Voices of Southern Hospitality: An Oral History Project

Interviewee: Brown, Alphonso
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Abstract: The interview begins with Brown telling about his background, and how he came to be a Gullah tour guide. He started giving tours with his car in 1985, and eventually it became so popular he had to buy a large bus. He provides insider knowledge about Charleston's tour guide industry and its relation with the City government of Charleston. He also discusses the demographics of his tours, and what people know and don't know about Gullah culture. Moreover, he describes the changes he has seen in Charleston, architecturally, racially, politically, and economically.

Biographical Note: Brown was born in Rantowles, South Carolina. He went to South Carolina State University and received a bachelor's degree in music. He went on to receive a master's degree from Southern Illinois University. Brown was a band director for the Charleston County School District, but has since retired. However, he is still very active in the music community, and currently is the choirmaster at Mt. Zion AME church. He has been a tour guide since 1985, and owns and operates his tour company "Gullah Tours." He has a wife, three sons, and as of 2008, five grandchildren.

Sources:

- Brown, Alphonso. *A Gullah Guide to Charleston*. History Press, 2008. Pp 157-158.
- http://gullahtours.com/gullah/about-alphonso-brown
- This interview.

Project Details:

In the summer of 2018, student researchers from the College of Charleston conducted oral histories for the research project, *Voices of Southern Hospitality*. The project documents

diverse opinions and stories about southern hospitality in Charleston, South Carolina, but also offers a deeper and more intimate history of a changing community. Over the past thirty years (early-1990s to 2018), the Charleston peninsula and its surrounding islands have experienced rapid economic growth and rapid cultural and ecological changes. The *Voices of Southern Hospitality* project chronicles this profound transformation with the personal histories of Charleston residents.
The project was launched in June 2018 with funding from The Committee for Innovative Teaching and Learning in the Liberal Arts and Sciences at the College of Charleston. In addition to documenting important stories, the project was designed to train College of Charleston students in oral history research methods. Five student researchers and 42 interviewees participated in the first phase of this project (June and July, 2018).

Transcription Key:

- (indecipherable) = transcriber could not decipher words
- Yellow highlights indicate places that were it was also indecipherable, but transcriber attempted to write what he/she heard
- There are time stamps throughout in the format ***(00:00)*** every five minute interval

Interview Begin

[Interviewer Initials]: LR
Interviewee Initials]: AB

(Slight static sound in background)

LR: It's July 5th, 2018, and this is Laura Robins, sitting down with Alphonso Brown at Charleston Visitor Center in Charleston, South Carolina. Alphonso, can you tell me how long you've lived in the area?

AB: How long I've lived here?

LR: Mhmm.

AB: All my life, all my life. I'm seventy three years old, right? I, you know, went away to college... that and whatnot... but came back and lived and everything.

LR: Where exactly are you from in Charleston?

AB: I was born and raised in a rural part of Charleston called Rantowles.

LR: Okay.

AB: Rantowles. I went to high school in...at... Baptist Hill High School out there in Yonges Island. Norton area. Little area, you know. I went to college at South Carolina State College and I got my… and for music... with a degree in music. And I got my master's degree from Southern Illinois in agriculture.

LR: So you, like you said you left, but always ended up back.

AB: Ah yeah, came back home.

LR: Back home.

AB: Mhmm.

LR: And were your parents from Charleston as well?

AB: Mhmm. Mhmm.

LR: Your whole family?

AB: Mhmm.

LR: Okay. So can you tell me what it was like to grow up here?

AB: Well, we just...it was...If I could do it all over again, I would do the same thing. But it was not this going along and knowing your place. Nothing exciting. Nothing unexciting. Nothing over exciting. We just, you know, a community, and we venture out, we venture as much we can, you know, as much as needed. But it was no big deal about it if you didn't go anywhere, you know.

LR: Okay.

AB: It just...the excitement was there all along. Nature is very exciting as it is, you know.

LR: So can you tell me how you became involved in Gullah tours?

AB: I used to like to...well I used to always like to show whenever friends and families come around, I just like to show them Charleston. We get in a car and I just take them downtown. We drove around and I liked to show them around town, and so one day we were at the Francis

Marion Hotel, and so I'm talking about the hotel and everything and showing everything like that. Then this guy walk up to me and ask me, am I a tour guide? I said no, is there such a thing? (Laughs) You know? So, he said, he says "Yeah". I say I would love to become a tour guide. How do you do it? He says, "Well go to city hall and buy this big book, you study out of it," and they announce the test, whatever the test gonna be, they announce it. Then you take the test. And so, the test is like twenty questions.

LR: That's it?

AB: Huh?

LR: That's it?

AB: That's it? Yeah you can only fail twenty. If you fail twenty, you got to take it again. So you got to pass eighty percent of the test. Eighty percent of the thing, because it...so it means you fail it some three or four times, by the fifth time you know exactly what's on the test. So that's what happened. So I passed the test. Basically hang up my shingles. Happy about it. And so I did these tours in my car at the time. I had no… so I could take one or two at a time in my car. I put up some brochures, and they had them in there. Different places. Spread it all around. Got to get tours, people. And so one day I had a couple that I picked up off of Vanderhorst Street, and so I took them out in Charleston and everything and blah blah blah and blah blah blah, thinking I'm doing a great thing. When I got back to the house and put them out they said "Oh what about the blacks didn't they do anything here?" Because what I did, I did the same thing that like Grayline did. They were the top tours. A top tour is a top tour. And I figure if I just look at what they do, I'm doing fine. And it didn't work for me though. When they said, "What about the blacks didn't they do anything here? That's why we took your tour to find out about the black history of Charleston." So I basically took my shingles in. Went to the library, on Calhoun street over there, and did some research. I tell you, all over the place--black history all over the place. It was like when you are searching for gold and you hit a vein. It was all there. But I wasn't going to let...I wasn't expecting other tour guides to go and cover black history, and, you know I can do that myself. So I didn't have nothing against them for not telling about black history. You know, that's their business. Matter of fact, City of Charleston gives us the right to develop our own route. And so, basically I said to myself, Lord I don't know what I'm doing, and if you could help me develop a route the money I make, I will do 10 percent of every dollar I make. Don't you know--it worked. It worked. I can't tell you how I came up with the route I have now. All I know is that it is one of the best routes for me. And that's when I started. And so I started doing my tour, and in my car. And I have a sister-in-law who is in the insurance business, she told me "You doing those tours in your car? If something were to happen, those people would own your car, whatever left of your car, and your house and everything else." You know because I got insurance on the car, but not for tourism. So I stopped--for awhile. And I would use the church

bus, theatre bus. (indecipherable) And the air conditioning wasn't that good. So one day after the tour, I went on Highway 17 South, went to Jones Ford or Palmetto Ford. I think it was Palmetto Ford on Highway 17. I got a 14 passenger van. And I bought that van, started doing tours. At first, I think I had about...oh... two people, four people. I said to myself Lord what I need with this big old van. And so, after a while the van became full, always full. And so I bought a 21 passenger bus, not this one. And when I got that bus, I said oh foo what do I do with this big ole bus oh foo what do I do with this big old bus. After a while that became too small. So, I stayed with that 21 passenger bus for years, ever since 1996--that was in 1996. And I just trade it in for this one last year in February.

LR: And how many is on here?

AB: 25. That's as large as you can do, that the city'll let you have.

LR: And it's always full for you?

AB: Huh

LR: And it's always full, 25?

AB: Yeah... yeah it's always full.

LR: How old were you, or how many years ago did you first start doing the tours, when you were doing them in your car?

AB: I got my license in 1985, so that's over 25 years. 25 years. Matter of fact, the City of Charleston have this thing where after you become a tour guide, I think it's every two years, you have to go and be recertified.

LR: Really?

AB: In other words you have to go to a lecture, something lecture. They have a series of lectures and they require… I think it's four or five of them. Out of ten series of them. That will suffice for recertification. Keep learning, you know, keep learning.

LR: As new information comes out?

AB: It's a good thing to do, I like that.

AB: So once you get done with 25 years, you don't have to go.

LR: Oh.

AB: You're grandfathered in. Now I help do the lectures.

LR: Oh you host the lectures?

AB: I do some of the lectures for them, yeah.

LR: Oh for other tour guides?

AB: Mhmm.

LR: That's interesting.

AB: Mhmm.

LR: Is there anyone in your family that does similar work, or likes to show people around even just in their free time?

AB: You mean like my children?

LR: Your children, or maybe your parents? Did you learn this from someone?

AB: No not my parents, no. I didn't know what the tour guide was, they didn't know what the tour guide was. It wasn't in our psychic, it wasn't in our...part of our lives.

LR: So you just…

AB: We didn't know about what a tour guide is.

LR: You did it on your own.

AB: People come to town show up, drive around, show them around. They don't learn no more than they came here for the first time.

LR: So why is it important to you to inform people about the area?

AB: Well, after I got my license, and I realized that those tour companies that were out here already, were saying nothing about black history… I realized they weren't saying anything about

black history. And I know that there was so much here to say, and tell about the culture and everything, and the black...why we do things, what we do, who did it. And so I decided I knew I needed to do that. You know, like I said before, City of Charleston allow us to choose our own script. We do our own script. Whatever we want to do in Charleston, we do it. They don't tell us what to do, what not to do. Except where you can't go. The little narrow streets and what not, cobblestone streets but otherwise do anything you want to do.

LR: So you saw ***(10:00)*** a need for…

AB: Huh?

LR: So you saw a need for black history education?

AB: What now?

LR: You saw what other tours weren't doing?

AB: Right.

LR: And you did it yourself.

AB: And a lot of them still aren't doing it. But you know I guess there's a privilege of developing their own route, and it worked for them. At that time we didn't have any...I mean they didn't need to do no black history because there weren't blacks taking no tours. And right now, majority of my customers, 90% of my customers are white.

LR: Really?

AB: Yeah. Always been white. Always been white. During the summertime I get more blacks. Blacks travel more the month after school close, after school is out. June, July, middle part of August, I see more blacks. But after that, or before that, after that, I see an increase of blacks. In other words, they will fill half the bus, and the rest of them are white. After that, all white.

LR: Do you find that a lot of the people that take your tours know a lot about Gullah culture already?

AB: (disagrees)

LR: They don't know much?

AB: You know they hear about it. They hear about slavery and everything. It's like they need to come get a clarification of it all. To clarify all these things they are hearing, you know. They are coming here and they find out (imitating) "Well let me know about whether if they are true or not". You know, you know. Because are thinking about the television, the television will have you thinking that the slaves weren't allowed to use any native words and expressions. Remember in the movie Roots? No, you too young for that.

LR: No, I've seen it.

AB: Well when they beat Kunta Kente and make him speak English, and all that kind of stuff? That's not exactly true. They spoke their languages and expressions. You know, think about the fact that you had Europe at that time, European traders all up and down the coast of Africa, you had Africa all up in Europe, all over the place there, up in Africa, everybody speaking English. They didn't discard it, an expression. They didn't discard it. That's why I do a lot of African... we used to in the Gullah language or whenever in Charleston, in Rantowles out there, we spoke Gullah, you know, but we didn't know we were speaking Gullah, because nobody ever told us anything about it. The word was invented in 1929 when this man named Dr. Lorenzo Dow Turner, a black linguist, came up there and studied the language. Went to Africa to find out the same thing these people are speaking in Charleston and South Carolina--same thing they speaking in Sierra Leone.

LR: In West Africa right?

AB: Yes, West Africa. Speaking the same thing. You had many, many white linguists who made an effort to study language. But it was always mixed with--blacks didn't talk to them. You know there was always that thing that you don't talk to white people. That was the thing, yeah. Well Lorenzo Dow Turner being black, he went around and gained the confidence of people. Whites never gained the confidence of people. And they went to work formulating innuendos, hypotheses and theories of what happened, of where we are. And they were all so wrong. So wrong. But they didn't know us. They didn't right think. They think maybe how they perceive it to be.

LR: Yeah. What did you say his name was?

AB: Lorenzo Dow Turner. Dr. Lorenzo Dow Turner.

LR: And when did he come to Charleston? Around what year?

AB: You're looking at 1939.

LR: Okay.

AB: Mhmm, and studied the language. Wrote a book called... let's see...Gullah and African dialect…(trying to remember) Something like that, by Lorenzo Dow Turner. I call it the Gullah bible myself. Yeah. But he was the one who attended the meetings and all that stuff, and adopted as a language. He proved to the linguist society, linguist organization - whatever the big thing is - that the people are speaking different language. Speaking a different language. And then they all agreed that it is a language. I can conjugate the word "to be" in Gullah. (Coughs a few times)

AB: Excuse me. Yeah, so its a language.

LR: So it took him studying it, for people to recognize that it was another language really?

AB: Because whites were trying to do the same thing. But they never came up with any--they couldn't talk to nobody because nobody would talk to them. They just guessed up what it should be.

LR: In your time in Charleston, ***(15:00)*** was there a certain time or range of years when you noticed a change in Charleston? Maybe more tourists, or more development?

AB: Yeah. You're looking at around 1985, when tourism started really getting big in Charleston. They...let's see how can I put it. A lot of them - a lot of the hotels and concierge, when the people start asking for my tour, then that's when it started selling. And they realize, you know, if you make your customers happy, they will come back to the hotel, and stay in the hotel. That was basically the thing. A lot of times the (indecipherable). The Charleston business convention bureau on King Street, they advertise it. Not advertise it, but just do regular- they acknowledge it, more or less speaking. Because people are asking for it, and when you start asking for it, what do you do, you give it to them you make them happy, and they come back.

LR: There's a market for it.

AB: Yes. I've come like- every time you see an advertisement, you see the carriage drivers, you know like the carriage company? So now I am like the icon for the other part of the carriage tourism- the bus drivers of the tourist company. I have had almost all the major magazines in the world have been on my tour. About every major magazine, newspaper, magazine in America had did articles on me. New York Times, Southern Living Magazine. The thing is, the magazines that did articles on me - let me see - New York Times, Southern Living, Travel Channel, Learning Channel, German publication, Africa Now Channel, The Sense of Style Baltimore Globe, Minneapolis Times Tribune, Esquire. Michael (indeciperhable) But all them magazines, newspapers, or magazines that, you know, caters to whites. I'm selling it, the magazine did it. Oh

lord. I was getting what they did, they would call in to the Charleston Visitors' Center Bureau about it. They would do a sticker or envelope, you know. They would give a whole spreadsheet of names and addresses of people who inquired about it. They would give it to me, and I'd do...I would put it in an envelope. I would put my flyer in an envelope because you know they all have all these requests for you. (ringing noise) And that's when it really got out. It really got out. After Southern Living Magazine did an article. That along with the way I present my tour, really built it up.

LR: So are you the only tour guide, (ringing ends) for Gullah tours?

AB: Mhmm.

LR: You're the only one.

AB: There's a large black company called Sites and Insights in Gullah. Another, new fella named Godfrey Hill. He call his tour, Gullah-Gullah tours. Actually that can be confusing sometimes you know. People may ask me they go...people may see, want your tour, and see my tour and they'll probably take my tour and not take your tour! It's confusing to name it--that's a similar name, a close name like that.

LR: Yeah.

AB: Don't hurt me none. I still got my people.

LR: So you're Gullah Tours, and there is Gullah-Gullah tours also in Charleston?

AB: He totally different. He put a different twist now. Totally different. Totally different twist.

LR: Did you guys start your businesses around the same time?

AB: (Disagrees) Godfrey new. Godfrey just started it's been about a year.

LR: Oh, okay. So you're the original Gullah tours? (laughs)

AB: Yeah. That's right. I'm the first one.

LR: (laughs) So, from the changes you have seen in Charleston, you said around 1985..

AB: Changes I've seen?

LR: Yes, you saw a boom in tourism? Did you see any other changes, in industry or in development in the area?

AB: Yeah…

LR: Maybe after Hurricane Hugo?

AB: When you talk about Charleston, you don't talk about changes. You talk about augmentations, (indecipherable), making it bigger. And so what I've seen in Charleston--you know…***(20:00)*** I don't know. The mayors of the city, the City of Charleston itself do all they can to promote you and help you. They do all they can, everything that helps. Because they had the neighborhood association at one time, in 1994, really trying to close down tourism. They didn't want tourists in their yard, like that and everything. But you know the City of Charleston came to our defense. When you brought them home down there, you brought them on the stipulation (indecipherable) and sat down there everyday, all through the streets everyday. You can't just close off the streets to the tourists, because the street belongs to the state. But otherwise, they came around. But me, and the neighborhood association...I found when you respect them for what they have, and respect the fact there is a whole lot of money in their homes, you respect what you say around them, you don't want to say anything derogatory about them or their homes, stuff like that. We're not allowed to say anything about who live in those houses- nothing. We can't give no names of who lives in those places. Before that, the city came up with an ordinance saying you can't do that, saying 'who that', 'who that'. You would tell them who live in the houses and all kinds of stuff. That was disrespectful to the people.

LR: Yeah it's kind of an invasion…

AB: That kind of changed with me, you know, don't tell them who live in these places. Bill Murray lives in a house up in the Battery in some place in there. I don't know where the house is, but even if I did, I couldn't tell. I don't want to tell it, you know. I respect the fact that they put all this money to this beautiful homes for me to show, you know. There is cooperative efforts between the tour guide and the residents downtown, because they have their right. If I am going to show their house, and do their house justice, you know be truthful about everything I say.

LR: And give them their privacy.

AB: Right, right give them their privacy. That's the next step, give them their privacy. So, yeah. And if I stop to a house or something I would have spoken to the owner already. If I don't go and speak to them, I probably write them a letter, a note - a letter saying exactly what I say about the house. And if I stop in front of the house, may I have the privilege of stopping, pausing - pausing not stopping - in front of your house to explain the situation in this letter. Almost all the families

agree yes, because you know I respect them. Now they know what I am saying about their property, they know I'm not disrespecting anything that they… their privacy.

LR: Now is that just something you do or is that something…?

AB: That's something I do.

LR: That's just something you do…it's not required at all?

AB: We have to stay on the streets all the times, stay on the streets and keep moving. We can pause, if you are going slow you can pull up and pause. Let a truck or car go by. But you are not supposed to pause for a description in front of somebody's house. You can pause if you're in a non-residential area. You can pull over for a description, pause. But you are not allowed to pause in front of somebody's house.

LR: And that's a rule from the city?

AB: Mhmm.

AB: If I pause, they know exactly what I'm saying. Because I would have given them a note of what I'm saying about the house, and meet their approval. You can pause in front of my house, I don't have any idea what you're saying about my house, I want to say something.

LR: Yeah. But if they can look out the window and see...Gullah Tours on the bus.

AB: They are going to know exactly who I am. For example I go, you know Bethel Church on Pitt Street, on Calhoun? I go in there, in their parking lot, and the parking lot is graveyard, and I tell about the tombstones. Bethel is the only white congregation that I know of, that has always maintained a graveyard on the very same property with slaves and a few blacks. I go into the slave graveyard, and talk about the tombstones back there. It's very interesting. I show where Bethel moved some of the tombstones that was stacked up and high in the annex building, into the white graveyard up front. I told them the fact that ***(25:00)*** how that is a no-no - you don't do that in Charleston. But the Methodists, they do. The pastor who wasn't on the tour, but he came when I pulled in the yard, he came up to hear what I'm saying. And he was like, pleased with what I am saying. So what I am saying is, let them know what you're saying, and these people wouldn't object to anything. Just don't treat them with no disrespect.

LR: [Clarifying his advice] As long as you're, telling the truth…

AB: Yeah. It's sort of like they let me come by there, back there, you know. I don't think nobody else go back there.

LR: So, do you ever have locals on your tour bus?

AB: Locals? Yeah.

LR: Really?

AB: The Visitor's Convention Bureau (Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau) right over there on King Street. They got this advertising during the winter time like February, January… when tourism is slow called "Be a tourist in your own town." "Be a tourist in your own town," and they advertise that in January and February, and everybody come in, tourists you know.

LR: Who advertises that?

AB: The Visitors Convention Bureau.

LR: Okay, so they advertise...for everyone?

AB: Yeah, because that time of year, you don't have a lot of tourists. So, they say to the locals, "Be a tourist in your own town." Come and take tours and enjoy Charleston, and it works.

LR: So you get a lot of locals in the off-season?

AB: And the locals come. Locals got family and friends who live off some place. They tell them, "Oh come see Charleston, you got to come here." The majority of people that come back on my tours are repeaters - they come back again.

LR: Really?

AB: Or they tell somebody else. The majority of them, tell somebody else. That's how I have survived, I tell them to tell everybody about it.

LR: Are your tour passengers that are locals, are they more…

AB: The majority of them are not local now.

LR: The ones in the off season, the ones that you get in January and February, are they more interactive? Do they...participate in a different way than tourists?

AB: Mhmm, Mhmm. They are more excited about it.

LR: They're more excited because they know…

AB: It's interesting when you talk about something, if you talk about the Visitors Center--I know a little bit about the Visitors Center. When I come back as a tour guide, and add more to it. They are "Ohhhhh". For example the marketplace, the market.

LR: Mhmm.

AB: Many blacks think that this whole slave dynamic. They tell you, "What happened to the slaves sold at the marketplace? Where the vendors are?" And then I tell them, slaves were never sold there. [imitating the tourists] "Oh yeah?" That's exciting you know to them. A correction in their lives thinking that slaves were sold there. They worked there - never sold there.

LR: So, are your interactions different with tourists versus locals? Or, generally the same?

AB: Mhmm. Most of the people, when they come here, they know. They know. Either they did that or they did some research. They know almost what they're going to do. I got a web page, and they go to the web page and check it out before they come, and read through it.

LR: So, over the years...your years as a tour guide, do you think that people's attitudes have changed?

AB: Attitudes? What do you mean?

LR: Just their viewpoints. At least, your customers, do you think that…

AB: I mean change. You won't change them. [laughs] They hear you, what you got to say. For example, I tell about the South Carolina flag. You familiar with the flag?

LR: The palmetto, with the crescent moon? Yes.

AB: You know what it mean?

LR: I know that the palmetto was used against, like, cannonballs.

AB: Oh yeah okay.

LR: To repel the cannonballs...and that's why.

AB: In the independent war, the Revolutionary War, and the British fight cannonballs at the palmetto logs. Fort Moultrie's made out of palmetto logs to repel the cannonball. So the palmetto became the symbol of strength. What about the crescent moon?

LR: I don't know why the crescent moon is on there.

AB: You don't hear nothing about it much at all. You remember the account of the palmetto logs? But you don't hear about the crescent moon.

LR: Well what does it mean?

AB: Well. Most of the other tour guides will tell you that the crescent moon. General Moultrie was asked to design the flag. So the crescent moon through the Revolutionary War in 1776, John Moultrie's soldiers ***(30:00)*** wore a metal gorget on the uniform around their neck. If they were (indecipherable) by the bayonet, it offered them some sort of protection. You know what a gorget is? A gorget - y'all call it a choker.

LR: Oh.

AB: Mhmm. So these soldiers wore a gorget around their neck. If you were getting charged by a bayonet, it offered them some sort of protection. I tell the tourists, if I'm fighting someone with a bayonet, I'm not going to aim at the neck, you're going to miss! The neck is kind of small, aim for the body. Most people say its the gorget. I say it's not a gorget. I say it's a crescent moon! Because when you look at the flag, you would look at it, there's a tree, and the moon above the tree like you see in the sky in the night time. Just like at night time!

LR: Yeah.

AB: But they don't tell about that. I say this is a moon. I tell them that a gorget is a gorget, and a crescent moon is a crescent moon. Very seldom you see, you hardly see the South Carolina flag without the crescent moon. What you probably hear if you keep pushing the issue, they get upset by the fact. (imitating a rowdy passenger) "They say it's not a crescent moon, this is a gorget!" It's a gorget, but it's a crescent moon. I say it's a crescent moon because (faint ringing in background) General Moultrie was asked to design the flag, and when he presented the flag, he left no details whatsoever as to why those symbols.

LR: He didn't give any reason?

AB: None. You can't find no book with that in it. So, therefore, people come up with all their concerns and theories about what it is. (imitating a tourist) "Well I can read now." The crescent moon. I ask if any Muslims on the bus. The crescent moon is a Muslim symbol meaning a new beginning. So Muslims translate it as a new beginning. A time of growth, a time of fruitfulness. What was happening July the fourth, 1776 when the flag was designed? New America. Time to grow, and be fruitful!

LR: Mhmm.

AB: General Moultrie had slaves, and may have had some Muslim slaves. The Muslims, many of them could read or write. They were very literate, very literate. They were often given superior tasks to perform. Moultrie could have easily asked one of his slaves to design that flag for him. Those slaves, being Africans, knew about all the African symbols of the moon, and the palmetto tree and everything. Those are African symbols, you know that they used, that they respect in Africa. But who in their right mind is going to tell you that there's a possibility, or even the slightest possibility of an African, having designed the South Carolina flag. That's right. Ain't any body going to say that. Too much to do to come to other descriptions. Like I said (imitating an adamant tourist) "It's a gorget!" Or the crest, Moultrie sort of had the crest. Now, look at this now. If we fighting against the British, and this is a British symbol on a British uniform, why would we have something on our uniform that will reflect, that is also British. That don't work. You know, you fight against the British, yet you could have a British symbol on…

LR: What is on the British uniform, the crescent?

AB: The crescent moon.

LR: Oh! Right okay.

AB: It is something used by the British soldiers.

LR: Around their necks?

AB: Yeah, they put the moon around their necks. Some people say its the emblem that the British soldiers used on their uniforms and all that kind of stuff. If I'm fighting against them, I'm not going to have no kind of symbol that they relate to.

LR: Yeah.

AB: But nevertheless, people. But all these tour guides will tell you that it is a gorget. I say it's a crescent moon. Like it is. You go to any of them, they will never tell you it is a crescent moon.

LR: I always thought it was a crescent moon.

AB: It is a crescent moon, that's right.

LR: Despite the change in Charleston and time, is there a place in Charleston that has remained the same for you? Maybe a favorite spot in the city?

AB: Well. I like the Historical Preservation Society and the Board of Architect Reviews. ***(35:00)*** I love their work in preserving things just as it is.

LR: They're very strict.

AB: Huh?

LR: They're very strict, right?

AB: Oh yeah. I love that. Because you are keeping things the way it is. Only thing that hasn't changed that much- oh the hotels being built. So many hotels being built. They have done a great job at building it where it wouldn't destroy the decor of the neighborhoods - the city. You know, I can appreciate the way they build it.

LR: It's farther out.

AB: No. Here in downtown…

LR: The new ones…

AB: Oh yeah, uptown and everything. You really can't tell if these buildings been here for 20 years or 200 years. The way they fix them, the way it blends in.

LR: Yeah, with the style.

AB: The one in Marion Square a little awkward, you know. But nevertheless, it looks like an old building, that they just kept up.

LR: I have to ask you - what is your idea of Southern hospitality? You express, it seems to me you express a lot of Southern hospitality.

AB: Southern hospitality is not a white thing. Southern hospitality is a black thing. Because, southern hospitality is like being hospitable and greeting and everything, and people like that. Whites had hotels and everything to go in. Blacks didn't have hotels to go in. They stayed in homes - people's homes. At number 1 Meeting Street, the bed-and-breakfast inn there, they said they're the first bed-and-breakfast in Charleston. I said no! They are the first official bed-and-breakfast inn. Blacks' homes have been serving as bed-and-breakfast inns for years. People come...You know when they used to have these rockstars, these singers come here around town to Charleston to sing? They would sing at the Saint James Hotel. You don't know what that is - that used to be down before the bridge. But they wouldn't stay, after they finished that hotel. There are many blacks who have large homes, and they stayed in the homes. We stayed in people's homes when we were travelling like that. You just knew where they are. This was long before we recognized, before people had recognized bed-and-breakfast inns. That's a black southern thing.

LR: So that's your idea of Southern hospitality? Taking people in, into your home?

AB: Whites cannot prove that it's a white thing. I can prove that it's a black thing, because whites had hotels to go in. When you invited people in your home, to stay, that's a southern thing. Southern hospitality. You know, when you go in a hotel, that's cordial. That's business. You feed them, and you give them a home, and everything.

LR: It's a transaction.

AB: Mhmm. Southern hospitality is not a white, white thing. It's a black thing. Always been a black thing.

LR: Do you have a vision for the future of Charleston? Or something that you'd hope to see in the coming years?

AB: Well. I love Mayor Riley, when he was done. Mayor Riley wasn't the mayor for forty years for nothing. He was the mayor for forty years because he was a good man. He was a fair man. He was an honest man, and he wasn't a prejudiced man, you know. We all were citizens of Charleston. I'm not saying he didn't do anything wrong - he may have done things, because sometimes you have to do things to please people, and it doesn't look too well with others. For example, Strom Thurmond. Ever heard of Strom Thurmond?

LR: (disagrees) Hm-mm.

AB: You never heard of Strom Thurmond? He was Senator Strom Thurmond?

LR: (disagrees) Hm-mm, I haven't.

AB: He died about...its been ten years now. He had a daughter, a black daughter. Strom Thurmond was a racist person, considered very racist. Down in history as a very racist person. Strom Thurmond had been, being re-elected ever since I don't know when. Has been in office almost all his life.

LR: Is he from…?

AB: South Carolina. He was a South Carolina senator. Lindsey Graham is taking up his space now. So Strom Thurmond has gone down in history as racist. Strom had a black daughter. ***(40:00)*** Black daughter died about...three years ago. When Strom Thurmond died, that's when the black daughter was able to come out and say who she is. She made a promise not to reveal who she was. We always knew she was Strom Thurmond's black daughter. The lady went to South Carolina State College. Well Strom Thurmond's considered a racist, but the man was being re-elected every time in office. Think about it. If he was being re-elected, every time he wouldn't be able to be re-elected if blacks weren't voting for him. Strom Thurmond is a - I don't know sometimes I get confused. Because one time, once I see this racist of-old person, the other side sees a great humanitarian of blacks. Strom Thurmond has kept more black colleges and universities open than any other black senators. First to hire blacks in his office. First to hire blacks. I have an uncle, he is dead now. He was a minister of the church. He told me that every time it rains, water get in the yard and people can't come and worship under the church. He said, he kept calling the county to do something about it - dig ditches and everything. (indecipherable) if he didn't do it because of the black congregation - he didn't care. He told me they wrote Strom Thurmond a letter, (a bit indecipherable) sent it out on a Monday. But on Thursday, those bulldozers were out there and everything. I go on and on and on, of blacks who Strom thurmond got into college. You know integrate them, integrate those colleges. So, you know, I don't know what to say about him, except that he probably changed and what not, but he wasn't no racist. He was a politician. Like George Wallace. Ever heard of George Wallace in Alabama?

LR: (gestures no)

AB: No? Yeah. George Wallace - staunch racist. He never have let blacks into his places. Never. Keep blacks out, keep blacks out. But he died. When he got older in his young life he got into an accident and was paralyzed. His best friends were blacks. Best friends were blacks. (indecipherable) He had a change, a change… has a black daughter. Yeah.

AB: So people change. People change, for the best.

LR: So, you said that you really liked Mayor Joe Riley?

AB: I like our new mayor too now.

LR: Are you hoping for similar leadership?

AB: Huh?

LR: Are you hoping that the new mayor will be...?

AB: He does the exact same leadership. Mayor Tecklenburg - he was a good mayor. About the same thing. Charleston always has good mayors. Mayor Gaillard during the Civil Rights Movement time - Mayor Gaillard said we will not have no dogs in Charleston and no demonstrators and all that kind of stuff. Everybody will open up your lunch counter. We will have no racial issues and strife in Charleston. Follow the law per the law. Well you know people aren't going to do that. They will do that, but they will still try to be racist. But still you have, the mayor said we will not have that kind of thing in Charleston.

LR: So you're hoping to see the same unity in the future in Charleston?

AB: In the future?

LR: Mhmm.

AB: Oh yeah. It is getting better. It has gotten better. Much better. Charleston never had segregated houses or churches you know? Never had segregated housing, never had segregated churches. If you are coming to Charleston, you can research on the Civil Rights Movement, you will find very little to write about compared to other places. You'll find very little to write about with Charleston. It's different. It's different. You got some -we got our problems now. We got some problems. Still have a few people who - a few racists who make a lot of noise. But like my grandmama said, it's always been a good white person that got us to where we are. Because they don't make no noise about it. They do what's right, and they'll hire us and everything. Don't say nothing big, no advertising, (imitating) "I'm hiring black builders". Just hire them, and move on. Help them if they need help. They don't put no posters up of "I have a black man." Always had whites like that. Always had them like that. They outnumber the bad ones. They outnumber them. So, when the bad ones make a lot of noise, so we just ignore the bad ones.

LR: Ignore the bad ones?

AB: Huh?

LR: Hope for their…

AB: Yeah you know what, I pray for them.

LR: The best in the future.

(45:00) **AB:** Yeah, you pray for them. Bible said pray for you.

LR: Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?

AB: You know. (Laughs)

LR: Maybe about...I wanted to ask you, could you tell me some of the sites that you visit in Charleston? That you take…

AB: Mhmm.

LR: Your guests on?

AB: Well. I go to Philip Simmons' house. You know him? Philip Simmons - has ironworks all over the world. They just gave that to Smithsonian, right there. This one is Smithsonian. Mhmm.

LR: Oh**,** and he did all, almost all of the iron work in Charleston?

AB: No. No, many of them, not all.

LR: Many of them.

AB: Many of them. The thing about Philip Simmons is that you could find gates all over the place, but he's the only one that I know of that still continues the same old style of the old gate makers. The old German gate-makers. (indecipherable) He scrolls, and he scrolls up. And if the scrolls are curled in tight, tucked in tight, that's the way old German gate-makers make gates. All over Charleston. You go through Charleston, looking at the scrolls, you see them curled in tight. The ones from Sears, see that one hanging on the railing there, the end is just cut off. The kind you get from Sears, and Home Depot, Lowe's and Wal-Mart. That type of thing. Philip Simmons curled it in tight, and they are all completely iron anyhow, you know.

LR: So you show a lot of people?

AB: People love that.

LR: Philip Simmons Work?

AB: Mhmm. When I first started doing my tour in 1985, when I got my license - I'm a retired schoolteacher, a band director. I taught at Rivers school, and so one day on break, a coworker and I were sitting down talking, and his name come up, and he say "Oh I know that man real well, I know him real well!" I said oh yeah? Can I... let me go by after work...Can you introduce me to him? He said yeah, and that same day after work, I went to his house, and said Mr. Simmons "I'm a tour guide." I was still teaching school at the same time, I was doing tours on the side. (asking Mr. Simmons) Can I bring tours by your house to meet you? He said yeah, if I (speaking in Gullah) da-ya, da-ya. If I'm da-ya, I'm da-ya. You got that? You missed that?

LR: I didn't miss that.

AB: If I da-ya, I'm da-ya. If I'm da-ya, I'm da-ya. (Explaining phonetically) If I deya, I deya. If I is here, I is here. If I ain't here, I ain't here. You know, but bring the people anyhow. When those times when he is not there, I know where he is -that little barber shop in that little place. I know where he is because he retired there. And so I would go all over Charleston and do the tour, and I would always point out his gates. Because he has been dubbed a national treasure by National Endowment of the Arts, and had lunch with (indecipherable) and Reagan and everything. He was invited to the White House for his work. And so after I tell about all the gates, then I pull up to his house, and I tell them about, "That's where Phillip Simmons live." (imitating) They say, "Ooooh, that's where he live, oh yeah?" And I will say, "Would you like to meet him?" They say, "Meet him!" Because in the tour, I just tell about him. I don't mention whether he living or dead or nothing. I just talk about the stuff. They find out this man a national treasure, living right in the hood. Up and in the hood, still living, and they can meet him? Ohh Lord! They go crazy. People go by there, take pictures with Simmons because he is a very humble man, and children are just drawn to him. Because he's a humble man. They meet this man, who is an artist, a national treasure, living a very humble and meek life, right on, here in the hood. People ask him if he's rich. Mr. Simmons says, "Yeah I'm rich. Anybody rich who got Jesus. A place to live, a bed, food to eat, family and friends, and all y'all tourists coming to see me." He goes, "I'm rich!" But he will tell you that his wife died, in 1939 when she was 24 years old.

LR: Oh wow.

AB: He never remarried. Raised his three children, sent them all to college. Sent about eight of his grandchildren to college, but fifteen plus, other students living on the eastside of town to college. He says "After all of that, how rich can I be?" But he give a lot along the way. This man named John Blatch, who taught at Georgetown University asked Mr. Simmons to come to the

Folklife festival in Washington D.C to demonstrate his craft. Mr. Simmons went to the festival and made that gate. The Smithsonian fell in love with the gate - bought the gate from him. So it had been on display at the American History Museum for a long time, a rotating exhibit, but now permanently displayed at the new African-American museum at the Smithsonian.

LR: So ***(50:00)*** he made that gate just for the festival?

AB: Mhmm.

LR: And they bought it?

AB: Yeah, they bought it.

LR: Wow.

AB: Mhmm. Now the first gate he made - you familiar? It's behind the old Jack Krawcheck building, I think it's 315 King Street. There's clothing sold there now. You go by in that clothing store, and ask them if you can see the gate, they'll show you the gate - first gate he ever made. You have to wonder how in the world a man who has never made a gate - but he'll tell you right now, he was trained as a blacksmith. He shoe'd horses. That's right, he shoe'd horses. Once the cars, the trucks came along and put the horses out of business, that he started making - Jack Krawcheck asked for Simmons to make a gate for the back of his store. The people coming through the wrong door. You see what he told Jack Krawcheck - I ain't never made no gate. Jack Krawcheck tell him, bend the iron the same way you bend the horse shoes - and you should see that gate. It is something. It is something. A man who had never made a gate, come up with...I got a picture somewhere...I don't know where I got it. But anyway-- but something like that.

LR: Just improvised and made a gate and…

AB: Huh?

LR: He just improvised, and made his first gate and…

AB: Made his first gate. That's right.

LR: Went with it.

AB: It is amazing. You should see it, behind 315 King Street if you get a chance. If I've given you the wrong address, ask them for the Jack Krawcheck building. They'll tell you where it is. If

you're going downtown it's on the righthand side. After you pass the hotel, and that's next door to George, and Calhoun.

LR: So, you show… on your tours… you show a lot of the gates, of Philip Simmons?

AB: I still go to his house. After he died, I still go there.

LR: You go to his house? Are there any other sites that are really popular with your passengers?

AB: His house is tops - is the top. Now, let me see...other places that are popular. I think when I go in Bethel graveyard, and show the graves for some slaves, and a few blacks, and the tombstone against the wall and everything. That's probably my second. I talk about John C. Calhoun statue. Blacks call him Kill-who-un. Kill-who-un. This old lady at Mount Zion - I go to Mount Zion on Glebe Street - on College of Charleston campus. We used to have 7:30 services. These old people around here went to 7:30 service, and we used to have breakfast after church. Oooh, they'll tell you everything. They'll talk and everything. I got to know them (in my book? indecipherable). That's how I really learn a lot about Charleston and my tours.

LR: So, have you noticed overtime, for you personally, is it harder to maintain your culture because of the changes?

AB: We weren't trying to maintain no culture.

LR: No?

AB: Noo.

LR: No Gullah culture - you don't want to maintain it?

AB: Noooo. We were ridiculed so bad about how we sound when we speak. Most Charlestonians, when they went to College, have to take a semester of speech. I had to take three semesters of speech. So, what you hear now has already been fixed. We were ridiculed so bad about how we speak, and the way we live, all backwards people, backwards. Illiterate people and everything? We were trying to be the best. I tried to speak English, and everything, and this just didn't work. Got to the point I realize, what's the big deal, you know. I accept you for you. You get to a point in life where people begin to accept people as they are. I don't know when that started. (indecipherable) Live the way you are, and don't let someone else dictate to you what you should be. If that's the way you speak. The culture, what people call culture and tradition and all that kind of stuff. For us, that be like hard work. I live on a farm. I would rather have a tractor than a horse, you know. I have an outdoor outhouse. I would rather indoor plumbing. I

don't want to go in the outhouse with all the snakes and everything. We don't have no nothing, except that. That's what people call culture, history, and tradition, that kind of stuff. Farming.

(55:00) **LR:** So you're saying you don't want to maintain that culture?

AB: We weren't trying to maintain it.

LR: You don't try to maintain it.

AB: We weren't trying.

LR: You weren't trying.

AB: We didn't know that there was such a thing as Gullah. I never heard of no Gullah until I got into college, or something like that, and the students from other places South call us Geechee. Geechee what we speak, what we sound and speak. Geechee was considered a derogatory term. You call somebody a geechee, you better be ready to do battle, because that meant you sound bad when you speak and like (indecipherable). I went to this forum at called the Charleston, these Africans were conducting the forum, and the question came up as to what is a Geechee. They said Geechee was the name of tribes living in West Africa. They were known as the Ogeechee tribe. Go to Savannah, see the Geechee boulevard... or Geechee River, or Geechee boulevard. Now if you call me a Geechee, I think you are being complimentary of me. That means you know about my ancestors. So we are proud of who we are now. I think that happened when they made that movie Roots. That made them realize, we are proud of who we are...from where we came. That's when everybody start searching ancestry.com. So, we can know who we are. We find out who we were, who we are and everything.

LR: So do you think it's important, to remember your history?

AB: Yeah. Got to know where you're going. Got to know where you come from before you know where you're going. My great-great...my great-great grand-daddy was a colonel in the Confederate army. White man. His name was Robert Gourdine. G-o-u-r-d-i-n, he spelled his last name G-o-u-r-d-i-n-e, made the difference. He was a member of the French Huguenot Church. Queen Street. You find out who you are. Once you find out who you are, that's who you are. Nobody else tell you what you should be, or what you ain't. Or how you should speak. If I spoke Gullah, if you insult me, you can't understand me - that's good. When it got to the point where we speaking English, you still here a brogue in my voice. Then people ask where I'm from. That's where I'm from. The way we speak we sound like Jamaicans, when we speak. The Caribbeans? So I can't change that. I'm still speaking English, but the brogue sound like Jamaican. But I've been to Jamaica, we are not Jamaicans.

LR: Well thank you for sitting down with me, and taking the time to talk to me.

AB: My pleasure. Anytime, anytime.

LR: It was a pleasure.