



## Interview with Matthew Grant

June 28, 1993

Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South  
Enfield (N.C.)

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## Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South

An oral history project to record and preserve the living memory of African American life during the age of legal segregation in the American South, from the 1890s to the 1950s.

### ORIGINAL PROJECT

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Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University  
Behind the Veil: African-American Life in the Jim Crow South

Interview with  
Matthew Grant

Interviewed by  
Karen Ferguson

Unedited Transcript by

1. **Ferguson:** Mr. Grant, I thought maybe we could begin, I could begin by asking you to tell me where you grew up and to talk a little bit about the community in which you grew up.
  
2. **Grant:** I grew up in Northampton County, Kirby Township, farming country, farming community with both black and white living in the community. They were neighbors, both black and white. They were neighbors and would do things for each other in sickness and trouble. They would work together neighborly but they couldn't associate. When it got to that part it was everybody for his own. That was the kind of community we grew up in. Went to school separate and church separate, cafes separate and all of that. All the segregation law was in place when I grew up where I grew up at. Now what you want to know about it?
  
3. **Ferguson:** Well I thought maybe you could tell me a bit about the people, specifically about the people who lived around where you grew up. Were people living close by? When you say that they were neighborly but didn't associate, if you could be a little more specific about the kinds of things that you would do for each other.
  
4. **Grant:** Well when I said they were neighborly, if you needed anything, if you were sick they would come see you. If you wanted to borrow something you could go borrow it from them. They worked together some. But socially going to church or going to meetings or anything like that was segregated. You'd go to the same store, you'd talk on the street maybe. But that was the end of it. You went to separate schools and you were not afforded any

public assistance. When I say assistance I'm not talking about money. I'm talking about you weren't afforded any assistance, blacks were just there and all the laws were made for whites.

5. **Ferguson:** Who did you grow up with in your family?
  
6. **Grant:** I grew up with my mama and daddy. My daddy died when I was six. We had nine children in the family. My daddy bought a sixty acre farm when they got married. They got married in 1900 I think and he died in 1942. He was forty-two when he died. Then my mother married again. She raised the children on the farm. But most of them left home at a young age because they weren't able to go to school and weren't able to have automobiles so they went out on their own. There were two girls so they got married very young. Of course the boys got married young too but they were more outgoing than the girls were. I was the only one left home and I stayed home until I finished high school. Then I married.
  
7. **Ferguson:** Were you the youngest?
  
8. **Grant:** Yeah I was the youngest. I was the baby boy. I finished high school in 1939 and my mom and daddy moved to Newport News in 1939. I went with them and I got married in 1940. We lived in Newport News until 1945. That's when the war ended. Then we come back. We heard of the resettlement over here and we wanted some land of our own. We were able to get over here and get a forty acre and a mule, plot, forty acre plot. I had to get the mule. (Laughter)

9. **Ferguson:** If we could stay back in your childhood for a little bit, do you remember anything about your grandparents at all or did you know anything about them?
10. **Grant:** My granddaddy on my daddy's side, I knew him. He lived until 1940. He was a hundred and some and he was born during slavery, the latter part of slavery but he didn't grow up in it much. Before he got grown it ended. He got married. I forgot what year it was. Anyway, my daddy was his first child. His mother died. His first wife died. And my daddy was the only child of that marriage. He married again and he had another boy and he died. Lightning struck him during his teen-age.
11. **Ferguson:** Literally he was struck by lightning?
12. **Grant:** I think that's what they said. He died and the mother died too. But she wasn't struck by lightning. And my granddaddy married again so he had three wives. But the last wife, they had ten or twelve children by his last wife. All of them were raised. There are several of them living now. Naw, ain't but one. One boy. I don't believe there's but one living. I've got one uncle that's living. Ain't got no aunt out of the second. But the grandchildren, a lot of them are living. He was a pioneer in farming and he was interested in education. He tried to have a little school out there on his farm and he paid a teacher. Built his own house. Made his own bricks. And he was progressive. My daddy was the same way. He had all the modern farming machinery that was good at that time. It must have endowed in the family. All the boys especially are machinery oriented. We've got several of them in long distance truck hauling and mechanics. So none of the boys got real educated but most of them got it

through experience. They educated their children but they didn't. The boys in my day were not educated. You had a few girls. The boys were, the white landowners governed their education. They went to the field.

13. **Ferguson:** How did they control it? Did they directly state that the boys were not to go to school or how was that controlled?

14. **Grant:** If you had a white man and he had a tenant in the county I was in they didn't have great landowners. Most of them owned a hundred or a hundred and fifty acres. So they didn't have but one, sometimes two tenants. Well if you worked on halves on his farm then it took the children to do the work. So the boys, you know girls didn't plow the mules, so the boys done the work. So the girls were kind of free to go to school. Seemed like the white folks didn't try to make them work all the time like they did the boys. Well then if a man owned his own land and he had boys and the boys at the tenant farm they would razzle around together. So whatever they done, the life they had was kind of elevated at the same level.

15. **Ferguson:** So if a black person owned a farm he would get his sons to work in the same way that he - would they go to school then, would the boys go to school then?

16. **Grant:** Naw the boys still wouldn't go to school. They would go to school to get four to seven grades, something or another like that. You know what the tenant boys were having a good time going from house to house at night and getting the girls out and all that. In the community didn't but one or two families, didn't but one family in my family would let the

boys have the car. They owned their own land. But they were the only one that had a car and could go outside the community. Everybody else whatever they done they done it right in the community. Then you didn't have nobody to teach, I mean to encourage. We didn't go nowhere but to the church and the preacher won't educated. To make a living he had to preach for you how do you keep your job. You had to keep your job with it. So over here in this county it was a little different when I moved over here. It was more or less a plantation county and it still is. You know they own several thousand acres of land, had several families. Still whatever the boys on that, they communicated together. I don't know really but one boy over here that was in that group that his daddy owned land. I think he finished high school or went near there. But several girls went on to finish and taught. The white folks would kind of help the girls, some of them, you know their mothers. But most of them still worked their way through but I don't know no boys that, all of them left home and went north but not to school.

17. **Ferguson:** What would happen if a tenant farmer sent his son to school?

18. **Grant:** I'll tell you the truth, I don't know. I don't think nothing would happen. But he'd make him move if he sent his children to school and he needed work done. He would make him move and then nobody would hire him.

19. **Ferguson:** I guess too that the farmers would need that labor too.

20. **Grant:** Yeah they would need that labor because along then you know you didn't have nothing but mules. Then they had - they didn't never have it in this county - over in

Northampton County they had summer school, two months summer school. So you could go to school in July and August. September, they'd be out two months to help house the crops.

That got more boys going to school.

21. **Ferguson:** Was that set up by the county? Was it a public school or was that something that the black community did?

22. **Grant:** No, the public schools, the county set it up.

23. **Ferguson:** Was that when you were going to school?

24. **Grant:** Yeah, in latter years.

25. **Ferguson:** I wanted to ask you a little bit more about your grandfather. You said he was a pioneer in farming in that area. What do you mean by that?

26. **Grant:** Well he was a pioneer, what I meant by that was in getting machinery, pea-picker. He said he invented the pea picker but I don't know. He probably started it. And the combine too I reckon. But anything that would help in farming he had machinery oriented enough to build it.

27. **Ferguson:** Okay so he built his own machinery?

28. **Grant:** Yeah, built a lot of his own machinery.

29. **Ferguson:** Did he own his own land?

30. **Grant:** Yeah. He bought land.

31. **Ferguson:** How did he come about to own it, do you know?

32. **Grant:** I don't know too much about that. He owned a couple a hundred acres. I don't know who he bought it from. I was the youngest of the boys. I don't even know how my daddy got his land really. People back there didn't tell the children very much. They didn't discuss business with them. They didn't carry them to the store. There was a lot of difference in the black family and the white family. The only thing that a black boy would be able to ride around with his landlord, around the field until he got big enough to plow. Then he'd be struggling behind the plow. But the white man, you never saw his son riding around in the back of the pick-up. He sent his to school. When I moved over here the automobile was coming in, pick-ups and stuff. I moved over here in 1947. I don't think but two or three families had a car even then in the black community. They were still working mules and would drive the mule and wagon to town on Saturday, Saturday morning and they'd stay out there all day. That was the big day. They'd sit out there and talk and communicate. Sunday go to church.

33. **Ferguson:** Where would they go to talk, into Tillery?

34. **Grant:** Yes.

35. **Ferguson:** And was there a store or something?

36. **Grant:** Yeah, they had - Tillery was a big town. They had five or six stores out there.

Barber shop and all that. Even had a place you hooked your mules. Drive your wagon up there and tie your horses up. They would communicate all day and in the evening when the sun started going down everybody would get their family together and go on back home. That was a weekly thing. You didn't go to town through the week much unless you just needed something you'd go out there and pick it up if you had any money. Mostly didn't have no money. You didn't have no need to go.

37. **Ferguson:** In Northampton County where you grew up were there many black landowners?

38. **Grant:** It was a few. Not a whole lot. It was maybe eight or ten. Maybe a dozen if I go in a big area. But it won't many landowners. It was really more landowners over here. Up and down this road it was a lot of landowners. But over there the white people didn't own big farms. Most of the time they didn't have but one tenant. I have always asked myself, they had one tenant, they didn't work a bit. Whatever children they had they sent them to school and sent them to college.

39. **Ferguson:** So all on the labor of that one tenant.

40. **Grant:** That one tenant and his family.

41. **Ferguson:** So the white people with tenants they did no field work at all?

42. **Grant:** If he didn't farm, no field work. If he farmed, over in Northampton County some of them farmed. The women worked just like the men.

43. **Ferguson:** So there were some white farmers who didn't have tenants?

44. **Grant:** Yeah.

45. **Ferguson:** And they worked?

46. **Grant:** There were some that had one tenant and had enough land for him to work too.

Then his family would work. A lot of the white folks worked in Northampton County. But didn't no white folks work over here.

47. **Ferguson:** Were there any white tenant farmers over in Northampton County?

48. **Grant:** Very few. They were poor. I mean they were poor.

49. **Ferguson:** Were they poorer than the black tenant farmers?

50. **Grant:** I would say so because he didn't have no esteem. One thing about it, if he showed some ability to work and wanted to have something, they would get behind him and he could have something. He wouldn't stay poor.

51. **Ferguson:** Why was that?

52. **Grant:** Because he was white.

53. **Ferguson:** What would be the problem with having a white tenant farmer in the eyes of white folks?

54. **Grant:** I don't know. You didn't talk to the white folks about that.

55. **Ferguson:** What do you think the reason, why do you think that was a problem to have poor white folks in the eyes of the other white people?

56. **Grant:** Well the white people didn't so no need for no white person to be that poor and they would think he wouldn't work. And it would be because he wouldn't work or wouldn't take care of what he worked for. See all the jobs were open to whites. I mean what white was in the county. All the county jobs they looked out for them. They'd give them a job soon as they come out of high school. They didn't have to go to college. And any store or anything needed somebody, they didn't have to go to college. As soon as the white person come out of high school he had a job. You didn't have no white people that couldn't get a job. Then if you wanted to go away he could get a job. But blacks only had one place. Either the farm and what few girls that could finish high school, they could teach. That's the only thing they could do.

57. **Ferguson:** Your family is one of the very few black landowning families. Did the white people resent you? Were there any problems with white people because you owned land?

58. **Grant:** What, over here?

59. **Ferguson:** In Northampton County and then over here as well.

60. **Grant:** No, not in Northampton County. In Northampton County we didn't make no noise.

The only thing we done we owned land and paid our bills. My mama and all the rest of them

Matthew Grant

that I knew - owned land and pay your bills then you could, the children could go in the black community. You didn't have no trouble with them going in the white community. That was about it. You'd have socials and the fair would come around once a year and stuff like that. Didn't have no gathering of no white and blacks, no nothing. Didn't have nothing where they come together at.

61. **Ferguson:** But did the powerful white people in Northampton County, did they have any problem with black people owning land? Could you only be so prosperous without getting in trouble or anything like that?

62. **Grant:** Not as I know of. It won't enough of them to bother nothing. If you were black and owned land you the only way you showed it was by sending your children to school. You didn't never get to be where you had no voting power or no say-so in politics or nothing like that. It was way up here in the sixties before you got so you could. In the fifties my mama and daddy never did vote.

63. **Ferguson:** On the farm when you were growing up did you ever hire people to work on the farm with you?

64. **Grant:** Yeah. My mother hired one fellow but you know they didn't never pay nobody. Farmers weren't paying nothing. I don't know what she paid him really. We hired one man, one young man. He done the plowing. My step-daddy he helped but he was - all of them were getting up there in age at that time. That was the only somebody I know. You know

the white hired but the blacks didn't. The blacks, I mean they hired you to stack peanuts in the fall. I don't reckon you know nothing about that. Where are you from?

65. **Ferguson:** I'm from Canada originally but I know a little bit about farming down here. I'm interested in it.

66. **Grant:** You've been enlightened, huh? (Laughter)

67. **Ferguson:** Well, I don't know. I've had a lot of book learning about it but no actual experience. Put it that way.

68. **Grant:** But in picking cotton, along when I was growing up you didn't get but fifty cents a hundred. Pick cotton twenty-five sometimes fifty cents back in the thirties. In the forties when I moved over here I forgot what we were paying. I know it went up to two dollars before we got a cotton picker. I had the first cotton picker that was in this community. I don't know, things went so fast back there. Then the boll weevil took the cotton. Then I got hung up with this kind of business and went in the service station business. And a lot of it I forgot what even I done. I know I lost a lot of money in the farming. I had a hundred and fifty acres of cotton one year and didn't pick any. So you know I never got out of that.

69. **Ferguson:** So when you were growing up did you work on other people's land to pick cotton as well?

70. **Grant:** No. We had about forty acres of crop land and we worked that and we lived on it. My mother didn't believe in credit. Whatever she bought she paid for when she bought it.

We lived on the farm. We had plenty to eat. She put up plenty of stuff through the winter and had a garden in the summer. Plenty of apples. Plenty of grapes. Anything you want to name. That's what we ate. I didn't even know what beef was. I heard of it but I was married before - I mean I wouldn't even eat beef. She cooked beef once in awhile. I didn't like it. It didn't taste good to me.

71. **Ferguson:** Did you have hogs?

72. **Grant:** Had hogs, chickens, cows, milk. Anything you can name other than beef. Anything you can raise in the garden she had it. And she cooked plenty of it and you eat all you want. Man, them eggs and ham in the morning ( ). Don't do it now. (Laughter)

73. **Ferguson:** Were other tenant farmers, were they able to grow as much food? Did most of them have livestock?

74. **Grant:** Yeah but they didn't have no more than it took for the family. I mean if you were a tenant farmer you could have three or four hogs or whatever it took for the family you'd kill them. You didn't have a whole lot to sell. Most every farmer had a cow. They had the cow to milk and they'd have a calf. One or two farmers in the community may have had a bull. You'd carry your cow to his bull.

75. **Ferguson:** Was there a lot of cooperation among black farmers?

76. **Grant:** Yeah.

77. **Ferguson:** How so? What did they do for each other on the farm and then maybe more personally?

78. **Grant:** They popped peanuts together. They'd plant together if he was a big farmer. You get ready to house your crop, you picked peanuts together. Cotton, you'd pick your own cotton. You didn't have a whole lot of acres you know. You'd have eight or ten acres and pick seven or eight bales. But a man that owned his own he would hire the tenant farmer's family to help pick his cotton after he finished theirs. But peanuts, they'd work together on the peanuts. The ones that owned like my family owned land and you'd have another one down the road here that owned two or three, they would work together to get their crop out. And hog killing, that was just a family thing clean through the winter.

79. **Ferguson:** Was that a time of celebration as well, hog killing?

80. **Grant:** They didn't call it celebration but that was getting you set for the winter. You'd kill along right after Christmas or just before Christmas. Then you started to popping peanuts. That was the celebration. You'd go around the house and pop peanuts from house to house. That was good for the peanuts.

81. **Ferguson:** What did you do with the peanuts?

82. **Grant:** You popped peanuts to plant. You've seen peanuts in the hulls. Well if you planted ten acres you'd have to pop ten bags. It took about a bag to the acre. So people had big peanut poppings and stuff like that you know and you would get it done. Children would pop

at night. Especially teen-agers like you know so they could court a little bit. That's the only way you could get close to the girls.

83. **Ferguson:** You weren't allowed to court the girls otherwise?

84. **Grant:** No.

85. **Ferguson:** Why not? Your parents wouldn't allow it?

86. **Grant:** I don't know. Girls were fifteen or sixteen years old before they'd start courting. Then you had to leave at nine o'clock. Days it is now when the sun goes down about nine o'clock, you still had to go.

87. **Ferguson:** So you could go over to the girl's houses then?

88. **Grant:** The girls would be at the pea popping. They would help pop too.

89. **Ferguson:** But otherwise if you wanted to see a girl how would you do it? Would you be able to go to their house?

90. **Grant:** Yeah you could go to their house. They'd keep their eye on you. But you know boys slip around at night. The girls slip around too. Slip out the window and all that kind of stuff. They told it but it was kind of going out of style when I come along. So I don't know. I didn't get to do it. There won't no girls in my community.

91. **Ferguson:** You said something earlier on that the sons of owners weren't allowed out the way that the tenants were, that parents were stricter with them. Is that what you said?

92. **Grant:** Stricter with the owners?

93. **Ferguson:** A black owner's son, the parents were stricter with them than tenants were with their sons.

94. **Grant:** Yeah I think they were a little more stricter. I mean they could go out to more things because they had a little more money, a little more lead way than the tenant farmer did. Few tenant farmers would ever clear anything. If they cleared anything it would be very little. A few of them had a car later but most of them used a mule and cart.

95. **Ferguson:** Do you think there was any kind of division between black owners and black tenants in Northampton County? Would people associate with each other?

96. **Grant:** Yeah. You didn't have no problem with that. Not that I know of.

97. **Ferguson:** Did black owners play a special role in the community do you think?

98. **Grant:** Yeah. They were the dominate force in the community.

99. **Ferguson:** Why?

100. **Grant:** They were more intelligent than the tenant farmers. They could do things the tenant farmer couldn't do because they had say-so in the church. They were the deacons. But he

didn't have nothing else. In the schools I don't know much about them. But in church if he owned his land, you know a tenant farmer who rented land, they were the ones that had the say-so in the community.

101.**Ferguson:** Did you have a lot of kids living around you in Northampton County?

102.**Grant:** Yeah and no. Where I grew up at it won't but one family and that was the Grant family. They were thinning out when I come along. Back in the next community the same thing was happening with two or three families. They were getting grown and leaving so that thinned out and then it kept thinning out.

103.**Ferguson:** Were there people other than your immediate family who you particularly looked up to when you were growing up who were role models or who looked up to you?

104.**Grant:** We really didn't have no role models. The church was our role model. If the church had problems they pretty much kept it within the church family. People that courted outside didn't let it be known. It won't like it is now. Didn't make no difference where you know it or you didn't know it. All that stuff was taboo.

105.**Ferguson:** What was taboo? I didn't understand.

106.**Grant:** If they were doing something wrong it won't published.

107.**Ferguson:** So the church community was very close-knit. Was there only one church that people went to in your area, the black people?

108.**Grant:** You had a church in every community. We had one, two, three, four, five - have a church every Sunday. They didn't have a meeting but once a month and you'd have five or six within ten or twelve miles and you'd go to one every Sunday. You'd visit this one this Sunday and this one.

109.**Ferguson:** Did you feel that you belonged as much at these other churches as the one that you were a member of?

110.**Grant:** Yeah most especially the officers. They were honored and they still are at the other churches. The minister mostly what you, the choir, if they sang well the minister could holler well. Then after he'd finish you'd go on out and go back to business.

111.**Ferguson:** What role do you think the church played in your community for the people? You've talked about it a bit but can you talk a little more.

112.**Grant:** The church played all the role. Just well to say more so than the school. My sister's husband put up a little juke where you could dance at place about as big as these two rooms here. The boys went down there and danced. The folks, I don't know who told it, told the church about it, and they turned every one of them out of church. Turned them all out. And some of them didn't ever go back. I mean that's how - I mean they didn't have no better understanding. And in school, when I was in high school, a boy pulled a girl's dress down. It won't above her knees. And she told the teacher and the teacher told the principal. He didn't see where he had done nothing. The principal wanted him to sweep the chapel and he

wouldn't do it. So he ended up never finishing high school. I mean they had the say-so over your life.

113.**Ferguson:** Did you always like that control?

114.**Grant:** No. I really don't think I had sense enough. I didn't know no better.

115.**Ferguson:** You didn't know any better than what, than to follow the church?

116.**Grant:** Follow the church. Whatever they said was right. School, whatever said was right.  
Home, what...

117.End of Side A - Tape 1

118.Side B - Tape 1

119.**Grant:** Was it anything like that when you were coming up? No.

120.**Ferguson:** No, not at all. I'm interested in hearing about that. What happened to people, you said these people were thrown out of church. Were there many people who didn't attend church around where you were?

121.**Grant:** Naw it won't. Everybody went. Out of the community I reckon it wouldn't be a dozen that didn't go to church. It didn't mean to say, even if they went all of them won't members. But see you were a member of this church but you went to church, you didn't go to your church but once a month and see you had three other Sundays to go to other

churches. So you went all around. The younger folks didn't go as much as old folks when it got so you didn't - you got twelve or fifteen years old then you could stay home.

122.**Ferguson:** Did you stay home at that point?

123.**Grant:** Naw. It won't nobody at my house but me. I don't know what age everybody left home. When I was about twelve or thirteen I reckon. And I was a mama's boy. I was the baby you know and I just stayed and wherever they went I went.

124.**Ferguson:** So your brothers and sisters left home at twelve and thirteen years old or they left the church?

125.**Grant:** They left home at thirteen or fourteen years old.

126.**Ferguson:** And these were your brothers and sisters?

127.**Grant:** My brothers. My sisters, they must have gotten married when they were real young. All of them were married when I knowed them. My two sisters, I didn't have but two sisters, and they were married when I first knew them.

128.**Ferguson:** Why would they leave home so early, at fourteen?

129.**Grant:** Looking for a better life.

130.**Ferguson:** Where did they go for that?

131.**Grant:** Went to work for themselves. Some of them went logging. Some went working on the farm for somebody else. My brother was telling me the other day he went to work for a dollar and seventy-five cents a week. When he got married that's what he was getting. Had to borrow ten dollars from somebody, he told me who it was, to get married. After he got married he had fifty cents left. So that's what he had for his honeymoon. (Laughter) I was about the same thing but I had just got a public work job when I got married getting fifteen dollars a week.

132.**Ferguson:** Now you said your brothers wanted to go work for themselves. How did they go about doing that? Did they have to work in public work jobs for awhile before they could do that? How did they?

133.**Grant:** Naw the public work jobs were over at that time. What they would do was go work for a farmer, like I said for a couple of dollars a week. They worked like that and the farmer would feed them and pay them two dollars a week. They'd save all their money. When they'd get enough saved up they'd move on to something else. My uncles and my first cousins and all would always tell me about they were buying land. They had saved up their money working for that and bought land of their own. Back in those days white folks would sell you ten or twelve or forty or fifty acres of land and let you pay them. You didn't have to go through the bank. They'd let you pay them so much and they would work the land and then work for the man.

134.**Ferguson:** Was that always a fair arrangement?

135.**Grant:** Must of been that's the way they got their land.

136.**Ferguson:** But then after they bought the land were they still in debt to the white man?

137.**Grant:** Naw they would give them a clear deed. I don't know how my daddy bought his. I don't know who he bought it from. I know he cleaned up from my sisters and brothers. He cleaned up most all of it.

138.**Ferguson:** Could you tell me a little bit about your life at home when you were growing up? What kind of work you did on the farm specifically.

139.**Grant:** Well breaking land was the big start off. Then mama and daddy mostly would run the rows to plant. Then the boys would do the plowing. Then we used to pull fodder. I don't know whether you've ever heard of that. Along in those days to feed the mules with. That come in the last of July and August. Then the last of August we would start picking cotton. We picked cotton until time to plow up the peanuts. We stacked them on poles along at that time. We didn't have much tobacco in the community I grew up in. So we didn't bother with tobacco. So we just had cotton, peanuts and corn and soybeans. We might have a few soybeans and house them. Then it would come hog killing time and cutting wood. So that was about the life of the farm in my day. Go to the fair in the fall. See the horse race. And that was about it.

140.**Ferguson:** Do you have some early childhood memories? Was there any particularly happy time in your life that you can remember?

141.**Grant:** Well when everybody left home there won't nobody there but me and that was a happy life. (Laughter)

142.**Ferguson:** Why was that?

143.**Grant:** Well then I could do anything I wanted to do around home. They didn't make me go with them every time they left home. Then I loved to eat. My mama would can apples, peaches, all that stuff. Every kind of way you could name. I'd steal it - I called myself stealing it - eat it, wash the jar and set it up on the shelf. (Laughter)

144.**Ferguson:** You said you had more to eat when they left. Was there ever a shortage of food when you were growing up?

145.**Grant:** No it wasn't a shortage of food. When you were children you know you could eat all you want at dinnertime. You could eat again in an hour just as much. Well when they left home, anything around there you could eat that you wanted, see you could get it while they were gone. If they were there you didn't touch it. I remember one time we went in the preserves jar and put the spoons back in the thing and didn't clean them good. She cleaned us up that night. (Laughter) So that broke me. Whenever I went in anything I cleaned it up just like it was and put it back. They'd let you eat all you wanted at the table. In my families and in most all the families that's one thing they could eat all they wanted because most of the food they raised it themselves.

146.**Ferguson:** Do you remember getting into trouble any other time with your mother?

147.**Grant:** Not too much. I got in trouble one time about a chicken. I had to feed the chickens and hens used to set, what we called set. There would come a period when they would stop laying. They would want to set on the eggs. I would have to take them if she didn't want to set them and put them in a pen until that cycle went around. And the hen got out and I was trying to get her up and she run into the fence somehow and her neck got crooked like that and she whipped me about that. I always thought she had done me wrong.

148.**Ferguson:** Were there other times that you felt that your mother wasn't fair with you?

149.**Grant:** That was about the only time. She whipped me about that preserves. I don't know whether that was right or wrong. It taught me the right lesson. I didn't get another one about it. So home life was pretty good. I didn't have nobody to play with. I didn't play much. So now I can't throw a ball from here to the road on account of that because I didn't have nobody to play with. Then when I went to school I was shy and I didn't play much ball. Didn't hunt and do all them things.

150.**Ferguson:** Why was that? Why didn't you hunt?

151.**Grant:** My family won't a hunter and they didn't carry me. They didn't teach me to hunt.

When I got big enough they carried me once in awhile but they didn't teach me how to shoot so I couldn't hit nothing. When I'd shoot I couldn't hit what I was shooting at.

152.**Ferguson:** Why wouldn't they teach you to shoot?

153.**Grant:** I've never understood that so I really don't know why. It was just their ignorance I imagine.

154.**Ferguson:** Did you have a good relationship with your step-father?

155.**Grant:** Yeah, had a good relationship with my step-father. He was just like a daddy to me.

He thought a lot of my up until he died. I thought more about him than I did my daddy because I knew him and I didn't ever know my daddy very good. They carried me everywhere they went. So that's about the way it was. I went to school. Had to walk to school you know and that was five miles away. Over where I lived at was about three miles from where the next black community was. I didn't get a chance to associate because you know you had to be home at sunset. To keep from having to be worried I stayed home. I stayed down there and played with the boys and girls I went to school with one evening and I had to walk about two miles and the sun was right in the treetops and it was me and the sun. (Laughter) When I got home my brother was home then. He just rolled. You ought to hear him tell how fast I was running. (Laughter)

156.**Ferguson:** Why was it so important that you got home by sunset? Was it dangerous to be out after sunset?

157.**Grant:** Naw you'd get a whipping. Your mama would whip you if you came home after sunset. Yeah you had to beat that sun. That was what it was. After that I stayed home. I didn't stay out another evening until I could come back home at night. (Laughter) I don't know, I reckon that started to teaching me. I'm like that now. If something is going to worry

me I'll just lay the whole thing down. If it's possible to lay it down and not even bother with it, I do it.

158.**Ferguson:** But it seems like in some ways you haven't done that. That you and your family have...

159.**Grant:** Well there's some things, I mean life - living, you have to keep going. But if it's a relationship I can lay that down. If it's you at there at the store and me and you can't get along, I can leave you alone. I mean it's alright but I just don't bother with it. They're the kinds of things that's disruptive. I done that with the segregation. I just let them alone. I grew up in Potecasi. I didn't know but one white, two, well it was three but I never had no dealings with none.

160.**Ferguson:** This was in Northampton County?

161.**Grant:** Yeah. Potecasi was the local town. Bruce Lassiter owned the sawmill. I knew him. But by being on the farm I was independent of their rules and regulations so I just didn't have nothing to do with them. I knew the man that run the store. I'd buy something from him once in awhile. It won't because he done nothing wrong with me, I just didn't need. But when I got grown and started farming for myself if a man treated me wrong or if I thought he treated me wrong, I could just leave him alone and go to somebody else. And I'm like that now. I've been poor. I grew up poor, just poor as anybody. I come over here and I've work hard and I've done more building than most of the people. A fellow told me one time that gas, I gave him a check and it bounced. Bought some gas, farm gas, and he said he

couldn't sleep that night and I've been dealing with him several years. I asked him why. He told me about the check. He didn't know whether he was going to get his money or not. He told me that I ought to be thankful that they let me buy gas from them. That was a big insult to me. I told him he wouldn't never have to lose another one. So I paid him I think a day or two later. I ain't had to buy no more. I ain't had to buy no more gas from him.

162.**Ferguson:** Did you know any people who couldn't just leave it alone? Who reacted more, not angrily, who couldn't lay it down?

163.**Grant:** Who had to stay with it. Naw. To my perception no. They might have but they could have. Some might not have had sense enough. But anybody could have because he always - that's one thing the white man in Tillery taught me. The man that gave me my first bank loan, I'd always go back to him every year. He'd say you don't have to go back to him. Said the reason he's making you a loan is because it's profitable to him. And when it gets so it ain't profitable he's going to turn you down. So you just as well go to my bank and borrow some. (Laughter) Because he's going to turn you down too if it ain't profitable. So he taught me that. You just well remember it. I don't know if you know it or not. I don't care how good your bank loves you. When it gets so it's not profitable to them they know how to turn you down. So don't ever depend on one. Don't ever put all your eggs in one basket. I thought they loved me because I was paying. I paid my bills when I was farming. But when I got so I couldn't pay them when I had bad crops and all that stuff come along I was just another person. So they turned me down and wouldn't let me have nothing. I got poor again. Just as poor as I was when I grew up. Or worse because I owed money. I didn't owe

nobody nothing then. So I had to pay for everything cash. And the Lord he blessed me to do that. I haven't paid everybody but I ain't asking them for nothing. And if I have to go back to living at home I'll do that. I tell them right quick. You know when we moved over here the children had to go to school right across the road here where you see them houses.

164.**Ferguson:** That's in the Rosenwald school, the Chapel School?

165.**Grant:** The Rosenwald School. The white folks had this beautiful school down the road here and they were going to Scotland Neck. I mean they won't using this one. And we had them pot bellied stoves. They wouldn't let us go down here to school. Done the same thing in Potecasi in Northampton County. I just don't see how they could have that kind of feeling. But they're just like it now. I wonder why. Why could they have that kind of feeling? They don't care nothing about you living outdoors. Like that's where you're supposed to be. Just like a dog. The school burnt down then they had to think about it. Didn't move us on down there. Then they had to think about whether we could go down there.

166.**Ferguson:** Go down where? To build another one?

167.**Grant:** You see the school got burnt down over here and they had the school down there that was empty.

168.**Ferguson:** They had to think about whether the black people could move down there?

169.**Grant:** Un-huh. Then they had to think about it ( ).

170.**Ferguson:** So there was always an empty school over there and it was only - is that what you are saying - that there was always a big empty school?

171.**Grant:** A big empty school down there. Years before the school got burnt down.

172.**Ferguson:** But there was never any suggestion of the black children could go over there to the school?

173.**Grant:** Un-uh. We thought about it. Wouldn't even let us have a school bus. You know what they put in our mind?

174.**Ferguson:** What?

175.**Grant:** They put out a saying that a school bus couldn't stop at an elementary school. I wanted to know how was it stopping at theirs but along then they had the elementary school and the high school in the same building or right near together. Anyhow, they had us fooled that way. To get a bus we had to go over there and ask for it. That was way in the fifties, in fifty something, I don't know what. Then our principal didn't want us to go up there and ask for a bus. That's how much - scared he was going to lose his job I reckon. And he retired.

176.**Ferguson:** Before you asked for the bus?

177.**Grant:** Along at the same time. He retired that spring and we went up there during the summer. And they give us a bus. I don't understand it. They give us a bus and we've had a bus ever since.

178.**Ferguson:** This was in the fifties?

179.**Grant:** Yeah. I think it was 1951 or 1952, somewhere in there.

180.**Ferguson:** Where did you go to school when you were growing up?

181.**Grant:** A school in Potecasi, elementary school. Then I went to Rich Square, W.S. Creecy High School. That was the first black, that was a private school.

182.**Ferguson:** This was in Northampton County?

183.**Grant:** Un-huh.

184.**Ferguson:** Who ran the private high school?

185.**Grant:** W.S. Creecy.

186.**Ferguson:** Who is he?

187.**Grant:** Professor Creecy is what we called him. He came from over towards Elizabeth City I think. But anyway that's where our education started, in Elizabeth City at the State Teachers College over there now. But that's where our education started. The first high school I remember was at Winterville. And the next one was at Rich Square.

188.**Ferguson:** And you came to Rich Square to go to high school when you were living in Northampton County?

189.**Grant:** Un-huh.

190.**Ferguson:** So did you live at the school?

191.**Grant:** They bought a bus and we rode the bus for two years and a half I think, something or other like that, and it broke down. Then I stayed in a home up there for that year and the last year I was in high school. Dr. Parrish was a doctor and I stayed with him.

192.**Ferguson:** You said you were the only one in your family that was able to complete high school?

193.**Grant:** Yeah.

194.**Ferguson:** Why were you able to go and the others were not?

195.**Grant:** I don't know. I think some of the boys could have finished if they had wanted to stay home and stay under the rulership of my mama. See my mama was the boss. Somebody else might say they had the say-so but she was the boss. So they didn't want to stay under her rulership so they left for to do better for themselves so they would be the boss.

196.**Ferguson:** Was there a lot of conflict in your house over this? They just decided to leave?

197.**Grant:** Just decided to leave. My mama didn't ask them to come back. They were on their own.

198.**Ferguson:** Did they still come back to visit?

199.**Grant:** Yeah. There won't nobody angry or nothing.

200.**Ferguson:** What would they have had to do that they didn't want to do if they'd stayed home?

201.**Grant:** Nothing but work on the farm and not have no money.

202.**Ferguson:** Was this a situation that happened in all families?

203.**Grant:** In all families. Yeah.

204.**Ferguson:** So you stayed home and were able to go. That was what you got for staying home?

205.**Grant:** Un-huh.

206.**Ferguson:** The Creecy High School that you talked about, was it like the Brick School or anything like that?

207.**Grant:** Something like the Brick School. It would take you after elementary school. They had a county test that you had to take. That was bad because in the year I finished it was four or five students that were in the class that would have made good students but they didn't pass this test. I didn't pass it either.

208.**Ferguson:** Why not?

209.**Grant:** Because it was kind of an intelligence test and we didn't have no intelligence.

210.**Ferguson:** I know that's not true. What do you mean by that?

211.**Grant:** That's true. We didn't have no intelligence. How are you going to have any intelligence when you ain't never been nowhere but in this room? Ain't read a book.

212.**Ferguson:** I see what you mean.

213.**Grant:** But that was it. The only reason I passed it was because my mama was friends to teachers and preachers. She went to all the churches and she knowed all of them. The teachers were the ones that give the test and they knowed I was her son. And I think they helped me pass because I didn't know nothing. I knowed how to read and write. I won't no real good speller. But as far as me being intelligent I won't. I didn't even know how to go to the store and buy something really. But I was as ready as any of them. But I didn't have no intelligence really.

214.**Ferguson:** These other boys, were there boys and girls as well?

215.**Grant:** Boys and girls.

216.**Ferguson:** Why didn't the teachers help them in the way that they helped you to pass the test?

217.**Grant:** They didn't know them. Didn't but two out of the class pass, me and one other girl. I don't know, she might have been smart enough but she won't the smartest one in the class. Tell you the truth, I don't know if the rest of them finished high school or not. Seems like to

me they got in the next year but I don't know because I left. I don't know. Seems like to me I don't even think so.

218.**Ferguson:** So you went Creecy School?

219.**Grant:** Un-huh.

220.**Ferguson:** And that was in Elizabeth City?

221.**Grant:** Naw, Rich Square, the high school. I never did go to college.

222.**Ferguson:** Did you have to pay to go to that school?

223.**Grant:** Un-huh.

224.**Ferguson:** It was a private school?

225.**Grant:** Un-huh.

226.**Ferguson:** How did you manage that?

227.**Grant:** Mama paid it. I don't even know what they had to pay. Whatever they had to paid she paid. She paid for riding the bus. I did know how much that was but I done forgot it. Had to catch the bus at six o'clock in the morning because one bus had to do all the routes. And I was thirteen miles from there.

228.**Ferguson:** How long did it take you to get to school in the morning?

229.**Grant:** Well you'd get there when school would be taking in, about eight thirty. You'd catch it at six or six thirty and I'd get there about eight or eight thirty.

230.**Ferguson:** So an hour and a half.

231.**Grant:** Then it had to go down to Roxobel and pick them up.

232.**Ferguson:** Did you like high school?

233.**Grant:** Un-huh I liked high school. I just got interested in girls after I got in high school and didn't study like I should the last two years.

234.**Ferguson:** Did any of the people that you went to school with go on to college?

235.**Grant:** Un-huh, some of them. A few of them in that class went to college and become teachers.

236.**Ferguson:** But the girls mainly?

237.**Grant:** They were girls. I don't know no boys that went to college.

238.**Ferguson:** Did you ever think of going to college?

239.**Grant:** Yeah I thought about it. I could have went to college if I had been pushy enough but I was too much of a baby boy. I took a course after I got married. Went to Hampton Institute. And I could have went there while I was working, went at night. I went as a machinist and it had helped me very much. But I could have gone if I had stuck right with it.

240.**Ferguson:** Where were the students coming from to go to the Creecy High School?

241.**Grant:** All over the county. Had three counties - Northampton, Bertie and...

242.**Ferguson:** Halifax?

243.**Grant:** Naw. Halifax was across the river.

244.**Grant:** Bertie and Hertford I believe. I believe some come down from Hertford. Yeah. I don't think the bus went to Hertford. They come up there and stayed. They had a dormitory that students stayed in.

245.**Ferguson:** When you were going to school before you went to high school, where did the teachers, were the teachers that you had local girls or were they women who had come from outside the county?

246.**Grant:** They came from Rich Square.

247.**Ferguson:** So did they graduate from Creecy High School?

248.**Grant:** No they went to Elizabeth City awhile. Had one from Jackson. I didn't start to school until I was eight. See if I had started when I was six I might have been something else. Might have been something. But starting at eight I ended up being nothing.

249.**Ferguson:** I wouldn't say that. I'm just interested to know how it was decided how people went to school and that kind of thing.

250.**Grant:** Well your money decided how you went, whether you went, how far you went.

Then you didn't have no, you really didn't have nothing to push you to go because you couldn't have no job. No job, no nothing. To do what you had to do or you - it's just like black boys right now. You ask them what can you do. Whatever you tell me. You just tell me what you want done and show me and I can do it. That's what we could do then and that's what we can do now. It don't make no difference what it is. It's just like you know they wouldn't let no black girls or black boys work the cash register in a store. When they got so they didn't have no white they just told the black ones you do so-and-so and they'd do it. They ain't been to school. You have a few now that have been to school. First started back there they didn't have none. Then they were talking about the farmers. They're going to the tractor now. Black folks don't know nothing about driving the tractor. You look up and they're still driving them. Ain't been to school yet. They can't mess with the insecticide too much because that's reading. They can't read. You can show me what to do. They can put it down but they can't mix it. They don't know how to mix it. They don't let us have but one thing at a time. You can't say I'm going to school to be a principal. You might get a job in ten years. See that ain't right. Ten years down the road, you're going to school now and ten years down the road then they say I believe I'll give you one. You done used up all the energy you had trying to get there. How are you going to be a good principal? All your thoughts are done gone. Tired. But that's your fault. That's your fault. Alright, what's next?

251.**Ferguson:** I wanted to ask you what kind of values you think your mother and step-father instilled in you when you were growing up.

252.**Grant:** Work and take care of yourself and don't get in debt.

253.**Ferguson:** Do you think those have served you well? Have you followed them?

254.**Grant:** I didn't follow the debt part. I thought that's what you ought to do. Try to get everything you can when you can. And it worked pretty good. I just tried to do too much and didn't think it through. I won't hard nosed enough. If I had been hard nosed I could have done better I think. I think. But I think I had some good ideas.

255.**Ferguson:** You finished high school. Did you meet your wife while you were in high school?

256.**Grant:** Yeah.

257.**Ferguson:** How did you meet her?

258.**Grant:** We was in the same class. They had a play and I had the main part and she had the main part. So that's how we met, working together in that. We ended up getting married.

259.**Ferguson:** Did you get married right after you finished school?

260.**Grant:** Naw one year later. I finished school in 1939 and got married in 1940.

261.**Ferguson:** Did her parents approve of you as a suitor?

262.**Grant:** Yeah. I had to ask for her and they just give it to me. They gave their approval.

263. End of Tape 1 - Side B

264. Tape 2 - Side A

265. **Grant:** ...and Mama kept on, farming got so bad so they moved there in 1939 and I finished school in May and then I went up there.

266. **Ferguson:** Were you working in the war industry up there or shipbuilding?

267. **Grant:** Yeah I got a job in the shipyard in 1940. I worked in there until I left. I worked in the cafe for three months for five dollars a week.

268. **Ferguson:** How much were you making in the shipyard?

269. **Grant:** Fifteen dollars.

270. **Ferguson:** So that was pretty good money.

271. **Grant:** Yeah. Working for an old Jew. Not a Jew. He must have been Italian. He said you make more money here because I feed you. Five dollars a week. I told him yessir, I'll be back. I ain't been back yet. Five dollars a week, seven days. Be there seven in the morning and stay until three and come back at six and stay until nine. Seven days.

272. **Ferguson:** Did you know when you moved up there that you could probably get some work in the war industry?

273.**Grant:** Naw I didn't know nothing when I went up there. Hadn't never worked for nobody but been at home all my life.

274.**Ferguson:** So you were living with your mother and your step-father and your wife? You were all living in the same house?

275.**Grant:** Yeah when I first got married. I lived with them. I got married in May. I stayed with them all that year I think. I moved in my house sometime the next year. I would have stayed there longer but my wife, she wanted to move.

276.**Ferguson:** She wanted to move?

277.**Grant:** Un-huh.

278.**Ferguson:** Move away from your mother?

279.**Grant:** Yeah.

280.**Ferguson:** Were there problems with that when you first got married?

281.**Grant:** Naw. She wanted a house of her own. My mama was just as good to her as she could be. She wanted to be the boss though you know. All mothers is the boss. (Laughter)

282.**Ferguson:** When you moved into the shipyard to work, did they treat you well? Were the people managing that, were they good bosses?

283.**Grant:** Yeah they won't too bad. I went in the clean-up gang. That's the only thing much they had. I stayed in that so I went and asked for a transfer because I got tired of that. That was too near nothing. So I happened to transfer to the paint department. I went in there and I claimed I couldn't stand the scent of the paint so I asked for another transfer and I got in the ship-shedding. That was handling the iron. So I stayed in there. I should have stayed in the paint department. I could have made more money. I could have got used to it. They had me scraping dust. You'd go down in the bottom of the ship, about a dozen of you, and you couldn't even see the other fellow's light. I couldn't stand that. But if I had stayed there I would have got a better job.

284.**Ferguson:** Were all these jobs that you did, were you only working with blacks or were there white workers as well?

285.**Grant:** Only working with blacks. They were just as segregated. The whites were the boss and you were the worker.

286.**Ferguson:** Was there ever a time maybe towards the end of the war when there was a little more integration in the work force?

287.**Grant:** Along the end of the war it was better.

288.**Ferguson:** What happened then? Do you know what happened to change things?

289.**Grant:** The union I reckon caused most of the change. The union wanted to come in. AFL wanted to come in so they made their own little union - Ship ( ) - Ship something union.

Before then blacks couldn't get, if they weld or chip or something, they couldn't get first class pay which was a dollar and twenty cents an hour. White folks could get it but blacks could get about - I believe it was two twenty - get about a dollar because that's what I got, a dollar an hour. That's high as I got. Then they did start giving blacks two twenty.

290.**Ferguson:** So the union came in in the mid-forties?

291.**Grant:** AFL didn't never get in. This union was what we called the company union.

292.**Ferguson:** In this union were there just blacks or were there whites as well?

293.**Grant:** There were blacks and whites. Everybody was in the union I reckon.

294.**Ferguson:** Did the white workers support your demands for ( )?

295.**Grant:** In the AFL union they did but in that one they had one or two blacks that were news carriers, what we called news carriers, that had a pretty good job. But blacks were making pretty good money. Along then they'd pay you by the job, a lot of them by the job and you made pretty good money that way. You didn't have, your hourly wage was lower. In the first job I had I ain't never seen a white person in that job other than boss. Second job I had they had some few whites do the marking off but all the work was done by blacks. In the paint department they had some whites in there but the blacks done the dirty work. Just like it was everywhere. I think it's a little different there now. They've got a lot of equal pay and a lot of I don't know whether it's equal but it's much better than it was when I was there.

296.**Ferguson:** Your experience in Virginia, how did it change your life or did it change your life or your perspective on life at all?

297.**Grant:** It really didn't change my life. I won't doing what I wanted to do. I didn't know what I wanted to do to tell you the truth. Even when I come back to the farm I don't think I knowed what I wanted to do. I don't reckon I know what I want to do now. I'm not sure. I always tried to do the best I could with whatever I was doing. I could have stayed at the shipyard so the boss said when I left. He told me I could stay and he would see to it that I would have a job out there where I was working. I could have stayed there and retired.

298.**Ferguson:** But you came here instead.

299.**Grant:** Came here instead.

300.**Ferguson:** Why was that?

301.**Grant:** My wife wanted to come back to the farm and I wanted to be independent. I wanted to be my boss. I reckon I must have got that from my granddaddy's side because very few of them is able to work for anybody.

302.**Ferguson:** They weren't able to do it? They didn't have it in them to do it?

303.**Grant:** They weren't able to work for somebody else and let somebody else be the boss. Just about all of them is mostly independent doing something. They might not be making no

money. Some of the great grandchildren is in the city working for somebody else. But all of them around home, most of them have got their own something.

304.**Ferguson:** When you moved down here what stage was the resettlement community at? How did you learn about the farm here? How did you come about owning it?

305.**Grant:** My wife's brother, I really think he learned more about it. He moved over here a year before we did. Then we moved over here the next year. We found out we could get some land. I worked with my wife's daddy. He was working on halves with another man. I worked with him one year. Then the next year I moved over here and I've been here ever since.

306.**Ferguson:** Was the government involved in the resettlement at this point?

307.**Grant:** Yeah. The government was it. But before we moved over here it was a kind of a trial thing, something or other like that, where you moved on the farm and you work sixty/forty with the government and they furnish it. See you pay for everything. You borrow the money and buy whatever you need to farm with. Then you pay the money back. The difference between what it costs to raise it and sixty percent that was yours and the government got forty percent.

308.**Ferguson:** So like sharecropping for the government.

309.**Grant:** Yeah. Like sharecropping. That's the way I understood it now. I don't know. I didn't never work under it.

310.**Ferguson:** So that wasn't what happened when you came down?

311.**Grant:** When I come they started selling you the farm and you could borrow the money from them.

312.**Ferguson:** From the government?

313.**Grant:** Un-huh to operate. But I never did that until way later I borrowed money from the government way back in 1973 to operate with.

314.**Ferguson:** But you didn't borrow money when you first came down here?

315.**Grant:** No. When I first moved over here I got money from private and just paid them the land payment.

316.**Ferguson:** Why did you do that instead of going through the government?

317.**Grant:** Trying to be my own boss.

318.**Ferguson:** Why would you not have been your own boss if you had done it through the government?

319.**Grant:** Well the government, they didn't turn the money loose to you. You had to go up there and get it and wait until they decided to talk to you. If you needed something now, this morning, you might get it by the time they closed this evening. And that's the way it was

when I did go but I had been established and I could go get stuff and pay for it later. So that's what I done mostly.

320.**Ferguson:** So where did you borrow the money from, a bank here?

321.**Grant:** When I was on my own?

322.**Ferguson:** When you came down here and first bought the land.

323.**Grant:** When I first bought the land it was a man owned a store. He furnished me the money I needed to buy the fertilizer and stuff and I could go there and get all the food I wanted. So that's what I done year in and year out. Then I went to the bank. After I got too big for him then I went to the bank and they loaned me the money.

324.**Ferguson:** The store owner who furnished you, did you buy things on credit with him?

325.**Grant:** Un-huh. Bought every year. I bought food from him on credit but I'd give him a lien against the crop. You didn't know that they could borrow money, I could give him a lien and he'd take that lien and go to the bank and borrow money on it. Then he'd lend it to me and charge more interest than the bank charged him. They always had the advantage and all. Then he kept the money and let me have it as I needed it. That way he could furnish several people off my money because I wouldn't need it all until way about July.

326.**Ferguson:** How did you see this as being...

327.**Grant:** I didn't have no problem with that.

328.**Ferguson:** How did this make you more independent than if you did it all through the government because he still had a lot of control over your money furnishing you?

329.**Grant:** He had control over keeping the money but if I'd go over there and tell him I needed a hundred dollars or if I needed a thousand dollars he didn't do nothing but write me a check. I didn't have to wait a half a day. I didn't even have to tell him what I wanted it for. But I'd have had to go up to the office and tell them what I wanted it for when they got to it. Then they wanted to make it out to the man that I was going to buy it from. There's a lot of difference in that.

330.**Ferguson:** So the land that you bought was not part of the resettlement?

331.**Grant:** Yeah.

332.**Ferguson:** So were you buying it from a black or white man, the land when you first bought it?

333.**Grant:** Bought it from the government. White folks were in control.

334.**Ferguson:** But now the way people were in control of it down here, were they local people?

335.**Grant:** Yeah they were local people. They were just as prejudice as anybody. Still is. Just as prejudice as they can be. They'll tell you so-and-so-and-so and they're lying through their head. I've borrowed money from several banks but I never have - I had one bank that I thought was really fair. He was fair. You tell what you want and he would let you have it

and what made you unfair was when you couldn't pay. But it won't nothing the matter with the bank. I liked the man. I like him right now. He's helped me more than any other man. That bank has helped me really more than any other bank that I've ever dealt with.

336.**Ferguson:** Why did you come down here and buy your land?

337.**Grant:** This is the only place you could buy land without money. See you didn't have to make no down-payment. You just made payments. And it was reasonable at that time. In Newport News you could have bought some land but I don't whether they had FHA up there or not. You'd had to have some money to be making some money. Then they didn't farm up there like we did down here, not that I saw.

338.**Ferguson:** What did you think of this whole scheme down here? Did you think it was a good thing?

339.**Grant:** Buying the land?

340.**Ferguson:** Un-huh.

341.**Grant:** I thought it was a good thing.

342.**Ferguson:** What was your attitude toward the government doing this?

343.**Grant:** Good. Very good. It was good for the black farmer. His trouble was he didn't have no education. He didn't have no thought for the future. He just worked. As long as he

worked and kept his bills somewhere he was happy. I don't know how come I won't happy like that. I don't know. You might can tell me.

344.**Ferguson:** Do you think that this scheme of giving people a chance to think of the future, to have a future, to build, do you think that that changed the way black folks around here thought, changed their attitudes? Did it make them more - did it give them more hope and broaden their horizons as opposed to other places?

345.**Grant:** I don't know. The problem they had was the same problem they had working on shares. They bought the land but they still didn't seem they would get anywhere. They just worked themselves to death and won't able to - I don't know whether they didn't try to educate their children - children won't satisfied. They won't having nothing. And couldn't have nothing because there won't enough coming in. So they ended up just like they was. But they were still, the family heads thought they were doing better.

346.**Ferguson:** Did you live in a home that was built by the government when you moved down here?

347.**Grant:** When I moved over here yeah.

348.**Ferguson:** What was it like?

349.**Grant:** It was just a regular shot-gun house, had four rooms. Had a little kitchen and two bedrooms and a sitting room. House I live in now, you ain't been by there though, but it's the same house. I've added on to it.

350.**Ferguson:** Now there was a white resettlement farm as well, is that right? The houses there had indoor plumbing. Was it better over there?

351.**Grant:** You have to ask my son. I've never been there. They had a bathroom, a place for a bathroom in the houses they built here but they didn't have no indoor plumbing. They said when they first started building these houses they started building them for the white folks. They built a good house. It was a good little house. Had good lumber. But the flood water was coming up in it. That's how come they didn't put the white folks over here.

352.**Ferguson:** So the black farmers lived on the areas that flooded and the white farmers weren't put in that area?

353.**Grant:** Naw, right.

354.**Ferguson:** Did you have problems with flooding?

355.**Grant:** Naw. But they had a flood in 1940 and the water come up to the windows in the house I lived in. So I was in the flood area. Then they put up the Kerr Dam. Sometime between 1940 and 1945 they put that up. So it hadn't flooded here, nothing but the lowlands, since.

356.**Ferguson:** When you arrived here, was there much division between the black people that had lived here all their lives and the people who lived on the farms, the newcomers? How did they get along?

357.**Grant:** They got along alright. They just talked about each other. (Interruption)

358.**Ferguson:** You were talking about the difference between the people who lived on the farm and the people who had always lived in this area. You said they got along but they talked about each other.

359.**Grant:** Yeah, they still do that. They get along but they still call you "new folks" or something like that. New folks think you're better. That's about it.

360.**Ferguson:** Was that because the new folks owned land?

361.**Grant:** Not necessarily because they'd be owning land just like us. I think it just ( ). I don't pay it no mind. I just keep going. If you associate with them they are not as bad as if you don't associate. If you don't associate with them they are a little bit worse. If it looks like you are striving to do things they don't do or you know, I don't know why people are kind of like that anyway.

362.**Ferguson:** So there were some people who lived on Tillery farms that didn't associate with the people here?

363.**Grant:** I mean you associated together. You might didn't visit as much. As far as, you went to church together and went to school together and all that. But you probably didn't visit as much. I've never been a visitor no way. But part of the time you don't visit some home maybe as much as you do some others.

364.**Ferguson:** How large was the farm that you bought when you moved down here?

365.**Grant:** The one I got was sixty acres but ordinarily it won't but forty. The reason the one I had had sixty acres, like they had one, two, three farms. All three of them was forty acres. One of them was in a low place. They split that low place in half and give half of it to this farm and half of it to that farm. So that made sixty in both farms. It really won't but forty because the lowland you couldn't half work it no way. So I happened to get hold of the one that had the lowland. When we got tractors we got so we could work some of that lowland.

366.**Ferguson:** You called it a forty acre and a mule farm.

367.**Grant:** Yeah, that was the name of it.

368.**Ferguson:** Did you call it that, did the people around here call it that or did the government call it that?

369.**Grant:** I think the government named it that, forty acres and a mule. Along then forty acres and a mule would take care of a family. It was supposed to. That was why. But you needed two mules really. They ought to have said forty acres and two mules. (Laughter)

370.**Ferguson:** So were you able to take care of your family on that?

371.**Grant:** Un-huh.

372.**Ferguson:** Did you have to go out and do any work otherwise?

373.**Grant:** Naw. I had to go further when I got so I wanted more. But I come over here, forty acres and a mule, that's what I worked the first three or four years. Then I wanted more so we went and rented some land. That's the way it started off. Then rented more land. Then rented more land. Then rented more land.

374.**Ferguson:** Did you ever buy anymore?

375.**Grant:** Yeah, I bought more. I bought another hundred and forty acres.

376.**Ferguson:** When was this? How quickly did you expand? You said you got here when, 1946?

377.**Grant:** 1947. It was along about 1969 or 1970 I reckon.

378.**Ferguson:** Before the 1960's did you have people helping you out on the farm? Did you hire anybody to help you out?

379.**Grant:** Yeah we hired somebody near about ever since - I mean when I first started we'd just hire somebody to pick cotton, help pick the cotton and maybe stack some peanuts. That's all we did. We could work it. But when it come to that we always needed somebody. But I didn't hire no hands until way up there when I started renting land.

380.**Ferguson:** When was that?

381.**Grant:** I don't even know what year that was.

382.**Ferguson:** ( )

383.**Grant:** Naw it was in the sixties or the seventies.

384.**Ferguson:** Did your children help out on the farm as you had?

385.**Grant:** They helped out on the farm. But we didn't keep them out all the time.

386.**Ferguson:** Were they able to go to school full-time?

387.**Grant:** Yeah. Sometimes we'd keep them out two or three days at the time in harvest season.

388.**Ferguson:** I remember your son talking a couple of days ago that I'm not sure if he was talking about your family or not that there was a scheduling. One group of kids went Tuesday and Thursday and then Monday, Wednesday, Friday and then Tuesday, Thursday. Did that happen?

389.**Grant:** Now you have to talk to my wife about that. She done that scheduling. If it was any scheduling in it she done it.

390.**Ferguson:** But it did go on, scheduling, deciding when you go to school and who would go to school?

391.**Grant:** You'd have to talk with her about that. I'm not up on that. I was mostly outside.

392.**Ferguson:** So she made the decisions about the children and you did about the farm?

393.**Grant:** Un-huh.

394.**Ferguson:** When you were living here among the farmers, the farm owners here, was there much cooperation?

395.**Grant:** Yeah, we got along good. We didn't share hog killings and stuff with the people over here originally. Like the one that moved over here from home.

396.**Ferguson:** So you would do it with people who lived on the resettlement farms?

397.**Grant:** Naw. With the ones that moved over here from where we moved from mostly. But they would help you.

398.**Ferguson:** Did the farm owners have anything like an equipment cooperative or machinery cooperative?

399.**Grant:** Naw. Started one one time but it didn't work.

400.**Ferguson:** Why not?

401.**Grant:** Well the weather didn't cooperate I reckon. Everybody wanted to plant the same time. If it was my schedule to plant and it rained then it put me ten days later that didn't work. Then in the fall it didn't work because you were getting up your peanuts with machines and you had two good weeks. And this man was getting his up them two weeks and it rained your two weeks so that didn't work too well on the count of that.

402.**Ferguson:** When you were on the farm when you bought the farm the people who were the sixty/forty arrangement with the government were they able to sell their own crops or did the government sell it for them?

403.**Grant:** No you could sell your own crop but the government would put their name on the check and your name. You had to take money up there to them until you paid back what was loaned to you and you didn't never pay that back. That's something that they always had fixed.

404.**Ferguson:** What?

405.**Grant:** You never got out of their clutches.

406.**Ferguson:** Now was this just the government or was this also the people that were sharecropping, private individuals?

407.**Grant:** Both of them were like it, the government and - you know you really never had no freedom. You never could make enough it didn't seem like to pay your loan back and have your own money. Every year you had to be making out new papers because you had some left over last year. And you didn't ever know what they were really doing or where they were putting the money or all that.

408.**Ferguson:** Did the government supervise the farmers who owned their land? Did they have control over your land?

409.**Grant:** They claimed they were supervising. They would come out about twice during planting season and talk with you and see what you were doing. Supposed to have been looking after your crop.

410.**Ferguson:** Would they have any control over what happened on your farm?

411.**Grant:** Not really I don't reckon. Not really. If you would go ahead you could work it mostly like you wanted to. But somehow we don't do as well without a boss standing there and say you, you, do this, do this, and do that. We'd have made good crops if we'd have done that I reckon.

412.**Ferguson:** You think if there had been a boss it would have been better?

413.**Grant:** Had better crops. I don't know whether it would have made anymore or not. One of the problems with blacks they were always, when they were working with the white man, with a pretty crop and done pretty plowing. When we got to working for ourselves that was the same thing. If you had a pretty crop and done pretty plowing. Won't talking about what it made. You were supposed to have something left. You might not have had nothing left. We won't doing things that would make it make more to the acre and stuff like that. The possibilities see is what we were left out of. And the head was left out on it too. That's why he had all the land and still didn't have no money. Because he didn't make nothing. He had a pretty crop but he really didn't make nothing to the acre. When he ended up paying his bills he didn't have nothing even though he had the advantage of free labor. But he could borrow ten thousand dollars. That's what messed him up. For the farm work this year, he didn't put

a cent in the farm. He bought everything on time and he used the ten thousand dollars to live on and take vacation. But you see he had both of them to pay for. And so that kept him poor. He had the land but he didn't have no money. And they're just getting out of it now. Now they're having to pay labor and pay for the insecticide and the rent. When they get through paying all of it and living the kind of life that they live and building the kind of houses they're building they haven't got a whole lot left.

414.**Ferguson:** Do you think it's different here than it is for farmers anywhere else?

415.**Grant:** Naw. The northern farmer, I don't think he ever has much free labor. But he didn't have a really big money crop. I mean the crops he grew won't a big profit in them no way. But the southern farmer he had cotton and peanuts and tobacco that had substantial profit if he used it right. The ( ) farmer really worked hard especially the ones in the dairy business. We had some dairies here but I think they worked harder up there and I imagine they had more money than a straight farmer.

416.**Ferguson:** When you moved down here what kind of organizations were there for black people to help each other out? Were there any burial associations or mutual aid societies or anything like that?

417.**Grant:** They had a burial association.

418.End of Tape 2 - Side A

419.Tape 2 - Side B

420.**Grant:** ...give you a casket and pay the funeral home that buried them.

421.**Ferguson:** And you continued in that tradition here a little bit?

422.**Grant:** It's still here now. But it pays money now. I think they give you a thousand dollars or something like that. They've got it up to where they have good money now. The state was talking about taking them over one time. But it's not many of them now. They have only the ( ) and I think they are doing away with that.

423.**Ferguson:** Were there any other kinds of organizations like that back then for people, you know black people helped themselves?

424.**Grant:** They've had them ever since I was a boy to help bury you but ain't never had one if you make no money or teach you to make money or teach you to be able to survive, them kinds of organizations.

425.**Ferguson:** What did white people think about the Tillery farms and there being so many black landowners in this area? Was there any trouble because of that?

426.**Grant:** I don't know what they thought of it. As long as you spent your money with them it was alright. Spend your money with me and I'll end up with the land.

427.**Ferguson:** I'll end up with the land? Why is that because you get into debt?

428.**Grant:** Yeah. You get into debt and they'll take the land.

429.**Ferguson:** Is that how most black landowners around here lost their land?

430.**Grant:** Un-huh. You doubt you can find three black landowners that have ever sold their land that have lost it. It was took. **Ferguson:** There was one thing that I definitely wanted to get to with you. If you don't want to talk about it it's fine. I wanted to ask about violence around here between blacks and whites.

431.**Grant:** There hasn't been a whole lot of violence between blacks and whites because there ain't been no whites. The violence was between blacks and blacks what it was. See it ain't been but very few in Tillery. Ain't been but two or three white families. The Tillerys had most of the land that was left. The children to my knowledge won't into the farming. They went to school in Old Fort.

432.**Ferguson:** Was there any Ku Klux Klan in this area?

433.**Grant:** Not that I know of.

434.**Ferguson:** Not right around here?

435.**Grant:** Not right around here.

436.**Ferguson:** I heard a little bit about there being some problems with the Klan down near the Brick School and so on. There was nothing like that going on around here?

437.**Grant:** Well Enfield, I mean Brick School, see they brought some northern whites down here and they didn't like that because they were associating with blacks. That was the biggest problem.

438.**Ferguson:** Do you think that caused most violence?

439.**Grant:** I don't think they got to violence with it as I know of. They got to talk about it but I don't think they had no violence with it.

440.**Ferguson:** Not just around Tillery but in sort of the county or a larger area, were there places that were dangerous for blacks to go?

441.**Grant:** Well I really think blacks stayed mostly in their neighborhood. Just like Roanoke Rapids was real racist but they didn't go out long as you didn't go in there.

442.**Ferguson:** So Roanoke Rapids was not a good place for blacks to live?

443.**Grant:** They didn't allow you to live. They kept you on the out, out, out.

444.**Ferguson:** Outside of the town limits?

445.**Grant:** Right outside the town limits.

446.**Ferguson:** I was talking to a woman last week that told me about that. Now was the reason that you stayed around here to avoid trouble?

447.**Grant:** I'll tell you the truth. I really didn't have time to think about trouble. I know they used to, somebody near about every week would get killed in Tillery. We used to have a sawmill. That's was the only thing. Around the sawmill there was a weekend ruckus. Since ( ) CTT been working at that it has cut down. Very seldom you hear - you hear of break-ins, that's about all. But that was the biggest part. It won't white folks trouble and we didn't go nowhere. I mean nowhere to amount to a whole lot.

448.**Ferguson:** Did you teach your children or were you taught yourself when you were growing up how treat white people in order to stay out of trouble with them? Were you ever taught those survival skills?

449.**Grant:** Naw. We were taught to stay in your place and that was to stay from wherever they was at. That's what has always been. If you wanted to buy anything you go buy it and go on back home. And we ain't never tried to associate socially.

450.**Ferguson:** Do you remember anybody getting into trouble because they tried to break those rules or tried to overstep the lines that white people had drawn?

451.**Grant:** Not around here really. They had one rape. I remember one rape here several years ago. That's the only one and she was a fifty or sixty year old woman.

452.**Ferguson:** A white woman?

453.**Grant:** Un-huh.

454.**Ferguson:** What happened to the man that was accused of it?

455.**Grant:** What happened to him? Dog if I know. He was a black boy. I don't know. My wife might remember but I don't know what happened to him.

456.**Ferguson:** Do you remember any murders or lynchings going on around here?

457.**Grant:** Un-uh. Not from the time I moved over here.

458.**Ferguson:** Okay I guess it's not a very happy subject to end up on but...

459.**Grant:** It's alright. That don't bother me a bit. They ain't no better now than they was then really, not much. They are a little more fancy with it now. (Laughter) Little more fancy with it now. They want the same thing now they wanted then, all the control, spend your money with them. They let you have what they want you to have, whatever they feel like. And when you get as far as they think you ought to go, they cut your money off.

460.**Ferguson:** You've taught me a lot about power down here.

461.**Grant:** Yessir, that's it. That's it. Then black people don't help you none. They've never been taught to love their race. As a man said on television this morning, he was Irish I believe. Said my family, an Irish family moved here in 1882 I believe it was, something like that. You never hear a black say that. His family moved here, his family and what his family had done since they moved here. He was just as poor as I was and he's a millionaire. And

I'm still just as poor as I was. I don't know whether it's all my fault or part my fault. I wish I knew.

462.**Ferguson:** Well to finish off here I have some forms that I have to fill out, some biographical information, so that people listening to the tapes have a better sense of who you are. Could you give me your full name please sir?

463.**Grant:** Matthew Grant. No middle name.

464.**Ferguson:** What's your address please?

465.**Grant:** Route 1, Box 30, Halifax, North Carolina 27839.

466.**Ferguson:** Your telephone number please.

467.**Grant:** 826-3244.

468.**Ferguson:** If your name is to appear in any written material, how would you like it to appear Matthew Grant? (Pause) Can you give me your date of birth?

469.**Grant:** August 25, 1918.

470.**Ferguson:** And you were born, what's the county?

471.**Grant:** Northampton.

472.**Ferguson:** Is that what you would like me to put as your place of birth or is there a town.

473.**Grant:** Northampton. It ain't near no town. Kirby Township.

474.**Ferguson:** What's your wife's name?

475.**Grant:** Lorenza.

476.**Ferguson:** Does she have a middle name?

477.**Grant:** Moore. Naw she was Moore. M. Grant.

478.**Ferguson:** What's here date of birth?

479.**Grant:** 1921 I believe, Rich Square.

480.**Ferguson:** Did she work on the farm with you or did she do any other work?

481.**Grant:** She was my bookkeeper and farm worker. Farm mate not farm worker. Don't put worker down there.

482.**Ferguson:** I put farming as her occupation.

483.**Grant:** Yeah something like that.

484.**Ferguson:** And your mother's name?

485.**Grant:** Dolly B. Grant.

486.**Ferguson:** What was here maiden name?

487.**Grant:** Bowser.

488.**Ferguson:** Do you know when she was born?

489.**Grant:** I don't remember.

490.**Ferguson:** Do you remember approximately when she died?

491.**Grant:** I don't remember exactly when she died. I think it was 1948.

492.**Ferguson:** Was she born in Northampton County as well?

493.**Grant:** I don't know.

494.**Ferguson:** But somewhere in North Carolina?

495.**Grant:** Un-huh.

496.**Ferguson:** Should I put farming as her occupation?

497.**Grant:** Yeah.

498.**Ferguson:** And what was your father's name?

499.**Grant:** Gorwin Grant.

500.**Ferguson:** He died when you were six years old you said?

501.**Grant:** Un-huh.

502.**Ferguson:** Was he born in Northampton County?

503.**Grant:** Yeah. I don't know where he was born though.

504.**Ferguson:** Could you give me your sister's and brother's names?

505.**Grant:** All of them? I don't think we need to go through all that.

506.**Ferguson:** Okay. How many were there?

507.**Grant:** Six others besides me.

508.**Ferguson:** How many girls and how many boys?

509.**Grant:** Two girls and six boys.

510.**Ferguson:** Which number were you?

511.**Grant:** Ninth.

512.**Ferguson:** And your children's names?

513.**Grant:** I think you'd better ask him. I don't remember all them.

514.**Ferguson:** So you were born in Northampton County and you lived there until you were  
how old? About eighteen or so?

515.**Grant:** Nineteen I think.

516.**Ferguson:** Then you moved to?

517.**Grant:** Newport News, the big city.

518.**Ferguson:** And when did you leave there?

519.**Grant:** 1945.

520.**Ferguson:** When did you move up 1939?

521.**Grant:** Un-huh.

522.**Ferguson:** Then you moved down here?

523.**Grant:** Then I moved back to Northampton in 1945. Lived with my step-father a year and a half and moved over here.

524.**Ferguson:** Here you'd like to put as Tillery, North Carolina?

525.**Grant:** Right.

526.**Ferguson:** What was the school that you went to first in Northampton County?

527.**Grant:** Potecasi Elementary. Northampton County.

528.**Ferguson:** You went there until what grade?

529.**Grant:** Seventh.

530.**Ferguson:** Then you went to Creecy?

531.**Grant:** W.S. Creecy High School.

532.**Ferguson:** That was in Rich Square?

533.**Grant:** Rich Square.

534.**Ferguson:** Did you go there until the eleventh or twelfth grade?

535.**Grant:** Eleventh. Didn't have the twelfth back then.

536.**Ferguson:** What was the job that you had, where did you work in Newport News?

537.**Grant:** Worked in the cafe in the shipyard.

538.**Ferguson:** What was the shipyard called?

539.**Grant:** Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock.

540.**Ferguson:** What did you do, you worked in the paint department but what was the place that you worked the longest in?

541.**Grant:** Punching I reckon you called it. Ship Shed is what they called it. Ship Shed department.

542.**Ferguson:** And then you were a farmer. Does your family still own the land that you farmed?

543.**Grant:** Un-huh.

544.**Ferguson:** Are you still farming it?

545.**Grant:** Un-huh.

546.**Ferguson:** Have you received any awards or honors or held any offices that you'd like for me to put down here?

547.**Grant:** Naw. You can read that and put it down there if you want to sometime.

548.**Ferguson:** Okay.

549.**Grant:** You can keep that if you want it.

550.**Ferguson:** Alright that's important. I forgot now, you worked as a farmer after you came here but you've done several other things. Did you say you owned a filling station?

551.**Grant:** Yeah I run a filling station. You don't have to put that down there if you don't want to.

552.**Ferguson:** If you don't want it to be down here I won't put it down.

553.**Grant:** Just put down what they've got on that thing. That'll be alright.

554.**Ferguson:** What's your current religious denomination?

555.**Grant:** Baptist. Once a Baptist always a Baptist.

556.**Ferguson:** Do you belong to a church now?

557.**Grant:** Yeah.

558.**Ferguson:** What church is that?

559.**Grant:** Cumbo Baptist Church.

560.**Ferguson:** Where is that?

561.**Grant:** Rich Square.

562.**Ferguson:** Have you belonged to any other churches during your life?

563.**Grant:** Yeah but you ain't got to put them down there.

564.**Ferguson:** Are there any organizations to which you belong or belonged that you'd like me to list here?

565.**Grant:** Naw.

566.**Ferguson:** Do you belong to the Concerned Citizens of Tillery?

567.**Grant:** Yeah I belong to the Concerned Citizens.

568.**Ferguson:** And are you an open minded senior as well?

569.**Grant:** I am an opened minded senior but I'm not participating right now. I haven't retired yet so I don't go as much.

570.**Ferguson:** Did you belong to the NAACP?

571.**Grant:** Yeah.

572.**Ferguson:** Are you still a member?

573.**Grant:** Un-huh.

574.**Ferguson:** Is it alright if I put that down?

575.**Grant:** Yeah it'll be alright to put that down.

576.**Ferguson:** When did you first join? Was it in the 1950's when it opened up here?

577.**Grant:** Yeah 1950's I think.

578.**Ferguson:** Did you join at that time?

579.**Grant:** I joined and I was the first president.

580.**Ferguson:** You were? I didn't get to talk about that.

581.**Grant:** But I've done forgot what year it was.

582.**Ferguson:** So you were the president here in Halifax County?

583.**Grant:** Un-huh. They called it the lower Halifax County.

584.**Ferguson:** How did you come to form the chapter?

585.**Grant:** Because we wanted to vote and we formed a chapter here. And we did get to get on the voting list. They wanted to expand the prison farm back here and wanted to buy the farmland in here. The local politicians, you know they get hold of everything first, and telling us to retire way back. Sell them the land and you live on it. NAACP knocked that in the head. I don't believe, then they bought over the river there ( ).

586.**Ferguson:** When did you first vote?

587.**Grant:** 1956 I think it was.

588.**Ferguson:** And this was thanks to the NAACP work that you done?

589.**Grant:** Yeah. We got everybody in this area to join the NAACP and then we went up there as a group and broke it. We had to read and write the constitution and we wrote that down. White folks would walk right in. All they had to do was put their name on the book. But you had to read and write the constitution.

590.**Ferguson:** So how did you break it down?

591.**Grant:** With the help of the NAACP we went up there and we stuck out that we didn't have to do it. Local politicians told them you just as well put them on the book because they ain't

going to stop until you do. So they decided to do it. We hadn't really had no trouble since. I forgot what year it was. You can ask Gary.

592.**Ferguson:** You know a lot of people had trouble with that kind of thing. Was there any violence associated with the making of a chapter around here?

593.**Grant:** Naw.

594.**Ferguson:** No threats?

595.**Grant:** We were pretty much a together community and there it won't that many white people. We didn't have no trouble.

596.**Ferguson:** So this was county wide that people didn't have any trouble?

597.**Grant:** Un-huh. After we got on they didn't have no more trouble as I know of.

598.**Ferguson:** What happened to the county democratic party after you started voting?

599.**Grant:** It's still intact.

600.**Ferguson:** It must have changed. Did it change with all these new black voters?

601.**Grant:** Well it really didn't change until the last few years, not too much. Well we got blacks on the school board. We've got a black commissioner. We've got all that. We've got two representatives now. We've got a representative senator and we've got a congresswoman. I think we've got three on the school board.

602.**Ferguson:** But when you started voting in the 1950's were most blacks voting then? Did most people register?

603.**Grant:** No not then.

604.**Ferguson:** Why weren't people registering even though they could?

605.**Grant:** Well they still didn't think their vote counted. You hear a lot of them say that now. But that was really, and white people discouraged it. It's hard to get farmers and then the school teachers didn't vote.

606.**Ferguson:** Because they were afraid for their jobs?

607.**Grant:** I reckon. They still don't half vote. They don't never support nothing. ( ) bunch of people there is in the world. Don't do nothing but talk you down.

608.**Ferguson:** How would the white people discourage people from voting? Would they be at the voting booth?

609.**Grant:** Naw. We have never had no trouble at the booth as I know of. The trouble is teaching against it. They just talked. They never encouraged. You can take a white man that's got five or six tractor drivers, he'll take them home, stop by the poll and he'll get out and vote and not a one of them.

610.**Ferguson:** Do you think they're afraid to or they were afraid to?

611.**Grant:** I don't think it's as much afraid as they don't think it matters to them. I don't really think it matters.

612.**Ferguson:** So this prison farm expansion, the NAACP was able to stop that?

613.**Grant:** They stopped it from pushing to get this land.

614.**Ferguson:** I'm glad I asked you about the NAACP because I hadn't realized...

615.**Grant:** Yeah the NAACP was good. I got out of it down later because I didn't think it was doing nothing for our cause. But I joined back again this year. Gary, what year was it when we had the NAACP chapter down here?

616.**Ferguson:** I have it down. I have that little Tillery history. I think that's what I have. I'm almost through. I just have one final question and that was whether you have a quote or a saying or a phrase that you would like for me to put down here as something you've lived by or that you'd just like to be put on record?

617.**Grant:** Well I don't know how to say it but keep getting up. They can put you down but they can't keep you down if you want to get up. You might not get to where you want to but you...

618.**Ferguson:** So if put down they can put you down but they can't keep you down if you want to get up, will that be good?

619.**Grant:** Right. You know they black balled me in Scotland Neck.

620.**Ferguson:** What's that?

621.**Grant:** Give you no credit. Don't want to have nothing to do with you.

622.**Ferguson:** Were you black balled in Scotland Neck?

623.**Grant:** Yeah.

624.**Ferguson:** When did that happen?

625.**Grant:** 1985.

626.**Ferguson:** Why was that? What happened?

627.**Grant:** That was because I got behind in my debts and couldn't pay them. I applied for bankruptcy so they didn't want to have nothing to do with me.

628.**Ferguson:** So things are the same in a lot of ways?

629.**Grant:** Yeah they're the same way. Just like they've always been when you say you can't pay. But I've outlived that. I don't have to ask them for nothing. Right now I don't. I may in the future but I don't have to ask them for nothing now. If I want something I buy it and I pay for it when I get it. Now they let me have credit.

630.**Ferguson:** Now they do?

631.**Grant:** Yeah they will but I don't ask them for none.

632.**Ferguson:** So you're following your - you just laid it down?

633.**Grant:** Just laid it down. Alright what's next?

634.**Ferguson:** Okay there's just one more thing and that's the interview agreement that we were talking about with your wife earlier. Do you know what you would like to do? Would you like to place restrictions on this interview?

635.**Grant:** I would like for it to be used educationally. I don't like for nobody to write a book or something.

636.**Ferguson:** How about if I put down this permission to quote restriction for publication? That way if somebody is using it to publish they have to show it to you first to decide whether or not you want them to use it.

637.**Grant:** Yeah I would want them to talk to me before they put anything down.

638.**Ferguson:** So if I put down permission to quote for publication would that be alright?

639.**Grant:** Say that again how it would work.

640.**Ferguson:** I would say something like Mr. Grant requires that his permission be obtained if the interview is to be used for publication.

641.**Grant:** Yeah. Not like to be, would have to be.

642.**Ferguson:** Yeah right. Mr. Grant requires.

643.**Grant:** Now we're together.

**Ferguson:** I'm sorry I said it the other way but I intended to put it down.