



**Understories from Black Western Carolina: Seniors' Voices from Late 1980s Oral Histories**

Friday, March 13, 2020. 2:30pm-3:15pm.

PANEL: Convener: Wilburn Hayden Presenters: Wilburn Hayden, Professor Emeritus / Senior Scholar, School of Social Work, York University, Canada; Marie Cochran, Independent Scholar, Founding Curator Affrilachian Artist Project; Elizabeth Harper, Special and Digital Collections Librarian and Assistant Professor, Western Carolina University.

**Discrimination Understories from Black Western Carolina, Early 1900 – 1980**

Wilburn Hayden

*Introduction*

In this paper Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used not only to understand the past experiences of black Appalachians, but as a tool for creating strategies for future change. CRT positions racism as the key element driving black experiences within the Western Hemisphere, more particular Appalachia.<sup>1</sup> It listens to the voices of black Appalachians through a lens of oppression and five barriers<sup>1</sup> that must be addressed for racial change. Racial change is seen simply, as increasing opportunities and quality of life for black people within an equitable society.

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<sup>1</sup> White Privilege, Discrimination, Racial Prejudice, Powerless, and Limited Access to Resources

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The paper focus on the time period closely following slavery and the advent of “Jim Crow”. Slavery is the foundation for economic prosperity of all Western nations<sup>2</sup>, justified by racism and enforced after the end of slavery through racial discrimination and prejudice.<sup>ii</sup> Slavery existed within all regions of Appalachia and, its legacy was embedded within the Appalachian ethos. The paper examines Appalachian discrimination as one of the products of racism within the first eight decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The voices from the oral histories are seen through eight themes: Church, Employment, Hospitals & Health Care, Housing & Community, Military, Public Accommodations, Schools, and Social Interactions.

### *Racial Segregation*

Feagin defines a racial group as

... not something naturally generated as part of the self-evident order of the universe, but is a social group that persons inside the group or outside of the group have decided is important to single out as inferior or superior, typically on the basis of real or alleged physical characteristics subjectively selected.

... black Americans have been defined as a racially different by white groups for centuries on the basis of certain physical characteristics.<sup>3</sup>

From 1619 when the first recorded appearance of blacks in the US colonies, black people labored under the assignment as members of an inferior racial group. At the birth of the new nation,

Thomas Jefferson was the first prominent American to speculate that black people might be innately inferior to Europeans. Until then, most Enlightenment figures believed that differences between groups were not inborn but due to environmental factors. It wasn't until Jefferson introduced the radical new ideas of liberty and equality that slavery had to be justified and prejudices against the enslaved began to crystallize into a doctrine of white supremacy. American freedom and the idea of innate racial difference were born together. Historian Barbara Fields calls them *Siamese Twins*.<sup>4</sup>

Approaching the end of slavery in the USA, white southerners, as Jones-Rogers (2019) cited in respect to white slave-owning women: “... They had immense economic stake in the continued enslavement of African Americans, and they struggled to find ways to preserve the system when the Civil War threatened to destroy the institution of slavery and their wealth along with it.”<sup>5</sup> Racial segregation as it was practiced during slavery emerged post slavery as an important element in preserving the economic and social conditions of white supremacy.

White supremacy fueled by racism set in motion through prejudice and discrimination global racial segregation, historically and contemporarily. Though it was/continue to be practice in

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<sup>ii</sup> Table 2 lists the 42 current Western Hemisphere countries and their dates for abolishing slavery. During colonization, all European settlements of the Americas used enslaved Africans to form and grow their new colonies.

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North America, it is the southern USA where it was maintained by law and social tradition in all aspect of racial interactions. The region of Appalachia from New York State through Mississippi during the most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century practiced segregation ranging from tradition to legal restrictions. The voices of seniors from Western North Carolina attest to segregation within the mountains.

### Church

The churches in the region were segregated by race. Individual members and churches would attend services outside of their race. There were clear informal social markers for which white churches were accepting of blacks attending. Both races would attend special occasions and community wide events held had churches.

*I: So, the choir members of the black church would go to the white churches to sing. Now did the white people come to the black churches?*

*J: Yeah. They used to come to Liberty.*

*I: Liberty Baptist Church in Sylva?*

*J: We used to go way back out. We used to go to Asheville and back out here to Waynesville, back in a lot of these places because we had a quartet and they would invite us. We were scared to death.*

*... J: They were so nice and when we get there, they would have tables as long as from here to that kitchen just adding [inaudible] waiting on us to come and eat.*

*I: Who was in the quartet?*

*... J: We used to go way out in the mountains. We didn't like going back in there, but they were nice.*

*I: Were you paid for this?*

*J: If we'd take it, but we just did it for [inaudible]? Record 5 Pp. 37 – 38*

*C: Yeah, I remember a long time ago the whites used to come here sometimes at the church even before they integrated. The Catholics, some of the different anyways, some of the blacks belong to the Catholic, they go to the Catholic Church. Record 19 P. 24*

### Employment

For the most jobs were typed by racial tradition, and formal and informal policies. Jobs with the lowest salaries and little or no chance of advancement were black jobs.<sup>6</sup> The job types for races differ within regions within Appalachia.<sup>7</sup> In one region housing keeping maybe a black job and in another part of the region it would be a white job.

*I: Why are there so few blacks?*

*C: On account of work! They didn't give them any work at the plants and things. They wasn't allowed to work in these plants. There wasn't no work. No work for blacks.*

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*I: What about blacks in the coal yards?*

*D: There were no coal yards then.*

*I: So either you farmed or you left...*

*D: Yes.*

*I: ...or did domestic work?*

*C: Yeah, or pick-up jobs and things like that.*

*I: Well, did the young people leave at an early age cause they couldn't get work?*

*C: Yeah, had too. Record 22 P. 25*

*I: Where do most of the black people work in Sylva?*

*S: At Western, up here at the college.*

*I: So, even though many of the younger people have high school degrees, they aren't give office jobs?*

*S: No, I don't hear of them given much.*

*I: What's the other place of employment besides Western?*

*H: I guess the hospital, C.J. Harris.*

*I: What jobs are done up there?*

*H: Maids and cooks but I don't know of any blacks now but that used to happen years ago. Record 24 Pp. 13 – 14*

*I: I left home because I knew there wasn't a chance for me. When I was growing up, my aunts and uncles who went to school all left because they were not given the opportunities to teach or lead. Like one uncle was in air-conditioning and refrigeration, he couldn't find a job. And so they left because of that reason. Record 7 p. 10*

### Hospitals and Health Care

During this period blacks were refused admission to some hospitals. Hospitals that admitted blacks had segregated facilities which were usually of poor quality and inadequate care. This was not always the case in all segregated hospitals. There also were a few small independent black hospitals.

*I: Can you think of anything that happened to a black person or family? Angie, my daughter, she was born in Asheville at the Asheville Colored Hospital But, in Murphy you've always been able to go to the hospitals.*

*B: Yes, and any room you wanted.*

*I: Now that's different because in the other towns that I've interviewed people, there was a side or something, just a room for the black people.*

*J: After Asheville did away with Asheville Colored Hospital, they took the blacks to Memorial Mission and we just had a wing.*

*I: And that never happened in this small town?*

*B: No.*

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*J: And that's where my second child was born, in the wing for the colored in Memorial Mission Hospital. And then after that it was anywhere. But that's on her birth certificate - the Colored Hospital!*

*B: Over here it's Peachtree Hospital, then after the sisters bought it, it was Providence.*

*J: Or down at Murphy County because Bob was born at Murphy County Hospital. Gail was born at Peachtree Hospital and Angie was born in Asheville Colored Hospital. Record 7 pp. 15-16*

*I: Were black people allowed to come to that hospital then?*

*B: Yeah, sure.*

*I: Were they on the same wing as the white patients?*

*B: No.*

*I: There was a separate...*

*B: They were separate.*

*I: Do you remember if the rooms had all of the conveniences that the other rooms had?*

*B: Well, I reckon they did.*

*I: What about the treatment of the black patients?*

*B: They treated them right. Record 13 p. 9*

*I: Was that the hospital over by the courthouse?*

*J: Yeah. I don't remember how long that hospital was built. It wasn't there when I was growing up. I remember that house my grandmother stayed in and worked because they had to tear all those buildings down around there and build the hospital.*

*I: After the hospital was built, were Black people allowed to go to the hospital?*

*J: Yeah.*

*I: Was there a separate wing for the Black people?*

*J: Yeah.*

*I: Did you ever know of or hear stories of Black people being treated differently than the white people at the hospital?*

*J: You mean treated bad or good? No, I don't remember that. I know they use to put the Blacks in the basement part, but after so long, they put them upstairs, because I know. I was in there. Whites were on that side and I was across the hall from them after so long. But that was after I was married. I can't remember back no further.*

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*D: No hospitals.*

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*I: Well, could Black people go to the doctor's office?*

*C: Yeah. If you was able enough to go you could go.*

*I: Did they make you stay outside or anything like that?*

*C: No, they take you in. But I don't think they had you in the same room.*

*I: That's what I mean, did you have to sit in a separate room?*

*C: I can remember When Dr. Braden come here we had to sit outside in the hall and the White people in the reception room, didn't we? They just have separate rooms. I wasn't sick back in them days but you know... Record 22 p. 20*

*G: They just didn't know how to treat it. It used to be hospital. I lived on Clingman Avenue in Asheville and there was a hospital that the Negroes built. They called it the Blue Ridge. They nick-named it the Blue Ridge Slaughter Pen (laughter).*

*I: It was for black people?*

*G: It was owned and operated by black people.*

*I: I haven't heard that before.*

*G: It was owned and operated by black people. If you went in there and come out alive you were lucky (laughter). Record 10 p. 15*

*I: So, the Blacks could go to the hospital here. Was there a separate wing for Black people?*

*HG: For Black people. They first had them in bed. The Colored, Black people as you call it. Then they had them in the basement at the old hospital out here. Then they moved them up on the first floor. They had one side and the \mites had one side. Whites had one side. They were separated. Record 11 p. 20*

*M: Dr. Bacon had put me in a room the night I went in, right next to the office, one of those nice rooms. When I came out of surgery and woke up, I was back there in that little room and the room was built for them to hang coats and things, the little room what they put me in. I said I will never go back to Swain County Hospital. So when I had surgery for cancer, I went to Sylva. Record 34 p. 15*

*S: ... You couldn't sit in the waiting room.*

*I: You couldn't sit in the waiting room?*

*S: In the public waiting room where the white people sat. No, we were segregated as far as where we sat in the doctor's office.*

*I: But you could go to the doctor?*

*S: You could go to the doctor but you sat out in the hall. Of course now in Dr. P. R.'s office upstairs there, I don't believe he had anything that was a waiting room except out in the hall. Now, when I went to Dr. Bryson's office it was just mainly, he knew I was coming and just go back into the office part and all of that. So, I guess to a certain extent you had to sit in a different area. Because I know when I went to the hospital in Asheville back in '40, after Morris come out of the service, I guess and all, '45, '46 or '47 or something like that and all.*

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*It was just a little scuttle hole place where you sat. You didn't sit in the main waiting room. I guess that didn't come on until segregation was over, integration started. I don't guess.*

*I: Well, when the hospital that is now standing in Bryson was built, were blacks allowed to go there?*

*S: We had one special room that was built especially or was assigned especially to black people. Now if there was ever more than one at one time I don't know what they would've done with them but that's where they stayed back there in that one room... .. That one room. It was just the one room. Record 32 pp. 14 – 15*

### *Housing and Community*

Discrimination and segregation in housing and communities were widespread within the region. In parts of the region blacks and whites were neighbors, but the degree of interactions differ, ranging to being very close to little or no contact. There were cases in which a black family would buy property in a white area and the white neighbors would move shortly after the black family moved into the house. Living in the same area did not result in building racial cohesive communities.

When a single black family lived in a white area, the children would often play together at each others houses. There appears to be no direct associations to race with the children of either race.

*B: And there was a White family living here at the time we bought it, and they lived in here about three months and after they found out we had bought it, they moved out, so we moved in. Record 12 p. 16*

*I: Were there many black families where you lived?*

*EC: Huh-uh.*

*I: No?*

*EC: There wasn't but one. Not close.*

*I: Were there white families?*

*EC: Yeah, they was white families.*

*I: Close by?*

*EC: Yeah, well, you **had to cross the river**.*

*I: Did each family own its own boat?*

*EC: Yeah. Record 14 p. 16*

*I: You said there were several families out where you lived in Webster. Now, were all these families black?*

*J: No. There were white living around.*

*I: Well, how did the two races get along with each other?*

*J: Well, they got along fine. We played together. I played with white kids all my life. My mother would go work for them and she would take me. Me and the*

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*kids would just get out and play and climb trees and ride horses and wade in creeks and play with dolls and things. I played with white kids all my life. Record 15 p. 20*

*... She, on my father's side he was the first one over there in colored town as we call it... Record 10 p. 5*

*... The white people here has always been very friendly and very nice. I say. I lived in this neighborhood. I had no black children to play with. My yard was full of White children... Record 10 p. 13*

*M: Yea. Black people. We were the only black family that lived there. We didn't know the difference and they didn't know the difference... we never got lonesome because we'd either go to play or the white kids would come over and play with us. So we didn't know the difference in black and white. I never have cause I wasn't raised among the blacks. When we moved right out here where my daddy's house is now, that's the first time that we ever lived in a black community. Record 23 p. 8*

### Military

Segregation was evident in both World Wars. Black units were lead only by white commission officers. Blacks were non-commission officers. In situations where soldiers of both races mingled, some war friends emerged. Those friendships did not remain once they returned to the USA. Racial segregation was also practiced by the local Philippines.

Blacks were usually assigned to low level tasks such as digging fox holes, trenches and latrines. A few were trained in specialized areas. When they returned to USA, they were not able to get a job in the specialized area.

*K: This was World War II.*

*I: World War II. During that time were the black troops and the white troops separated?*

*K: Separated at that time, during that time. We did have white officers. Our captain was white. Our first and second lieutenants, they were white. But we stayed all at the same, in the same place together. But in tents.*

*K: But in America you had barracks, but it was separated, just before the integration came in.*

*I: Right. That's what I had heard.*

*K: But we had white officers, but we were in a black... we had A Company, B Company, C Company, and D Company which was blacks. And whites had the same thing, but you were separated. In other words, we might be here in this community. It was Army, understand, it was all Army—we're here in the Army, and in town there's another Army place and maybe that was all whites. Now, that's the way it was when I was in the Army. You were separated. We didn't know anything about integration...*



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*I: But when you fought were you separated then?*

*K: Separated then.*

*S: When you fought?*

*K: Unless you run together and get mixed up there and that's the only way you mixed up then.*

*I: Well, did the black soldiers [end of side one, some lost]*

*K: ... up to the front line and back. We had black sergeants, first sergeant, there was a staff sergeant, there was a private, there was a corporal, like myself, I was a T5, because I went to school and learned to use these apparatuses and how to use this gas and stuff. ... I remember this, when we landed in the Philippines, we had just got landed good and we had run out, when we got to where we were gunna get off the ship at, and we started to shore, which we made it and we had run out and started diggin' fox holes. Record 35 pp. 23 - 24*

*K: ... There was segregation over there. You know, people didn't have anything to do with the blacks, just like they did here in America.*

*S: (Chuckle). They told them they had tails. [Laughter.]. Record 35 pp. 25 - 26*

*I: Did you make any friends with any or the white soldiers?*

*K: ... That's what I'm sayin', over there was just like it was here in America. It was segregated over there. The people... the Philippino had nothin' to do with the black, and we'd go... One Sunday, they let us go out in the town, and the white soldier would go in the drug stores there where they sold ice cream... I don't know whether it was a grocery or drug store but there was ice cream sold, anyway, white soldier would go in there and get the ice cream for us and bring it back out there to us.*

*I: Even in the Philippines.*

*K: In the Philippines! It was just like it was over here, I tell you. It wasn't no different. It was segregated over there as it was over here.*

*I: So when you came back home, did you come back to Murphy?*

*K: Yeah, I came back to Murphy.*

*I: Did you have a feeling then that something wasn't right for the black man?*

*K: Yeah. We could tell the differences just the minute we got back to America, segregation again. See? But you were sort of in friendship overseas, till you got back and then you could feel it. The minute you got back to America they separated. We came back to California and you could tell right then.*

*Segregation began again.*

*I: You weren't treated any better even though you had fought overseas?*

*K: Yeah, we hadn't been treated any better when we first got back until this integration started, what Dr. Martin Luther King did for us, before anything got any better. You weren't treated any better. Now, I tried this when I come back. They told me that I was too old. I came back. I tried to go to school under the GI bill. And they said the government just don't accept you at that age. So, at that time I didn't know where to turn. I didn't know where to look to find out anything different. But now you can find out things different from way back then.*

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*I: And so you weren't allowed to use what you had earned. Record 35 pp. 26 - 27*

*S: Yes, I didn't go into action. I was stationed in Kearney, Nebraska, at the time during the war. I was lucky to stay there, could volunteer to go, but it was segregated, you know how that was.*

*I: No, could you explain that?*

*S: Yes, all blacks at one place and all that over another place. Everybody wasn't together. No, not in the Army. Just like you in this house and I'm in that house, white and black.*

*I: Did you fight together?*

*S: Oh, they finally got them fighting together... ..*

*I: ... If I remember correctly, there were white troops and black troops...*

*S: Right.*

*I: During World War II.*

*S: ... The white man, he was already gone to National Guard and he was over you when you got there. Done made lieutenant you see. But the black didn't have the chance to go at that time. Segregation. Record 31 p. 9*

### Public Accommodations

During this period public accommodations were defined by race. Whites and black only areas and services were separate. Blacks came to know that segregation was the rule and accepted it a just part of getting along. They read the situation and participated as they were expected too.

In theaters blacks sat in the balcony and whites sat on the main floor. Blacks usually had a separate entrance and off the main street or an ally way. If blacks were served at restaurants they were not allowed to sit in the main eating areas and were not allowed to enter through the front door. Blacks were served through a side window or rear door.

When riding public transportation, black people had to move to the rear. In some buses blacks would pay through the front door, exit and enter through the rear door. It was noted in one case of a white person giving up a seat to a black person recognized from their hometown. In another case, the white worker refused service to a seating black person. The black person knew the owner on the way out and told him what happen. The owner fired the white server and offered to serve the black person. But the black person decided not to eat at the café.

Often with the segregated accommodations \ service came poor quality or disrespect shown from the provider. Though blacks tended to ignore the ill treatment, as in one case the person noted it was unfair, but had no choice but to accept service. If the there was an option, as in the case reported of not buying gasoline only at service stations that permitted use of the rest rooms. Also, noted that were objections to segregation, through direct questioning to petitions and attempting to get support by governments and change in laws.

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*I: What about movies and restaurants?*

*J: It was segregated, the Blacks set in the balcony and the Whites downstairs.  
Record 7 p. 15*

*I: What about, do you remember when we had to ride in the back of the bus?*

*MB: Yes, I remember that. Now you get to ride anywhere on the bus that we  
want to sit down.*

*I: What else has changed?*

*MB: We can go to the picture show and we can sit anywhere we want to. We  
don't have to sit up in the balcony. We can go to these fast food places and  
eat. Just mix in there with the whites. Record 13 p. 24*

*I: Let's go back farther. You remember the days of Jim Crow?*

*J: I know we couldn't go to restrooms and couldn't go to cafes. If you wanted  
anything, you go in and get it and go out. You couldn't sit down, things like  
that.*

*I: What were the race relationships like in Sylva before integration?*

*J: Well, you just couldn't go to theaters. You couldn't go in and sit down and  
eat. Record 15 p. 36*

*M: ... Then, when you got on the bus, you had to set on the back or you didn't  
sit. If the white people wanted to get back there, they got back there. You set  
anywhere else and you were asked to go back there. I never sat nowhere else,  
but I know others, that was asked to go in the back.*

*I: You didn't like that did you?*

*M: No, I sure didn't like it. Whenever I get on a bus or train, I want to be able to  
sit anywhere just like you all do. When I want something to eat, I want to go in  
a place and get it just like you all do.*

*I: They didn't understand that?*

*M: No, they didn't want that. Record 3 p 19*

*C: ... I remember when I used to ride the bus, I had to sit in the back. I will never  
will forget that. I used to go to Charlotte to see my daughter and there weren't  
any seats, I would have to stand up, and it was somebody here that knowed  
the people that I worked for and they had seen me and recognized me and they  
lived in Duck Town and they had left because it got sort of bad and I remember  
this man got up and gave me the seat and you never seen so many eyes and  
necks tum around looking. Or he would say, "Sit down beside me" Yeah, Martin  
Luther King made it much better. Record 19 p. 26*

*G: Well, I don't. I really can't say. I can't bring up any event because you know  
back then the standard was on the inside. You knew the distance. You knew  
what you were supposed to do and what you were not supposed to do. Also,  
what was liked to be done and what was unlike to be done. I don't know. I  
reckon I've always been a person that wants to be exact and do just what was  
right if I possibly could in that life. Record 11 p. 14*

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*C: Oh, no! We wasn't allowed to go in cafes and restaurants. We had to go to the back.*

*I: What about travel. If you wanted to go somewhere, what about travel? You mentioned a train earlier.*

*C: We had to ride in the back of the train.*

*I: And then the bus came along later?*

*C: Yes. Had to ride in the back of the bus until Martin Luther King cleared the thing up. Lord, I'll never forget those old bus rides. I took you many times you and your mama. We had to sit at the back of the bus make me so sick. Record 22 p. 25*

*RD: Yeah one time went down to the cafe down here and we had to go in the back down there. So, I went in the back down there to get me a sandwich. There wasn't nobody cooking but white folks and I went in and sat down and this old boy come, "What do you want," and I said I would like a sandwich if I can get one. "Well we're busy. "I said I don't see you doing nothing. I said it looks to me like you're standing there looking out the front there. He said well, we just can't serve you. I said thank you and I got up and walked out.*

*I: Nobody was in there but he didn't want to serve you.*

*RD: Didn't want to serve me. Ms. Ensley came into the place and I told her what had happened and you know she fired that boy.*

*I: So, Ms. Ensley was the owner of the restaurant?*

*RD: Yeah at that time. She said well come on back in here go in the front with me and get you a sandwich. I told them no thank you cause I had lost my appetite. Record 9 p. 17*

*G: Well, Jim Crow, you couldn't if you went into a cafe you had to go around back. They wouldn't serve you then some of them wouldn't serve you then. If you went in the front way they'd want you to pull off your hat. Record 10 pp. 13 – 14*

*G: ... But they give us a balcony on the inside and you come in from Montgomery Street. So, we did go to the show. Record 11 p. 17*

*G: ... He felt, they said they never heard tell of just no Black Lion's Club because ain't all Lions together. There ain't no integration or what? But any way that's what they told me that Lion Club's were not supposed to be integrated. Well, anyway, he said that he knowing more about his people you know that he could organize getting on foot in which they are.*

*I: So, there's a black Lion's Club?*

*G: That's right.*

*I: I didn't know that.*

*G: Yeah, but do they all meet together?*

*HG: They meet once. The Lion's Club, Albert and them, they meet once a month. Record 11 pp. 29 -30*

*S: ... For instance, the same cafe that you worked at, at that time, if you worked there, if you came to get a hamburger, you had to go to the back door.*

*K: Yeah. I remember I worked in the cafe, I didn't have no problem eating a hamburger, I was already working there. [Laughter.]*

*S: But you were in the kitchen. You couldn't go out front and eat a hamburger.*

*K: But people, blacks—that came in. Now, this is one thing I'll say about Murphy. I don't know what other towns ever had. But Murphy's always had a place to eat in the back. You come in there to eat. You had a table over there you sat in the back. And they'd fix you a hamburger and French fries, and you could sit over there and eat it. But now, see, we don't have to do that. In a drug store, you don't have to buy your ice cream and go out on the street and eat it. You sit down if you want to. 'Course, now it's different. You got the ice cream place.*

*S: Sweet Tooth, they call it here. Place where only ice cream is sold.*

*K: Yeah, Sweet Tooth, it's called. And you don't go in there no how. You go up to the window. That's as far as you, everybody, black or white, goes up to the windows. And, used to, when I was a kid, the white sat at the counters at the drug store, they ate ice cream sitting down. If you were black you could go get a cone but you had got to go out on the street to eat it. But that's not true today. Record 27 pp. 40 – 41*

*I: Do you remember riding on a bus?*

*S: Yeah, I remember riding on a bus.*

*I: When you had to sit in the back?*

*S: Yeah.*

*I: Hasn't that changed?*

*S: Yeah, have you ever sat in the back?*

*I: Yes, I did.*

*S: You did? Record 24 p. 13*

*S: Well, it wasn't always good because you'd have to go to the back if you wanted to eat. We didn't get hungry, you know [laugh]. We couldn't go no place, you know, without you had to take you lunch with you on the road. You'd have to go in the back. Dan Israel is the onliest man in Bryson City that opened up for the blacks. He did fix a room in there decent for the blacks, he did that. He's about the only one that I know that did that. When they built the theatre, they fixed a balcony for us.*

*I: A theatre in Bryson City?*

*I: What about the circuses? Could you attend the circus? Were you segregated then?*

*S: Yes.*

*I: In a different place?*

*S: White man over here and black...*

*WS: See, the circus was...*

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*S: All the bus drivers would be there on the bus Saturday to tell you to get to the back.*

*WS: But the whites that wanted to sit in the coaches with us if they could. Oh yeah, there were white people that like to sit in the back coach and all, where we were or something like that, but we couldn't go back in the coach where they were.*

*S: But on the bus seating, you know, you want to sit back there you know all people are not alike. Some good and some bad, but you can always tell when a guy is right and when he's not. Record 31 p. 9*

*S: When I was growing up there was a man in Bryson City that owned a little cafe and he had a window, that we could go to and get an ice cream cone on the outside, an ice cream cone or a hot dog. They were both five cents in my days. He'd see us coming walking across the street, you know from the depot over to those buildings right across the street there and all. His little old joint was in there somewhere and he'd see us coming and he'd raise that window and say "What you want!" before we even got there and you tell him because we didn't have anywhere else to go. Slam it down and go get it and raise the window and hand it back to you! Discrimination was terrible in my days. Back of the buses and of course the train and all that and everything. You knew exactly where to go to keep from being insulted. If you went in an area where you weren't supposed to go you would be told to move back. Even though there would be white people taking that back seat which they allotted to the colored people and all, if anybody stood up, you did. The bus driver would tell you to move to the back but he didn't tell the ones that was on that back seat to get up, that seat is supposed to be for the black people and all. You stood up and let them sit on the seat that was supposed to be for you to sit on. Record 32 p. 12*

*S: ...We used to have to drive up to the filling station and ask. Morris would ask could we use the restroom. If they'd say yes, we'd say "fill it up." If they didn't we didn't stop there [laugh]. Now, we go into anywhere and eat and sleep if we want to. Certainly, I admire him for that. Record 32 p. 29*

*M: Oh, no, Asheville's a little bit better. 'Course they was Jim Crow here, too, you know. We couldn't hardly do things here and couldn't go places. Record 34 p 7*

*M: Yeah, yeah, come on the train. I remember that. I remember that first trip on the train, coming to North Carolina. When I got on the train I got into the wrong coach, where, a Pullman, they called them Pullmans then, and nobody could go into the Pullmans but the white folk, no Negroes. And I went into the Pullman and sat down.*

*I: Did they let you know that you were in the wrong place?*

*M: No, Yeah, yeah, soon the conductor come and got me.*

*I: What did he say?*

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*M: He said, "I'm sorry but you're in the wrong part."*

*I: Was he black?*

*M: No, he was white. And, so, a white lady was setting there and she says, "No!" Said, "Let her set here with me," And I was thoroughly surprised, and he said, "You make sure you want her to set with you?" And so she said, "Yes, let her stay here and set with me," And I was on my way coming to Asheville. And, again, I never will forget that.*

*I: So you rode in the Pullman?*

*M: Yeah, yeah! But he didn't want me to.*

*I: Well, they knew that they were riding with a lady, [inaudible].*

*M: Yeah, well, I don't know what... No. But when you get through with it, I don't care if you are a lady, you're still a Negro lady. [Laugh] Record 34 p. 7*

*I: What was it like for colored people?*

*CS: The colored people? It wasn't too good. Didn't have much opportunity. Different drinking water. Wrote on the water fountains, colored and white. Stores the same thing.*

*I: It wasn't like that back where you grew up?*

*CS: No stores had any water fountains or anything. I remember above the Mason/Dixon Line you could ride anywhere you got on the train. Below the Mason/Dixon Line you would have to ride Jim Crow.*

*I: So, in Asheville it was like Jim Crow then?*

*CS: Yeah. Trains, buses, all transportation.*

*I: Did people try to do anything about it?*

*CS: Yeah, they did what they did then, petition about it. They never take it laying down.*

*I: What did they do?*

*CS: Talked to the government, states, counties and things like that. That's all they could do they didn't have no marching then. Record 17 pp. 11 – 12*

*I: Now, when you first came to Asheville, how were black people treated? How were you treated?*

*J: Well, people weren't... the black people wasn't treated as... they didn't have the privilege they got now. They had white water bin, black water bin up there on the square. [Chuckle]... ... And then you get on a bus you had to go to the back.*

*I: Wonder why?*

*J: Wonder why! Segregation, that's why.*

*I: How did you feel about that?*

*J: I didn't feel so good! Oh, with Whitey [I think] it was the same way it was in South Carolina. It wasn't no different. It wasn't no different. Well, it didn't bother me too much in a way of speaking, but after Martin Luther King come out and broke in there on this thing, it made a difference...*

*I: But it wasn't that way when you first came to Asheville?*

*J: No, no. But Martin.*

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*I: Were there any leaders like community leaders or black leaders trying to do something about segregation when you first came to Asheville?*

*J: No, no, no. I didn't never see no black leaders trying to do nothing 'bout no segregation around here. There wasn't no segregation did in this whole United States but Martin Luther King brought it up to where I said... Record 1 pp. 6 - 7*

*I: What were conditions like for black people in Asheville when you first came? Were they segregated?*

*M: Oh, yes, Asheville was segregated, greatly segregated, throughout the sixties, you know. P. 3*

*I: When you came to Asheville and it was segregated, because it was probably segregated in Greenwood, too*

*M: Oh, yes.*

*I: How did you feel about?*

*M: Well, now, at 12 years old you don't worry too much about... you just take things mostly like it is, and you must realize at that time the family had greater influence on the children and you didn't hear too much about certain things, because as they exist. And this was the norm of things. There wasn't much said about what was going on. Everybody accepted the situation as it was. When I said everybody, that's just it. So there was nothing to be said about it.*

*Particularly, you didn't think that much about it. This was a way of life, and that's all. As we would say, this is the blacks and the whites. Record 4 p. 5*

### Schools

All of the interviewees indicated that schools were segregated by race. The white schools were better resource and maintained. As cited the length of the school year was different between the black and white schools. Black students attend fewer months during the school year than white students.

Schools located outside of a city were elementary and went at least to the eighth grade. Students continuing their education through high school would commute or move to a location that had a black high school. This could also mean leaving the Appalachian region. Not all black community members wanted to end segregated schools. Two reasons cited were mistrust on how black students would be treated by white students, teachers and administrators; and identity and attachment to history of the black schools. One person was clear that the desire was equality over integration.

*I: When the schools were integrated here in Murphy, was it an easy transition or was there some trouble?*

*C: Well it wasn't bad. I think they took it pretty well.*

*I: What happened to the black school that was here?*

*C: They tore it down, it was old ... Yeah it was torn down. It wasn't but three rooms.*

*I: For the high school or all grades?*



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*C: It was, you see, to three or four, I believe 3-room and you only went to the eight grade ... Record 19 pp. 26-27*

*S: ... But there was a high school in Tate.*

*I: Was it for black children?*

*S: Black children and white children and now then it's just one school. They were separate schools but now I think it's just the one school there. They all go to just that one school. It's integrated. Record 33 p. 4 – 5*

*I: They don't realize the struggle that you had to go through to get where you are today.*

*C: No, they don't. As I said, we had a segregated school system. We, in my understanding, did not want integration. We wanted equality, but we didn't want integration. We loved our high school, and now it's a elementary school and so many of them have been closed down completely. We respected the teachers even though they had their flaws, all right. What we wanted was equality. If they got a new book at Fike, we wanted a new book at Dardin. Record 25 pp. 11- 12*

*S: We didn't want to. And they thought that was something. In other places people were fighting to integrate, and here we could and didn't want to. Our children would not have to leave home to finish high school.*

*K: I said this, "Your children are taught to do evil things to blacks." I told them to their face, I said, "Now if you get too rough on my kids, I'm coming to see about it." We told them that, "We will come over there rough." And they wouldn't allow any reporters in the day the kids started school [Slight chuckle].*

*S: And we didn't... Record 27 p. 28*

*B: ... Only teachers who had come down from the North would be working in the schools. Now, Allen Home all but two teachers from the time I was there -- only two colored teachers. The rest of them -- four would be white. But they were nice. Record 30 pp. 12 – 13*

*I. What was school like?*

*J: Well, school was pretty good. They called it the Hampton School. It was down in the country, you know. You didn't work... back in them days you didn't go to school... black people went to school about three or four months, five or six months, it wasn't any.*

*I: How long did white people go to school?*

*J: The whites, they went about eight or ten. See, things was real different back then. That was before you was ever thought of.*

*I: That's right. How were they different? What was the difference?*

*J: Well, it was all real different than it is now. The black people didn't have much that... they couldn't... they didn't have much, say like they do now. You understand me. They didn't have much to say. Record 1 p. 4*

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### *Social Interactions*

Interpersonal interactions range from close as a family member to absolute denial of the existence on the part of whites toward social contact between the races. Whites had a choice in monitoring contact that did not exist for blacks. For example, blacks had to have social contact for employment. During the time period most of the employment for blacks was domestic servants and food service, outside manual labor, and unskilled day work. The work would require supervision and/or direct contact with white people.

With most people of both races residing in racial segregated areas, there was little opportunity for social contact. My areas, (especially residential) within the region were off-limits to blacks who did not have a white sanction reason to be at a location. The penalty for social interactions by law or tradition was prohibitive or strictly monitored. For self protection, black people were self-monitoring to assure that the lines were not crossed by themselves.

Young children played together. This was especially true when they lived in proximity to each other. There appears to be in play no distinction with respect to race. Adults were also known to visit other adults at each other homes.

*M: Oh, Lord, well, I tell you there, you have to stay your distance. If you was a Negro you'd a stayed your distance. You meet some nice white people, but, still, I don't care who they are, they think Aunt So-and-So's all right and Uncle So-and-So's all right, but you better, when you think about it, you a "nigger" and so you stay in your place. That's the main thing. Record 34 p. 7*

*B: ... I'll say it like this, you went with your group, colored went with the colored, white went with the white. It wasn't mixed like it is now... .. Asheville wasn't -- the colored people didn't have the way like they have now... .. But you stayed in your place – they let you know they were superior.*

*I: But other than the church?*

*J: No, other than the church, no school socializing and such. Record 7 p. 15*

*I: When you were growing up, did the black and the white people mingle much?*

*EC: Well, some did. We had neighbors who did, which claims they did.*

*I: Do you remember playing with white children?*

*EC: Yeah, I did.*

*I: Do you remember the time when blacks and, whites went to school, and went to church together?*

*EC: No, I don't, ah [inaudible] there in late years. Record 14 pp. 24-25*

*I: You said there were several families out where you lived in Webster. Now, were all these families black?*

*J: No. There were white living around.*

*I: Well, how did the two races get along with each other?*

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*J: Well, they got along fine. We played together. I played with white kids all my life. My mother would go work for them and she would take me. Me and the kids would just get out and play and climb trees and ride horses and wade in creeks and play with dolls and things. I played with white kids all my life.*

*Record 15 p. 20*

*I: Was there much mingling between the races?*

*J: Yeah.*

*I: In what way?*

*J: Well, I remember way back my grandmother was fourteen or fifteen years old or something, she used to go to these people in town and sit down and talk to them and sit on the front porch. That was back before you couldn't go to different places. This lady live right down here in town, Mrs. Wilson.*

*I: Your grandmother would come to visit her?*

*J: Yeah, and go visit other people, Mrs. Carrie Manaley. She used to go visit her.*

*I: Yes, ma'am. Now, that was a movement, but do you remember being told you could no longer play with Susie because she is white or you can't go here, you can't go there.*

*J: Do I remember that?*

*I: Yes, ma'am.*

*J: I was never told that. I remember just playing with any of them because it was a lot of white people that lived around us. We played together all the time. We could go to their houses. They never told us that we couldn't play with them Record 15 pp. 36 – 37*

*I: Were there special occasions that the blacks and whites got together?*

*C: Well there have been, I remember Ms. Lucy Ann's sister and her husband, they used to come and live with her. And some of them would stay and Ms. Lucy Ann's husband was friendly and some of them would come and stay with her, and visit and get along fine.*

*I: So there was limited interaction. So as long as you stayed in your community and went to work and minded your own business there wasn't any trouble?*

*C: Huh-huh. They didn't bother you. Record 19 pp. 23-24*

*I: Do you see a difference in the relationship between blacks and whites now as compared to your earlier days?*

*G: Well, yes, I do. Because back when I was coming up, some of the whites you could associate with and get along with and then later years they just pull from that and you stayed your distance and they stayed theirs.*

*I: Do you remember when there was a change in the relationship, because in the beginning you said at first you were neighborly, you got along together, but then white people began to pull away. Do you remember when that happened?*

*G: Well, when that happened that was back when I was younger. That was back before I was married. When all of them, because I remember they used to come to my grandmother's house and she'd divide what she had with them, and if somebody, a white man or somebody, come to her house and he was*

*dirty, she'd take him in and have them pull off they clothes and she'd give them some of her husband's clothes to put on and she'd wash they clothes and iron them and let them stay all night and give them some food. Then the next day they could go on about their business. She didn't have to know them. She just never turned nobody away from her door. Record 26 p. 22*

*G: Well, I'd say the standard. Now, I would say the standard with exception. The white people here has always been very friendly and very nice. I say. I lived in this neighborhood. I had no black children to play with. My yard was full of white children. We played. You never heard, nigger, nigger. You know this and this. That field over there was full of cows on this end. We play ball up here. You know the Davises? I think Tony was a deputy or sheriff or police here. They used to live right up there. Played ball with them anytime right over here in the yards you know. Over there in that field and all like that. We got along just fine. We got along just fine. There was the Lees, the family that lived out there and she'd come out here. She was raised up. There was two of them along the same age as my sister in New York. They were raised up together and so, she'd come out here and sit down if we were having dinner. She'd sit down and eat just like we did. If she was going into town and we were going into town they'd go to town shopping together and come back and so forth. Record 11 p. 13*

*I: Well, you're back home. What was the climate like between blacks and whites here in Murphy? Did the two races interact?*

*S: We've always had pretty good relations, between the black and the white.*

*K: We've had a pretty good relationship, as far as. . .*

*S: It's always been pretty good. If something happened, for instance, like someone's house burned or some tragedy or something, they're always here to help out, wherever they could.*

*K: Um-hm, they were here.*

*S: Most of the victims would end up with more than they had before they were burned out.*

*I: What about in the earlier days?*

*K and S: Well, you know, I can say this about Murphy. It was pretty good, except eating at the cafe and places like that. Well, that was just Jim Crow. That was over. But as far as good relations, we still have. It was just Jim Crow, that's all I want to say. But as far as relationship... good relationship here in Murphy. They would come to us and we would go to them. That's why I reckon it's so.... when we integrated, it wasn't no trouble to us to integrate.*

*I: There was no trouble?*

*S: No, sir. Record 27 p. 28*

*WS: But one thing about Bryson City, we did always play together.*

*I: I was goanna ask. What about children playing?*

*S: Yes, they played together, we played ball together. As far as along that line, well, it was the old heads that was pumping the kids. Such so is now, you know. You can always tell when a kid's been raised to treat people right.*

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*Always, but you know some peoples got the old die hard in them, and they don't want to give up.*

*I: Do you remember then when a lot of people were farming that if a neighbor was sick, black or white that the community no matter what, would pitch in?*

*WS: Oh yeah, they did that.*

*S: I was telling somebody in Bryson City, an old lady, Sherrill. They used to have cottage prayer meeting. Her and my mother and then would go and them would go from house to house. There wasn't nothing between them, you know, but that's the way it was.*

*WS: Then if somebody died they would call the white neighbors would come around. The blacks would go into the homes when they lost loved ones and all. We always had that type of relationship.*

*S: Of course, the relationship you know, here in the western part is not like it is in the eastern part. You know, down where those plantations is down east.*

*I: Right*

*S: Different.*

*I: Western, North Carolina.*

*S: Yes.*

*WS: Let me tell you this. I think we had better relationships in Bryson City. Really, when things really got some of the whites were so steamed up because of the black children coming to school and things like that and all. But back in our days and all, well you knew your place and they'd come and play with us and we'd play with them. Well, the neighbors they'd visit each other and all from Bryson's Branch. All of them, they'd visit back and forth and all like that. And come in and lend a hand and you know, and all like that and everything. But the real problems did come with segregation, see, because some of them want to see blood flow.*

*I: Integration.*

*WS: Yeah, integration. Some of them so bitter against that, but as far as other relationships in Bryson City now, we had real good relationships.*

*I: As long as you kept your place?*

*WS: Kept your place and we all knew where our place was and we all abided by it and all like that. We didn't try to go in places.*

*S: As far as the white man, he wants to be our superior and that won't work. I never could think it would work.*

*WS: They were always Mr. and Mrs. to us and all that. Our fore parents was Aunt and Uncle to them instead of Mr. and Mrs. Howell. They were kin to us.*

*S: Claimed kin to you instead of calling you Mr. and Mrs. Record 31 pp. 9 – 11*

*I: What did you do after you worked, how did you all entertain yourselves? You couldn't go I know they had things here in the other hotels, but...*

*S: Well, you could do most anything in the way of entertainment. You on a segregated scale. You could go to a picture show, up in the balcony, ballgame, special sessions, and shows that would come over to the auditorium. You could go to anything that was open to the public, but it was segregated. Bands would come through and the blacks would be down on Valley Street at a place*

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*called the Tobacco Barn. There would be special sessions for blacks. Cafes, everything was segregated. The majority of blacks spent their time on the corner of Market and Eden. The YMI drug store was the center of activity of blacks. Dr. Jones ran that drug store. Record 5 pp. 7 – 8*

*I: Have the attitude of, this is probably a hard question, but what was the attitude of black people back then in terms of being segregated always? I mean, was that accepted or...I know it was accepted because you didn't have much choice. What did you think the general attitude toward that was?*

*S: I think the general attitude was that as you say blacks as a whole didn't pay too much attention to it because you didn't have no other choice so they just accepted that as a way of life. Not too much fanfare, I know I didn't pay too much attention to it. You knew there were some places you couldn't go and just didn't try to go and just accepted it. Record 5 p. 8*

### Conclusion

Like the rest of the nation during this time, segregation was the norm with few exceptions in Appalachia. Separation of the races was practiced by law and tradition. At its core was racism which dictated conditions and terms as to how black and white people must behave. The oral histories presented are snapshots from our past. There is no claim that these stories were true for of the region. For there were exceptions from these in experiences within the region. The central conclusion is our past as Appalachians included segregation.

*... it's a whole other thing the black men did, and he didn't get his rights for it. It's a whole other thing that he had to do to come up through life. But now he begin to get his rights for him. If he got it up here, now, he can get it, but they held it back from me all the time back in them days.*

*I: Um-hm.*

*J: For he didn't have no...he... well, he didn't have the, what you call like they have nowadays, they own his rights. You know, the white man will hold you back if you can't... if you don't have nothing to stick against him all the time, he'll keep you back. You got to have something to let him know that he can't. He'll try his all his best to keep you going back. Always has been and always will be. Record 1 p. 11*

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<sup>1</sup> Hayden, Wilburn. (2015). *Appalachian Black People: Identity, Location and Barriers*. Pittsburgh: 91South, Pp. 41-51.

<sup>2</sup> Hayden, Wilburn & Donovan Hayden. (unpublished chapter for forthcoming book)). Table 2. Abolishment of Slavery in the Western Hemisphere. Exclusion and Omission of Black Slavery within the Canadian Ethos.

<sup>3</sup> Feagin. (1989). *Racial and Ethnic Relations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, pp. 6 – 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Race Literacy Quiz: What differences make a difference?* The Race Literacy Quiz was developed by California Newsreel, in association with the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The myths and misconceptions it raises are explored in the new documentary series, RACE - The Power of an Illusion, to be broadcast on PBS, and available on video from California Newsreel at [www.newsreel.org](http://www.newsreel.org) or 1-877-811-7495. For more information and background, visit the companion web site at [www.PBS.org/Race](http://www.PBS.org/Race).

<sup>5</sup> Jones-Rogers. (2019). *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 150.

<sup>6</sup> Hayden, 2015, p. 60; Also, Pinkney, Alphonso. (1987). *Black Americans*, 3 ed. Englewood: Prentice Hall, pp. 53-56; Johnson, Charles. (1943). *Patterson of Negro Segregation*. New York: Negro University Press, pp. xvii-xviii); Reid, Debra. (2003). African Americans and Land Loss in Texas: Government Duplicity and Discrimination Based on Race and Class. *Agricultural History*, 77; Wachtel, David. (1965). *The Negro and Discrimination in Employment*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, pp. 11-12; Rungeling, Brian, Vernon M. Briggs, John F. Adams and Lewis Smith, pp. 38-39; Boston, Thomas. (1988). *Race, Class and Conversation*. Boston: Unwin, pp. 58-59.

<sup>7</sup> Hayden, 2015, p. 60.