that was very interesting and I really wish I had gotten the opportunity to have known him, because I found that even though he had been a slave, he was extremely progressive and extremely smart and he didn't have a college degree. Than my Uncle Anderson, I have to admire him, my great-great uncle, had a fourth grade education and was the oldest appraiser and had a real large estate company.

I find a difference in Appalachia and I'm really angry because of Shrewsbury Street. You had all types of black businesses on Shrewsbury Street and I have been trying to get it designated as the African American historical zone, I've been told that was in the past and it's not relevant today. But, I know red lining made a hotel go out, Smoot Construction Company had to leave Charleston, West Virginia because they were red lined and all of the businesses are gone. I would like to thank urban renewal, I mean across the nation, it been known as nigger removal. They, even though the red, Court Street was in the red light district, there were black businesses all gone. Shrewsbury Street is gone and you see very little of a black presence and now they plan to do the whole East End and that will take care of the rest of the presence.

And one thing that I find to be very interesting , in 1969 there was an eminent domain project and there was an urban renewal project, there was a highway project and there was a urban renewal project around the Court Street area and they did not, they all used the same stats for replacing housing and that caused an acute housing shortage. Someone mentioned to me today that they, the new police station being

located where it is, that it is going to push people further up toward the Capital. Now down towards the Capital near the bridge you have a lot of houses that are unbelievable, and now if you push toward Franklin Avenue, Quarrier Street and whatever, you're going to find blacks all over that area and landlords will make

(Continued - Ms. Porter-Green)

a fortune. So, you know there is irregular planning or inconsistent planning or no planning at all done by the Planning Commission, the urban renewal authority and the highway department, and to me that's, they've just pushed people out and that's frightening, we have blacks now in Putnam County, who would never have

gone to Putnam County because of the racism, you have blacks all over South Charleston, St. Albans, you don't have as many in St. Albans, now as you once had, I don't know how they got out of St. Albans, you lived there, you probably know. But they're being pushed out and where they're going, I don't know. That's all I have to say.

Interviewer: Well, I've really enjoyed doing this interview, I noticed you mentioned the slavery issue, could you elaborate more on that?

Mrs. Joan Porter-Green: Well, slavery was a situation here. My great grandfather, we found him when he was eleven years old and he had been given as a gift to the, the, from MacCorkles, to the Noyes family. Arnold Noye's daughter married and Arnold and he was given as a gift and was taken to the Civil War, as a valet to Arnold and he named quite a few of his children after Arnold and whatever.

I really don't know that much about my grandmother's family. My maternal mother's family, but they were highly integrated and in Charleston, they had white Browns and black Browns and they were probably part of the Brown Plantation, that is where Town Center is located now. It should not have been destroyed, I'm sure lots of buildings and whatever have been destroyed for progress and we've lost a lot of history in Kanawha County. But, I just found out, with my paternal great-great grandfather was with the

Holcombs, that there was a plantation in Clay County, but I can't find any information on the plantation, so was a great possibility that she met him and left. There is a question, the Holcombs say one story, we've heard another story, how she ended up with a black man. But, I do believe it could have been that he was on the plantation and she ran away with him, so that's about it now with slavery.

(Continued -Ms. Porter-Green)

Now, you had a large Indian population and I think that when the first white man came here, he assimilated with the Indians. When they wanted them out, they became black and there is a group of people that are obviously black and I wish I knew more about their story and I wonder who they came here with. But, there were blacks long before slavery, here in West Virginia, I know, I've heard little tiny tidbits about them and that might be an interesting subject for a student to look into. A friend of mine was suppose to send me the book and he hasn't sent it to me yet.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for you, Mrs. Porter and you Mrs. Green to allowing me to come and do this interview. This is a mother and daughter born and raised in Charleston, West Virginia, five generations.

Thank you very much and Good Evening.