Voices of Southern Hospitality: An Oral History Project

Interviewee: Campaigne, Alyssondra
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Abstract:
In this interview, Alyssondra Campaigne describes ecology and development issues in the Charleston area. Campaigne also talks about her childhood, professional career, and efforts to protect the Lowcountry's natural ecology. As Vice Chair for the Charleston Waterkeeper, she also offers solutions on issues ranging from sustainable tourism to the fragmentation of communities.

Biographical Note:
Alyssondra Campaigne, a resident of Mount Pleasant, has worked as a Legislative Aide in the U.S. House and Senate. While working as a Legislative Aide, Campaigne dealt with climate change with the Environment and Public Works Committee. Campaigne is a founding member of Engage Strategies, and currently serves as Vice Chair for Charleston Waterkeeper. Additionally, she is on the Board of the Palmetto Scholars Academy.

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.

Interview Begins
Interviewer Initials: AG
Interviewee Initials: AC

AG: Okay. So I am here with Alys Campaigne at the Daily, and it is February 22nd...

AC: 26.

AG: 26. Yeah, no, sorry, I'm nervous.

AC: That's alright.

AG: Yes. February 26, 2019, and I guess we'll jump right in. Okay. So where did you grow up?

AC: I grew up, in Maryland, north of Westminster and right on the Mason Dixon line.

AG: Okay. When you were, when you were growing up, did you spend a lot of time outdoors or on the water?

AC: Yes, I grew up on a farm, and realize now that was kind of a luxury to grow up in a working farm. I don't meet a lot of people that had that childhood. So I was outside all of the time, and where the farm was is mostly ponds, streams, that kind of thing, but we'd go out to the Chesapeake Bay particularly.

AG: I guess, pretty rural, though?

AC: That's a, very rural, yeah. Grew, growing our own food, hunting, somewhat self-sufficient. We had a hog farm. Milo and soybean crops.

AG: Okay. And what were some things you enjoyed doing, in the water and outdoors?

AC: I've always had a big affinity for the outdoors. I love, I'm a big, I guess passive, wildlife enthusiastic, just like hiking in the woods. Bird watching, creature sighting, hiking, camping. I used to horseback ride, ski, sail, kayak. I like to just be outside.

AG: Okay. Do you still enjoy those?

AC: Yes, yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We moved here from Washington, D.C, and in part because I kind of wanted to return to the, we had small children, and wanted to be able to have them have access to some of those things that I enjoyed as a child. So very much appreciate the indoor, outdoor life that I'm able to have here.

AG: Sure.

AC: Living in this area.

AG: And did, how did you choose Charleston, aside from being drawn to that, the natural ecology in the area?

AC: I had, from growing up on the Mason Dixon line, I've been really interested in sort of North-South, dynamics, and I had been working at the time with an organization called the Center for American progress. And we had hosted a discussion talking about different visions of the new south, and the south post, the decline of the manufacturing era and things. And I had encountered a guy, Andy Brack, for the Center for Better South, and working on a, on a convening we did at the University of North Carolina. And so in, through kind of thinking through the issues at that conference brought up and meeting him and being, going back and forth, I felt like Charleston was both a somewhat practical place to be. It has an airport. I think, I could get back and forth to Washington relatively easily. And it felt like it had a good both access to the natural world, and size and cultural amenities that made it kind of attractive. So, kind of a mix.

AG: Yeah. When, when you think of sort of environmental issues that are facing Charleston, what comes to mind? Where those necessarily apparent when you first moved here?

AC: I worked, environmental issues have been near and dear to my heart, as I said, from, from childhood. And I've worked on environmental issues most of my life. So I'd say I probably was a very, of, you know, more attuned than most because I think through that lens. So, I remember in reading and before I even moved here, I was very interested in kind of the view of what development had already done before, you know, 13 years ago, and had a deep appreciation for South Carolina, and, and this Charleston region in particular, of what we've been able to do in conserving waterfront land that is unique and just spectacular in the context of looking at the rest of the country. We have, I think the largest stretch of unprotected, you know, forest and wilderness and refuge, publicly accessible land in an area that is, has tremendous public pressures around it. So the agreements that drew up the ACE Basin Conservation Partnership, and the ability of land owners and partnerships with the federal and state government to protect some of that area was really interesting to me. And so making sure we defend those, with those obviously preceded my arrival, but I was interested in what was happening with the urban growth boundary and development patterns and the remaining landscape that wasn't already part of those conservation agreements. So I was interested in landscape and what it meant both in terms of habitat, and fragmented habitat, and very interested in water quality. I'm on the, we, we lived, an old, our first house was in the Old Village in Mount pleasant. I would go every day down to the Pitt Street Bridge and kayak or crab with the kids. And now we live on Vincent Creek up on Shem Creek, and we spend a ton of time in the water. I'm on the board of Charleston Waterkeeper, and water issues are a big passion project. So I guess again, I was interested in what was, what was the impact of the rate of growth and things like storm water runoff and water quality overall and those kinds of things. So I was, I also think that an under-sung environmental issue, or it's not as much talked about, is the environmental justice impacts of a lot of what has happened on the development landscape – the Naval Base closing in the late nineties, and what that meant to the economy, but also what the infrastructure of the Naval Base meant for the communities there that had roads literally pushed through their neighborhoods and had, have had over the years, fertilizer plants, and a lot of industrial kinds of high impact uses. The legacy of chemical exposure of soot from diesel and from the trucks and things like that. The air pollutants and the emerging contaminants is another area that I've been really interested in trying to see if there'd be - a continue to shine a light on it and support the groups that are working to particularly protect those communities have been impacted the most.

AG: Sure. Yeah. Actually, I'm kind of going off what you said in regards to just pollutants in the Lowcountry. I found research by the Maryland Institute for Applied Environmental Health, I don't know if you're familiar with them, but they said that minority communities in Charleston are far more likely to be exposed to these pollutants.

AC: Yeah.

AG: And just, I know that you said you care about these issues. Do you have any ideas how to rectify these problems?

AC: I, I have lots of ideas. Many of them, many of them relate to infrastructure and development patterns. And figuring out, you know, transportation is probably top of the list. Trying to get, limit the number of cars on the road. Limit, limit the number of the impact that, you know, the toll of having, single passenger vehicles dominate our transportation landscape at the rate of growth that we have. If we don't address that, both minimizes the quality of life but also has huge effects on creating more impervious surface, and in terms of the pollutants from the cars themselves. So, I think addressing density nodes, and putting it in public transportation, improving bike and ped, pedestrian access is crucial. I served on the board of Charleston Moves, and really applaud the work that they are doing and I hope a decade hence, there's been leaps and bounds of solutions that have been advanced, cause it's shocking to me that people are not investing in even just low cost efforts, like the bridge over the Ashley River. Or putting in, you know, closing off some of the streets, and making them more bike and pedestrian friendly as a first step toward, kind of the bigger ticket items like high speed rail or other transit nodes.

AG: Yeah. And I guess my follow up is, have they done anything since you've been here to address these issues? Like any real major infrastructure projects, that've gone and made a difference?

AC: I think there's been, I think it's very incremental, but there have been improvements in the conversation. There have been some planning changes in, I'd say Mount Pleasant and Charleston. They're not as coordinated as they should be on, maybe it's a little too little too late, but looking at responding to flood resilience kinds of issues, and whether it's buffers, critical line setbacks, tree ordinances, trying to limit filling of, putting fill dirt on lots that then disturbs the natural flow of water systems. Finally, a lot of those things we've made, you, we've, they're taking a closer look at some of those rules around the books. But I'd say it's, we're, we're behind the eight ball.

AG: Yeah.

AC: And with the rate of growth, I thought that more people would come in and demand something better, cause a lot of people are coming from communities that have higher

standards for pedestrian and bike stuff and things like that, but we haven't reached that critical tipping point yet.

AG: Interesting. So is there not enough, like almost, accountability for, you say it's elected officials that just won't, won't act on it? Or just the community as a whole?

AC: I think it's a combination. I mean some of it is just the legacy of how our infrastructure is funded, is very different than in other places because the state owns some many of our roads and we don't. The biggest issue is that we don't have a sustainable tax base to provide services and nobody wants to admit that. And so we are funding things off of, like largely a growth pace for growth model. So you have impact fees and things like that for new development. But to address the true core issues, you need to have enough tax dollars that you can maintain And upgrade all the stormwater infrastructure, and you can significantly improve the roads and you know, put pedestrian crossings and things like that in, and they don't have the funding for them because I think we've been just really dependent on let's just tax, nobody wants to tax anything. Nobody, nobody wants to admit that it cost something to have a high quality of life. So.

AG: Right, and do you think that problem is endemic to Charleston, rather than say Boston, which is, you know, up in the north? Like is that a problem more associated with southern cities?

AC: I think it's a bigger problem here because, well it's a different problem here, because of the, the, the legacy of the, of the, the legacy of the port, of the Naval Base closing was huge. Because up until the late nineties the government was pumping so much money into the local economy. And so I think there was, you grew up in the dependence on federal support that then largely vanished. Plus we have that issue of like not having a, having a relatively weak governor, and a legislature that's skewed, that isn't necessarily providing resources equitably, region by region based on need. So I think it's different in terms of like some of those structural issues. But I also think it's different because we don't have a lot of philanthropic leaders who are having a conversation about future needs. So in Boston, for example, Austin, Philadelphia, New York, they have very strong public, private partnerships with business leaders, and other philanthropists who are saying, 'Hey, let's, let's get together and think, do a real needs assessment for the future of like, what do we need on education? What do we need on roads? What do we need on this? And that'. I don't think that there's that future visioning or planning here because there hasn't, we haven't, I guess we felt like we didn't need it. It was relatively small. And we don't have a single industry. We don't have a natural leader of that conversation. There's not, we now, increasingly it's since I've been here, there's a big, big shift with Boeing or

Volvo. I mean there are some big, new homespun businesses that potentially could guide that conversation, but in the past, again, it was, I think a lot of those employers were federal, or there were hospitals.

AG: So going back, you said something about landscape patterns. When you came here, has the city grown as you anticipated, in regards to, like, the patterns of development and growth, or is it sort of shifted or...

AC: Soon after I got here, there was, there was a, a burst of enthusiasm about creating some, in Charleston they call them gathering spaces, or urban corridors in Mount Pleasant, and kind of create, creating these density nodes. There was a fair amount of conversation about that, both to address the affordability of housing, and also if you put appropriately scaled denser housing, you're both meeting a demand of changing, changing home buyers. What as the younger folks are often renting, or want an apartment, don't necessarily want like a big, you know, 4,000 square foot single family home. But also you're creating opportunity to put in transit stops and things cause people are gathered more closely together so you can have that sort of live, work, play idea. But there was a swift backlash to it, particularly in Mount Pleasant, and now we've been back to this knee jerk, single family sprawl, heavy, putting in big culdesac riddled developments that don't enhance connectivity or a grid or any kind of ability to have interconnectivity. There was a vision for the North Charleston, the the Naval Yard, that Noisette Plan, but that never came to pass. There's been a couple of projects that where there was a vision for something that would be bigger and better, but it really, they never, they never got out of the ground because of the recession, for the most part.

AG: That's all what it was?

AC: The recession. And to the extent that in Mount Pleasant on, as they started to build the first building on Coleman, it was the boulevard apartment building and people went bonkers feeling like it was destroying quality of life, and it was gonna, I don't know, reduce property values and all that. I don't think that any of that was true, but political leaders like immediately recoiled and have since totally upended the plan. There's that, has, they got rid of the design features that allowed that kind of vitality to be created. There's apartment moratoriums. There's, you know, I think people, if people have been put pointed the finger at the wrong thing though, like the impact, the environmental impact to me is from the sprawling single single family subdivisions where everybody's getting in their car and having to go in their car every time they want to take their kids to sports practice or whatever. Go to the store. And instead the political conversation is about the specter of these, you know, heaven forbid, there would be diverse communities living in apartment buildings and make it sound like, you know, be the ghetto,

when meanwhile look at downtown Charleston. Like, it's all, you know, you can have compact, dense places that are beautiful and that are the draw of people all over the world. But that's not, when you listen to our political leaders, they don't quite, see that connection.

AG: No. So do you think it's just sort of the lack of, like, political courage that's lead to certain environmental issues coming to the forefront.

AC: I, yeah. Well I think it's both a lack of vision and a lack of leadership. Yeah. And it's been a really great, I think it's hard to change things when, when people don't feel a sense of urgency. So I can, I can be alarmed at decline of pollinators, and concerns about impacts of emerging pollutants in our water or storm water, dissolved oxygen levels plummeting or things like that. None of them are dramatic enough for I think the public to be agitated enough to say, 'I want to see change'. I mean, their lives are really good. They're getting a big beautiful home, relatively affordable price. And their, they're hap, they're going to the beach on the weekend, they're happy. You know, they don't, they don't see the urgency and it, you know, the, so the beauty that is around us is our blessing, but it's also maybe a curse because people are like, 'Ooh, everything's fine. Look at the beach. It looks like it's fine to me', but they're not going to see PFCs in the dolphins that they're taking pictures of that are coming from the industrial pollutants that are being manufactured right in our harbor, and they're not going to see microplastics, like cause it's generally things swept out to sea and broken into small pieces, it's not collected as like a mass trash pile on Isle of Palms, or something like that. So I think it's hard to fight an unseen enemy cause you seem like you're alarmist. You know, you seem like your, 'Hey, flood! The floods are coming!' Well, if they're not flooded today people don't want to plan for the future, because they can't. It didn't flood last year, you know, I think that's the...

AG: Right. Do you think the city needs like some major galvanizing event, to maybe spur action or...

AC: Yeah, I think the recent floods, the flood tides and things happen in the last, just the last year I think have certainly increased the level of conversation. So that's, that's inspiring. But I'm concerned that it's very, so far the response is extremely parochial. So, you know, Charleston is worried about building the wall down at the Battery. And you know, fix the cross town, fix his or that. Boston got in front. Boston has huge flooding issues and just to use it, or in New York as an example, they got in front of this largely through the Barr Foundation, that convened a number of public leaders to say 30 years ago, you know, 'What, what is our plan?' And they, they relocated parts of the city. They did massive reshaping of parts of the harbor. But it's not just, it's not each local area fighting for its own solution. There was,, there was a master vision that was bought into from the governor on down so that each municipality felt invested in a

shared idea. Of course there's competition for dollars, but they had a shared vision. But absent that here, I'm worried that we know the money we were talking about is a drop in the bucket. So it's gonna if you don't know what, I don't know what it'll take to get people to galvanize around a vision.

AG: Sure.

AC: So for example, I think there should be a very serious relocation conversation going on. Not for right now, but like if I was investing hundreds of millions of dollars in some of these plants around here, you're not going to be, you, or the hospitals and all of it. Like this is not going to be here in 50 years. It just can't. So it, a retreat strategy that honestly looks at how is North Charleston going to absorb some of that shift? How are different parts of our region going to be preparing for it, but that, there's like, no one talks about that here. Florida's starting too. I mean Florida does. And Miami has a whole relocation strategy already on the books. But we'll see.

AG: So you think Charleston needs like Charleston, Mount Pleasant, Summerville, they need to work, like, cohesively...

AC: Yes.

AG: Rather than each doing their own thing.

AC: Yes.

AG: Interesting. So you mentioned flooding. So Charleston got a fair amount of press for the Dutch Dialogue...

AC: Yeah.

AG: What lessons could be taken from those conversations, if anything?

AC: I went to some of those events. I think it's great. But again, the Dutch have been spending public taxpayer funds, on the tune of, I mean forget the dollar figure but it's probably a hundred times what we are even thinking of as our most expensive price tag of the cross town. And that was the first thing they said when they came. Their leadership said, like, 'If you are serious about this, it takes a serious commitment', and I, I hope that we don't just end up with like, here's some great ideas on paper and we would love to have a few of these design adaptations

and miss the bigger message, which is that we need that vision and plan, and we need, and we need to buy in at a significant dollar amount.

AG: Sure. And that just doesn't seem, doesn't seem feasible to you right now.

AC: No, no politicians willing to say it because it's, you know, you don't get elected.

AG: It's political suicide?
AC: Yeah. So I mean I heard it, for example, they were talking about things like having the breakwaters out in the harbor, which is, to me it seems like if you had to, you don't want to admit it, but like you, somebody should do a cost analysis and say, 'Maybe that is a more protective feature and should, if you have a finite amount of money, that might be a better investment than the Battery seawall'. Even if that means that you might lose x number of the houses in a certain storm event. Well, I'm not saying that's right or wrong, but somebody should be doing the analysis to say how, you know, 'How much can we save, and how do we prioritize that', instead of just reacting to one tranche of angry homeowners who have very expensive homes, cause the, cause the investments are for projects that are not even going to be built for 15 years. And the projections of sea level rise and rates of change have to, you know, the world is moving on while, while our plans are still stuck from like 20 years ago, of an old engineering thing that doesn't even account for the floods that we have today. Not to mention we'll have in 10, so. Anyway.

AG: People need to ask themselves, like, there needs to be some hard conversations like...

AC: Yes.

AG: This, this will be lost, if we don't do this.

AC: Yeah.

AG: Have any of these been accounted for, say out in Sullivan's or Folly? Like have they been more progressive than Downtown, or is it all sort of same?

AC: I don't really know in detail, but my impression is, well Sullivan's has an unusual situation cause they're having created land at the moment. So they're mostly talking about what do they do to cut down trees to keep their views while their beaches are increasing. Folly is looking seriously at, you know, they're trying to get in front of it and say, 'We're not going to keep rebuilding on the parts of the beach that are kind of washing away', but they're facing

pushback. I think, I think each of them are trying in their own way to step out with some progressive measures. But all of them are facing backlash from citizens who have their head in the sand and is, will take, I think people also believe that, 'Oh, we had Hugo and it stunk, but everything got rebuilt'. There's an idea that the Hugo model of rebuilding is at all relevant to what we have today. And it's completely not. Like flood rules have changed dramatically. Flood Insurance will not pay for most of everybody's homes. Even if you had the flood insurance, because it's so costly. It's been, it's just the rules are much different now. So you get like a, you know, $250,000 cap. People are living in million dollar houses. You know, they're not, when their thing is gone and they're going like, 'Oh, I thought my insurance was gonna pay for it', and they get a $250,000 check, maybe that'll change the conversation.

AG: Right.

AC: I don't know.

AG: After Hugo was, was their insurance money to rebuild? Is that what happened?

AC: People, yeah, a lot of people did get insurance money to rebuild and the rules were different about, you know, what, what the standards were for, what percent was wind and what was blood and just the, the, the Congressional rules around how the, the pot of money was allocated were different, and it would, the costs were so high that then Congress said, they didn't do significant reform, but they did enough reforms that now, even though more reform is needed, it's still is, you don't get nearly, you don't get dollar for dollar like you know, you won't be made whole. The insurance is not there to make you whole after a flood event. And that's why there's some in, there are programs that are being tried to actually relocate, you know, repeat flood homes that Charleston, I applaud them for doing that. Just trying to get people out of those homes, buy the land, put it into nature based mitigation, just put it into a natural state so it can hold water. And like the Dutch Dialogues that said this, we need to live with the water instead of just thinking that we're going to barricade our way around the water. It won't, you know...

AG: It's just not going to work.

AC: Yeah. So I think looking to places that are making those like, you know, water and as an amenity feature is the right way to go. So in that way, going to the Dutch model makes sense. But like, I just think that the public is in total denial, but I might be, as I said, we live on the marsh, and we just last week sold our house after nine years of being on the marsh. And in large part we're doing it because our house has not flooded. But I think it will.

AG: Yeah, you anticipate it?
AC: Yeah.

AG: And were any, were any of your neighbors, like were they cognizant of that that's why it's your reasoning for moving? Did, did they say you're crazy or what was their reaction?

AC: Half and half. Half said, we were interested, none of the buyers that came in asked us a single question. I was sure that that would be the first question. And they didn't, and we sold it. It didn't even hit the market. It sold very, very quickly. So the market has not internalized the risk at all. The neighbors were just kind of split on it. But a lot of people said, 'I can, I get it, but I don't, I'm just gonna, I just really like living here'. I don't know. I think people think that we're being a little like a little alarmist, but they aren't. They don't, they've seen that, you know, last year they were probably seven, seven significant tides that you know, came up and affected the area that it hadn't previous to that it had been like maybe once every 25 years.

AG: And that, there's seven in one year? Wow.

AC: Like not even from the hurricane, just from big flood events. So many people, the old timers in our neighborhood all say, 'It's very different than it, than it was'. But you know…

AG: Did the old timers, like, you generally think of old people to be more entrenched in their ways, are they recognizing that things might need to change or are they as stubborn as someone who's like, you know, younger, and says, 'I want to live here the rest of my life?'.

AC: I don't know. I think it just depends. I mean, for some, I think it's just like they, maybe their house costs less so the risk is less if it were gone. But I would say, you know, I think it's convenient to say the problem is like the folks that want to just keep things as it was, and that it's the old folks that are staying in the way of progress, and generally I find that to be true in society. But from living around here, I, and going to, like being very involved in town and municipal government, and meetings, I think the apathy of the younger generation is as much to blame. Like nobody would, when they were taking apart all the planning rules that would have enabled density and these things, you didn't, it wasn't packed with young people saying, 'Hey, I care and I want to have an affordable apartment'. You know, it was like town staff saying we're concerned about affordability. I know that it does matter to people, but I think there's just like not an involvement, or just a faith that again, like nobody's having a problem so they don't want to show up to participate in the solution making. And I think that that apathy is at

least as much of a problem here as anything else because people just come to Charleston, have a good time.

AG: Yeah.

AC: It's pretty, it's nice.

AG: Yeah. They just don't...

AC: Yeah.

AG: Well that sort of brings to me some questions about tourism, what is the relationship do you think between the Charleston's sort of, natural ecology and the thriving tourism in the city?

AC: I think, we, there's so much more that we can do to link the two, the tourism and the natural environment. I think we've built it off of like history, and the food and beverage scene, and culture, and going to the beach. But increasingly I think there's just so much more. If you look at the demographics and the statistics of growth in outdoor related tourism globally. There's booming demand for things like, you know, outdoor experiences and kayaking and boutique, you know, camping and glamping and all of these natural places that we have. We have none of that. We have no amenities that are in, I mean, which is good and bad. Right? And if we don't have people tromping through and have access abuse but you can still go out and the Cape Romain, it's class one wilderness and you will see nobody, like nobody even goes to it. So the potential to use these as an asset even more than we do, you know, like there's a Seaweed Festival, which is a bunch of people who like to hunt and fish and buy art, And that's lovely. But like we are primed to be, like, capitalizing on the way that like Denver or Boulder or, you know, Big Sky or many cities in California are bringing like high quality dollars and experiences to support the natural landscape in addition to just having a good time. I don't think we it hasn't been how we've done it in the past, but um, I think that that's the future.

AG: Sure. Is there any push by any community leader to do anything like that? Or is it still sort of just like...

AC: I don't think so. I don't think so, or else they would be having, they'd put in the pedestrian and bike amenities, because every city that's done it has made so much money off of it being like, I mean look at New York City. If, if Manhattan can close off streets to cars, Manhattan, and find that it is an added value to the tax base, and to tourism, and to enhancing quality of life. I'm sure we can close like one street downtown here without pausing, you know, calamity. But

you would think that, you know, for us to close the street here, everybody's like, we're going to stop traffic for forever until the sky is falling. So there's just like that shortsightedness about not seeing. It's the same thing, when they put in the bridge like they, that happened right before I moved, moved here. But it was a huge fight to get the pedestrian walkway on the bridge.

AG: Really?

AC: Like no one wanted. Charleston Moves was like right at the front of getting that on there. And the same thing, it was going to cause deaths and it was going to waste money and this and that. And I mean, you know, you know, like how many people are on that, it's a huge benefit. We should have that at every bridge. And yet again, Ashley River Bridge, having a fit about like it might take five seconds off of my commute. They don't see the upside of all the ways that people use it. Yeah.

AG: Sure.

AC: Sorry, I'm talking a lot!

AG: No, no, it's good, it's good. Do you think if there was more like a more of an outdoor tourists like economy here, do you think there would be more concerned for sort of the, the water quality and things of that nature?

AC: Yeah, I do think so. And I think, yeah, there could be much more to be done to promote that kind of awareness. And there are some outfitters that are the forefront of that. So, Coastal Expeditions for example, that's leading like incredible bird walks, and they run the Bulls Island ferry and they, he, the head of it is doing a talk at the Gibbs, where there's a watercolor painting collection by a famous artist who is, was painting in this landscape in the late 1800's. And you know, being able to connect the dots of art, and place, and horticulture, and history. The people that are doing it are having a phenomenal response to it, but it's just very nascent. So, I think there's a tremendous upside. It just, nobody's figured out how to do it.
AG: Utilize it?

AC: Yeah. I mean probably the surfing, kiteboarding you know, that crowd certainly, it like appeals already on the islands, you know, to some extent, we don't have great surf. But if you could, there's just so much more that you can do. And the bike, you know, biking community is like, we're flat. It's so easy. It's gorgeous. If we could do so much with it. And you look at cities, like Traveler's Rest with their bike greenway and parts of North Carolina, and north, and in and around Greenville. They have whole, like a whole industry around supporting a cycling

community, and they're not doing it just because somebody got a, you know, bee in their bonnet. They're doing it cause it's bringing in dollars and it's creating value. And that is just not happening here.

AG: That seems crazy.

AC: There are people that are advocating for it.

AG: Yeah.

AC: It's just taking forever to get, like the Battery to beach vision is out there, but to get the municipalities to implement is really hard.

AG: It just takes a while?

AC: Yeah.

AG: Okay well that's all the environmental questions I have. So I guess we'll wrap this up, wrap it up, some lighter questions just about like...

AC: Yeah.

AG: Hospitality So you said you grew up right in the Mason Dixon line...

AC: Yeah.

AG: So you've had, you kind of grew up the whole like southern hospitality thing, I'm sure.

AC: Yeah.

AG: So what is southern hospitality in your opinion?

AC: Culturally, you mean?

AG: Yeah.

AC: Like, when people say like, 'What does it mean?'.

AG: Like how would you explain it to someone like Connecticut?

AC: I mean I think, I think there's a myth and then I think there's, well my, my experience of it is, it has to do with slowing down, with pace, slowing down, with connection to community, and neighborliness, courtesy, tradition. But I'm, I'm, I'm not, I think it's a little mythic cause I also believe that many communities, and other parts of the country have it, and there's a little bit of a, you know, southern people are just nice and the rest of the country isn't. And I, there's a lot of things about the south that are much more complicated that, and the hospitality has certainly not been extended to all people. In fact, we've been actively excluding many from that version of southern hospitality. But I think there is something to the slowing down. I do notice the saying hello to the passer by. Look somebody in the eye, the shake your hand, you know, conscious greeting. House gifts. Little courtesies like that. I think those traditions are a little bit more entrenched here but...

AG: Sure. Do you think, has it changed on your lifetime? Even like the whole communal thing? You know, I feel like people are more, less than, like they're less inclined to leave their doors unlocked.

AC: Yeah.

AG: You think it, has that changed at all in your lifetime in regards to like little southern community thing?

AC: I think it has changed a lot, but I don't know that I have a great sense of it because it hasn't changed for me. So you know, like I have the cognitive bias around, you know, personal experience. I love in my, but I chose my community really carefully and again, in my community, I know all of my neighbors. We're super connected with each other. I don't lock my doors. I'm very, I just can't say enough good things about how I feel about my relationship to my community. But I also know that that is not the experience of most of my friends, and I am sad for them, with typically the ones that are in the developments where the developments in north Mount Pleasant sell this idea of like being part of this charming lifestyle. But my observation is I go in the houses and their armed with like state of the art security cameras and the, they've trackers on their kids on their phones, and like the kids don't actually go to school because of our crazy school systems that they don't even go to school at a neighborhood school. So they don't have those relationships, and have that kind of like, 'Let's go play a game of manhunt outside, and go see if there's fish in the pond'. Like my son, I'm so glad that he, he does just roam out with the neighborhood kids. But I think that, I only know two other of his friends that are like that. Everyone else is in a much more kind of suburban experience, and I

think that's the whole country just pumped with this fear mindset of you know, thinking it's not safe to be out in the world. I don't know.

AG: Sure. So do you think, like do you think, not necessarily the tourist industry, but like the powers that be, sort of sell Charleston as like a mythic like sort of southern hospitality community, but when reality is not really any different than anywhere else?

AC: I think, I think it's, I think we oversell on the southern hospitality, and if we've really embraced the, the geography of our community and the, the natural assets that make it so unique and, and the history and architecture and all of that, and kind of separated the two, then we would maybe appreciate investing in what will protect them a little bit more. I, I think it's a little of a crutch to be like, come on down for the hospitality. It's, yeah. I don't really know what that means, but we marketed it a lot.

AG: Yeah, sure.

AC: And again, I feel like it's, in some communities, southern hospitality can be, I think perceived as a code word of we're not going to talk about complicated stuff like slavery and oppression, and I'm not saying we'd need to overdo it, but there's a, the limit of where politeness has kind of probably impeded our ability to move forward as a culture.

AG: Sure.

AC: And we can be polite about how we discuss it, but it's not really getting us anywhere to not have any conversations. So I am glad that there's been a lot more, unfortunately it's provoked by tragedy, but there's been more conversation about reconciliation, and kind of like defining our community more broadly than perhaps we were when I first got here.

AG: Yeah. I was just going to ask you, is that, was this a thing that people talked about when you first got here or is it still more hush hush than it is now? These broader issues like reconciliation and culpability?

AC: I think it's, I mean it was thrust in everybody's face and it is every day, so, cause we're just not making much progress. But the, the shooting, the Walter Scott issues, the Confederate monuments, the national, what it's meant with the president, we have, you know. I mean, I feel like the whole tenor has shifted in a significant way, and Charleston's kind of been brought along in that, but it's slow progress. So I think it's, yeah, I think it's different. The demographics of how, the rate of growth that we have, I guess I thought that the rate of growth that we have

there would be more diversity. Just if you think of it from a numbers game, you know, volume of people. And I think that that probably reflects like the lack of integrated affordability of housing types. So if you're down on the Peninsula, or in Mount Pleasant, or on the Islands, you can, you can easily believe that, you know, we're a majority white country, you know. My kids like want to leave here to go back and be in like what they call the real world because it's so, it's so strangely homogenous, and the growth's there, but it's in North Charleston, where closer job centers are. And closer to, you know, just a lot, much more integrated economic kind of picture of having more affordable housing and being closer to get to work. And so I think that the northern part of the county feels very different than down here, and that, that kind of segregation, economic and by default racial segregation, is worse than I expected when I, when I came. I just figured the numbers would make it different.

AG: Sure. And did you think any of that was deliberate on the part of city council?

AC: No, I think, well, I mean, the economic pieces of just, everybody wants to make a lot of money on fancy, expensive houses, but I don't think that the intention for it to be racially homogenous is intended...

AG: Yeah, right.

AC: But that's the, not having affordable, diverse housing has a consequence in that regard, so.
AG: Sure. All right well that is all my questions, so...

AC: Alright!

AG: Thank you for your time.

AC: You bet! Happy to help!

AG: Yeah that was great, thank you very much.

AC: Oh my gosh, I feel like I just...