

## History United: Memory Initiative

### Interview with Douglass Davis (DD)

InterviewER: Evelyn Riley (ER), Amelia Grabowski (AG), Kathryn Bennett (KB)

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**ER:** So I'm going to go ahead and start asking you some questions. For example, your name, would you spell it for us? That way we make sure we get it right.

**DD:** First of all, my original name, from my mother gave me, was Frank Davis. I changed it to Douglass Davis. Okay? That was years ago. I have five brothers and four sisters. Okay. We was all born and raised, we was born here. Once we got older we left, okay, and we went different places. But Danville back in the sixties and the fifties, I never went to school with a white person, okay. Cause it was not integrated, it was just one of them things that didn't happen. Integration didn't come along until after '63 when we started to protest and then demonstrations. And I am mean like it was not an easy life here. I mean for a black man you caught actually hell, okay. I mean at the time you couldn't go in a restaurant. I couldn't. At the time, me and you would never mix together. Okay. If I passed you, you was on the street. You pass me I was on the street. It was no mixture like it was today. Okay. It was terrible. It shouldn't have been like that but that's the way society was. Okay. And so when I got big enough, I left.

First of all, when I left here I went to Washington D.C. Well I was on my way to New York really. When I got to Washington this is where they said they made the money at. I said "well I'm going to get off right here. I'm going to get off right here." And Danville was like I say it was very, very prejudice. Okay. I mean it was hard for my mother. It was hard for the majority, 99% of the blacks it was hard. I mean it was truly really hard. I don't know, I looked back at times in my life and I said "how did my mother manage to make it?" To take care of me and my brothers cause my father he died when I was ten but she managed to take care of us all. Okay. You know, and I don't hold no grudges. You know I mean, as I went through life I found a lot of different peoples and everybody was... white people up north, I hate to use the word white, but that's the way, white people up north was different than the Caucasians down here. They would give you more opportunities. Down here, you didn't have, you know, opportunity was limited. And I think when I was fifteen I had job working in the restaurant on South Main Street behind Giles Flower Shop. I was washing dishes. Okay. I think I made, what did I make, I think I made 28 dollars a week. Okay. 28 dollars a week but I was a kid. And 28 dollars a week that was to me at that time that was, of course you could do more with your money than you could now, you could do more with your money, and it was really and we had more unity among our peoples than we have today. okay.

If I came across town and I did something that I wasn't supposed to do and one of these ladies over here spanked his butt. It was okay. Cause when I got home, we didn't have telephone but you go home, the news beat you home. See I grew up on the south side on a place called liberty hill. That's where I grew up at and as you could get a spanking on this side of town and these ladies over here that knew you. It was like that, anybody at that time could spank your butt because if they caught you doing something wrong they'll spank your butt and by the time you get home the news would be at home. I thought about it a lot of times how could the news beat me home this fast and I was where, my mama don't have a telephone but when I got there she knew. So you know what that means, you got another one. You got another one but it was, at that time I was a young, kids you don't think like we learn to think as you grow older.

I mean it was really hard here. Ain't a lot changed either. Okay. And my father he worked in a tobacco factory. Okay he worked in a tobacco factory. My mother has ten children. Ten. Ten children we had two bedroom house. Okay. My mother and father they slept in one room and the ten kids was in the other room. Like I shared a bed with my brother. My other brother shared a bed with my other brother. My sisters they shared beds. We was all in that same little room. Okay. It was hard but I can say for my brothers and sisters we came out pretty good. I mean we came out pretty good. Right now, my brothers and sisters all of us own our own house. Okay, we all own our own house. At that time my mother, I look back and my mother never owned her own house. When I look at my sisters and brothers we have managed to all own our own house. You know what I mean.

My sisters there well educated. I didn't get the education I should have got. Cause at that time I couldn't see how important education was. Okay. I wish had seen it but I didn't. But I don't have no regrest because I went out and learned a trade and in my trade I made plenty of money. I been on jobs that I made 30 dollars and hour on, okay? Because I, you know when you learn a trade, I learned in the working world. If a man got a trade he'll get more respect and he'll make more money. And so that's what motivated me to learn a trade. Okay. You know. I have no regrets I mean no regrets.

I do look at this little town here. They always had big ideas but they're still twenty years behind today. Okay but they always had the big ideas like Danville is a big city. To me it's still country. I had no intentions on coming back here. I think '05 my wife want to come to Liberty University because she wanted my daughter to go to school there. We came and we bought this house that I got over on White Street. We was buying another house in Lynchburg but when you change state's you don't make the money that you make in other places. So we had to come down here, it was not my idea to come down here. But I was trying to please the lady. *-laughs-*

All and all we, to me, we lost something. I mean my race has lost a lot because young men don't have no respect for you and me. They don't have no respect for own mother or their fathers. They just think everything is there way. Tell one of them to go to work. That's a no no. It's not all of them. Some young black guys out there who are trying to get ahead and don't want to stay in poverty but then you got others that don't care. They think like "hey, everybody going to give me something." It don't work like that you have to go out and earn it. You know.

I mean when I was young I cut grass. I sold newspapers okay. I used to get out of school, out of elementary school, at Dan River Mill I used to go to the Danville Bee and get a bunch of papers. At that time papers was ten cents. Okay. If you sold a paper you made three cents on every dime you made. You got three cents off of every ten cents. You gave the newspaper company seven but you could make, at that time it wasn't expensive as it is now. I mean at that time if you had five dollars you had a lot of money. If you got five dollars you can't even get a decent meal today. Okay. I was always productive I was always doing some... I was had willing to work cause my mother and my father they steered that in me. To work. Yeah. If you work you have something. Something beats nothing. As the man say "a piece of bread is better than none." So I always carried that attitude with me. My mother always told me don't care what you got if you got one pair of pants or you got two pair of pants keep them clean. Always present yourself cause your first appearance is everything. I learned that. You first appearance is... You can meet a person and if they get a bad impression of you that impression never goes away, I don't care what you do in the process of when you're with them cause that first impression is already still in their mind. And they don't lose it you know. I mean it could be better, it could have been better. But I look at it like this life is like that. You know, I mean my mother did a great job. I mean my mother did a great job cause my father died she didn't have a job. She used to go clean up people's houses but she always made sure we had clean clothes and food on the table. And I used to wonder sometimes why can I have what the other kid had across town. I didn't understand that until I grew up. I looked at it like she gave me what she could give me. You know. I didn't know that then but I learned to appreciate it after a become grown. What she gave me is what she had you know. She did a beautiful job. My mother lived until she got 98, okay. And I mean my brothers and my sisters, they doing well. You know. We all turn out real well. One of my baby sisters, she's doing better than everybody. She's doing real well cause she's got one of them sophisticated jobs up in New York City. Yeah. I mean a couple of my sisters are school teachers. One of my brothers he was an engineer. You know. So I mean my family tree goes, we didn't lose what my mother instilled in us, to be workers. And we all done well. You know what I mean. It was hard but we got through this.

I mean if young peoples had the initiative to go through what a man my age went through we could be a lot better. But the young generation today they don't have no desire. The majority of them, they don't want to do anything. I mean used to be a time when black people said they couldn't get the education but now the education is available. They can get paid for going to school. You can get a, what do you call it, a staff [?], you go so many weeks they'll give you a stipend for going to school. But at that time we used fall back on the statement "well I can't get this because I can't have this" but now all the young blacks have all these opportunities and they don't want to take advantage of them. It's a shame to set here and tell you this. But I see in the young black men that's younger than me. I mean they don't have no initiative. My daughter's boyfriend is about twenty something, 23, 24. He goes to school but all day long he ain't got no initiative he just sits there and plays video games. Something that a twelve year old kid would do you know. If you have any man mentality about you, you're going to go out and do something

positive. You ain't going to set there and just play a game all day you know. And that kind of frustrates me to see this but I wonder how could you break the barricade. How could you through to these young peoples? How could you tell a man this is no progress? I mean black purists today they have babies first thing they do it run to the welfare. My mama had babies she didn't run to the welfare she went to work. Black women in the fifties and the sixties if they had kids 19 out of 20 of them had a husband. And they had some kind of motivation to go to work. But these girls nowadays hey you can be 23 and you got five babies and three different daddies. I mean to me that's totally unacceptable because five babies, three different daddies who is going to marry you? And you won't go to work, you wait on the system to give you a check. To me, welfare is a form of slavery because they control your destiny. If you went to work you can predict what you have to sell. If when they get older and can't get welfare where they going to be at? They ain't worked no where they ain't, they can't get a social security check because they ain't worked no where. So it's a lost generation in my peoples because they don't have. And it's not all of them I'm not saying it's all of them but it's a handful. You can have a basket full of fruit and if one goes bad and if you leave it in the basket what happens to the rest of them? They go bad because it just spreads. One bad fruit makes the other one bad. And if our people would look at this, young men and young women would look at this they would change their mind and get up and motivate themselves to do something. I mean they can go to school now. I mean education is there. Education is there. They don't have no desire. I don't understand why they don't have no desire to go. They got kids coming out of school now.

I'm going to school now just to improve my reading skills. Okay. Because I realized all the years that I went through the world that was my weakest point. I've accomplished a lot of other things but that was my weakest point so about a year and a half ago almost two years now. I had tried it before but when you got family and you work every day and you come home you don't feel like going to school. After you worked on a construction job every day you don't feel like going to school. Only thing you want to do is sit down and pull them boots off. Okay. But now that I don't work and I looked at my grandkids I said I got to get, these kids they're always asking me questions. Grandpa can you read this book for me? I want to know how to do it for them. I mean I want to know how to do it for them. I don't want to just push them to the side. So I decide, I said well look I think I'll try this. I said I think I got the time. And Miss Ann the lady that you met, she's my tutor and she has helped me jump leaps and bounds. Okay. I mean has helped me out. I could go to a job and fill out an application now. I would still have complicated problems you know? So I want to overcome this situation so I want to be able to when my grandkids say I want you to tell me what this word is I want to be able to tell them. I don't want to push them to the side. Because if I don't tell them then they're going to feel bad about it they might accept it because they're going to say why you can't do this for me? I got two little grandkids. They is my joy. They is my joy. I want to be able to get through this so they can be productive citizens. Okay.

I mean because our peoples don't take, they don't take time to teach the children. Well I looked at it like why don't these young girls try to teach their kids how to do this. They're

teaching the bad things. One of the little kids three year old curse they laugh. They think it's a joke but it's not a joke. I seen kids their mother, they cussing and laughing and when that kid get big enough they're cussing them out. Then they get mad. You taught them this. So they're only doing what you taught them. Okay. A kid is only going to do what you taught them. And our young black women need to set a better example to their children. The young dads they need to set a better example for their children. I seen young black guys, you got a kids with you but you're selling drugs. If you're going to do that don't take you kid with you. Because hey you got a twelve year old kid he riding with you in your car you don't think that kid got sense enough to pay attention to what you're doing. I know a couple of people like that. I ain't calling no names but I know people like that. Okay I asked a dude the one day I said what make you think you're young kid, he's twelve years old, what makes you think he ain't going to pick up the habit that you're doing because he's going to say, "If daddy did it it's alright." And it's not. But he's going to betray what his daddy do. Somewhere and he'll say I ain't going to do it, some of them going to do it cause I met kids in the city. There was an article in the Washington Post, it was 1984. I came home one day and I looked at the paper. There was this kid he lived around the corner from me. That was when crack cocaine was whhhewww. Crazy. And the kid he was in the seventh grade. He wrote an article he said my name is crack cocaine they search for me day and night. I entered this country illegally. I make a beauty queen lose her beauty. I make a preacher lose his flock. My name is cocaine. And I told myself that kid had to be in a drug environment to have all this knowledge. I mean how can a seven year old kid have this knowledge if he's not in a household where this is happening at. It's a poison. It's really a poison. This kid I feel like he was going to achieve something. I never met him but if he kept this train of thought he became a productive person, citizen, wherever he went. Because he had, there was too much in him to say this. To not to grow up to be a product person.

Okay in Danville. Danville, in the fifty and the sixties it was horrible. I mean it was just, it shouldn't have been like that. 1963 when Martin Luther King came here he changed the whole situation around. Okay. He made our peoples look at themselves. Bishop Campbell he led the demonstration. Okay we were right downtown on Patton Street being shot off the courthouse steps with a fire hose. Whooped at night with a stick this long okay because we only wanted one thing we want to go into the same restaurant that you went in and sat down. But they didn't see that they were like we wasn't good enough. And God made us all. Just a different color skin but if I cut you your blood going to be red. If you cut me my blood going to be red. Okay.

This colored thing in America is terrible. It is terrible. It is really terrible. I mean it doesn't make sense for it to be that way but it's that way. They sugar coat it now. The black people say we sugar coat it because it's not a hidden prejudice still here. There's a lot of hidden prejudice still here. I can take me and you and go to one of these restaurants on Main Street they won't say anything but you can see the frown on their face. You can see the frown on their face. You know, if you're paying attention you can see it because you can look in a person's eyes and tell whether they approve of something. Okay. I've been through that with Miss Ann. Me and her went in a couple little places downtown for lunch. Two peoples just trying to enjoy each other's

company but the peoples in there you could see them. I could look through their eyes and see what they were thinking but I enjoyed it because it was a thrill to me. It was a thrill for me. It might not have been a thrill for her but it was a thrill for me just to see this. I say they haven't come that far yet. It need to happen, it may not never happen. But certain places that you can go right here in this town and you'll find that same racial barricade. Okay. It's a shame but you'll find that racial barricade it still there. You know they accept you and let you come through the door but you could look inside of them and you'll see that. I see that. I just laugh. It tickles me I say it's really unintelligent that you haven't overcome that. We should, I mean it's a shame that one of the greatest country's in the universe we're still going through that. We're still going through that. To me, black America, young peoples get mad at the Spanish peoples cause the Spanish peoples come over here, they go to work. Black guy, "I can't do this job" even white guys "I can't do this job" I won't work for that little bit of money. You work what you're qualified to do. If you qualified to a lawyer you be a lawyer. If you're not qualified, if you're qualified to be a janitor, sweep the floor. It'll get you a check. Okay. It'll get you a check. I mean you get what you're qualified for. But we don't look at it like that. We're looking for handouts. If they would shut the welfare system down a whole lot of people would suffer because they don't know how to get a job. You got a lot of grown people that never worked and get a check. How can you? What's wrong with the system? This person never worked but he can get a check. What they call it bipolar or some stuff?

**ER:** Disability.

**DD:** I mean I see these people running around healthier than I am. I said my goodness how you get a check. And they go oh no I got bipolar. How you got bipolar and you can come out here and do anything else you want to do? But that's the way the system is set up. That's the way the system's set up. It's a joke. It's really a joke. But one day somebody going to look at all of this. And they'll say hey ya'll you got to change this. I mean ain't no jobs here, true enough. I mean once they shut Dan River, I didn't even know Dan River was shut down until I came back here. But that was one of greatest assets of income for peoples in this area. And city council keeps saying we're going to bring jobs here. They ain't bringing none. If you bring a job and it's way out on 58 and if you ain't got a car you can't get there. Public transportation don't go there so they need to bring something in the city area, which can accommodate all people not just black peoples. Cause the white people ain't got no jobs. Some of them is suffering as well as we are. So we as Americans we need to take a look at this thing. Hey we can give a billion dollars away to a foreign country but here we got homeless peoples right here in America. But we can go take a trillion dollars and fight a war just fighting a way just to impose our ideals on that country but we got hungry peoples right here. We got hungry people. It's terrible. Americans need to take a real good look at America. How much do foreign governments own in this country? It's incredible. It's incredible how much they own in this country. It done look like we sold out.

The manufacturers to cheaper, to the third world countries where they came product the same products and bring them back here and sell them because they're using cheaper labor. Bring these factories back to America so the peoples in America can have a job. You know that's what we need to do. That's what the government need to do. Take some of these big manufacturers and say ya'll got to come back home. Because ya'll are giving all the jobs over there, you're producing stuff at a cheaper price but you still hurting these peoples over here because you're bringing it over here and your selling it and we ain't going to be giving you our money. It's a terrible situation. America is one of the greatest countries in the universe and we're not taking care of ourselves like we. You three people just are fortunate that ya'll don't have, you don't know what it is to miss a meal. Okay. There some kids that wakes up and ain't got nothing to eat right here in America. Okay. They wake up and they got nothing to eat. It's a shame. It's really a shame that Americas can wake up and there ain't nothing to eat for your kid. We throw away more food than some of the third world countries have to eat. Okay. I mean off our dinner tables some third world country would love to have our waste. What you throw off of our plate and I throw off of our plate. That's what I learned as I went through this life. How important it was, how much we do throw away. We waste a lot. And the big industries they're greedy.

It's all about the dollar. If you ain't got no money. Look it. I got medicine right here I can't even afford to buy. Okay. I can't even afford to buy it. I've been fighting with Medicaid for almost a week to upgrade my medication so I can get my medicine. I'm dealing with cancer two stages. My little social security check by the time I pay a couple of bills. It's gone. It's gone. I could work if I had a job but it ain't no jobs around. I had a job in the mall over there working with the construction company but they out of town. I didn't fit in with them and I've been doing this trade for 35 years. Okay. I told him man I understand because I been through that okay. I've seen that happen more than once to me. I mean you, they bring some enterprise in here. The majority of the people that get the job is from out of Danville. It ain't the people in Danville. They come and bring these people with them. So we still hurt the people that's here. You don't give them the job you bring the company here. If they hire sixty peoples ten of them, twenty of them might be out of Danville okay. It's a shame that is happens like that but that's the way it happens. I seen it when target came here. I guarantee you it's not twenty people over that originally come out of here because they brought people. I mean if you're going to bring a job to an area make it available for the peoples here. Okay. I mean they off with kids, jobs today, they said well come over to DCCC and get the training. I tell my daughter if you don't get the training how you going to get the job? How you going to get the job? If they offered they say they offer you the training and you won't go get it so when they bring the job what happens? You don't get it because you ain't went and got the training for the job. But then you'll set around and complain. I can't do this. I can't do that but they presented you with an opportunity and if you didn't take advantage of it that was your fault. But see they know, these peoples know this. They're not motivated so we're going to offer this if they don't go get it then when they complain we'll say well we put it out there and you didn't go get it. So it's really their fault because they didn't go get it. You know.

As Americans man we need to wake up. I mean we need to wake up and look around. And if you went to a third world country and seen it you'd be surprised. Why you think, you got all nationalities that I met in travels, in the places I done been I met all nationalities of peoples from everywhere they're all come to America because they got a chance to be productive. And got some of them from over there that don't want to do nothing. They don't want to do no more than they did over there. But then you got some of them from over there they're go getters. They'll go get it. But as Americans were laid back. Oh I'm going to wait on my check. Who says there ain't going to be no check then what you going to do then? Okay. What you going to do then? You know I mean it's terrible thing right here in America. Okay. It's really terrible and it's a shame that it's like this. It really is a shame. But you get what you put into it. You don't put nothing into it you don't get nothing out of it. You know.

And Danville is, it was hard when I was here. It was really hard. I mean cause I worked I carried newspapers. I used to sell the Danville Bee then they had another paper called the Commercial Pill. I used to sell two newspapers and I rode a bicycle. Okay. I went to Gibson Elementary school when I got out of school I rode that bicycle downtown and I got these newspapers and I had customers like I'd take them to your house take them to my house. Different people's houses. But that little money I made I managed to buy me some shoes. I managed to buy me some pants to go to school in. okay. Because I knew well my father was dead and my brothers that was older than me if they had left home they had children of their own so I had two brothers and a sister under me so I tried to help my mother take care of them three. Okay because my older brothers and sisters, they was, they had left Virginia and they had kids of their own. Every once and a while my sister might send us money if she sent me 50 cent I thought that was a whole lot of money. Okay. I did. I mean it was a whole lot of money if you got fifty cents. It was a whole lot of money cause you could, I mean, you could, fifty cent was a lot of pop bottles.

There was store on Industrial Avenue called Mr. Ison's [?] if you got enough soda bottles you could go trade for cookies. It was a trade off you bring me the soda bottles I give you, you know what kids like, kids like sweets so once and a while I may get enough money to get a pound of bologna and take home you know. You know if I could take home a pound of bologna that was, mama made, boy that was a fantastic thing.

I was always productive at something. You know, I mean because that's the way I was taught. Go to work. If you go to work you're going to have something. And I went to work I mean. I mean I would cut grass. I would do what a kid would do to make. One year, one year I think yeah I managed to make enough money in one summer I bought my sister some shoes. I bought my brothers some shoes. I bought other brother some shoes. I gave my mama money enough so we could by school clothes. That was a fantastic thing to my mama okay because I realized mama was doing the best she could. Okay. My mama was not an educated woman but she made sure her children were taken care of. I can say my mother we never missed a meal. I mean she had something in that plate. It was something in that plate that you could eat. I mean it might never, kids wasn't as picky as the kids today. Now you ask your kid what they want to eat

then at time when I was a kid when your mama put that plate on the table you didn't question it. You ate what was in the plate. You know you put stuff on the table now I don't want that. Oh man it wasn't like that when I was a kid. When they slid that plate in front of you, put that plate in there, whether it was beans or corn bread you ate that. It was always something there for you to eat. I mean we didn't have meat five days a week but on Sunday you can guarantee my mama going to have something, some kind of chicken, she going to have chicken or pork chops, she's going to have some meat for you to eat. She didn't worry about it through the week days. Through the week days you may get a hot dog you might get a bologna sandwich but you ate. I can I didn't go hungry because she always provided. She always provided something you know. I mean my mother was a beautiful woman. I mean she always provided something for her kids. And she instilled one thing in me, boy go to work. If when I left home first thing she told me you make sure you keep your clothes clean. Don't go nowhere looking like no tramp. If you got two pair of jeans you wash them. You keep them clean.

I left home, I dropped out of high school. I was in the ninth grade. I been through, that summer I had been through the race riots so I went to school and I couldn't see myself staying there any longer because I wasn't, I needed money so I left. I said I'm quitting this place. At that time I didn't know how important education was because my mother was not an educated woman. So she said boy you can't do that but when a kid gets a certain age he going to do it anyway. I regretted it many times that I didn't do it. My sisters and brothers they managed to get a better education than I got but I was pigheaded. I had I'm going to go do this I'm going to go do this my way. I didn't do too bad in the world because I always worked at something. Okay when I left here I only one things I had to know how to do when I left here in '63 only one thing I knew how to do was wash dishes. I got me a dishwashing job until I kept growing and I kept learning.

Then I said well if you're going to make any real money one of my brother told me say if you're going to make any real money you're going to have to learn a trade. So then I went to carpentry school to learn how to be a carpenter. And I didn't look back after that because once you get a trade, one trade, if you're motivated you're going to learn more, you'll have to learn more than one thing. I learned how to be a carpenter. I learned how to do drywall. I learned how to be a drywall man. I learned how to paint. And I made money at it. I mean, I worked for myself at one time. At one time, I had six peoples was working for me because I was motivated. I would go, you know I learned from a white guy I was working for. He told me he said I'm going to teach you how to do all of this. And he said I like you because you're motivated. You want to learn how to do this. I'm going to teach you how to handle a business card. Teach you how to present yourself to people when you go, he said sometimes if you working for somebody and they're unsatisfied then you take them by the hand. It's time to babysit them then he would say babysit them, pamper them. Please them. Sometimes the people, some peoples you could work for they didn't know what it took to put the job together themselves. Sometimes you would have to actually teach them about what you was doing. I learned that from a white man named Carlos. I used to call him Boss Hog. I used to call him Boss Hog because he was one of the best persons

I met. He gave me a chance to learn all of this. And I learned it and the more I learned the business part of it I worked for one company for ten years and I learned all of this. Then one day when the company somebody in the office was embezzlement and taking the company's money so they was, you know, I said it's time to move on. I went to work for myself. And all I knew I learned, he gave me a chance to learn it. And I didn't do bad at it. I mean I went out and applied what I learned. I made a living at it. I took care of my wife.

I've been married three different times. Okay. But I never abandon my kids I took care of them with what I learned. See a lot of times, education is important but if you got skills you can make, I made much money as those college guys made okay because I had skills. If a man got skills, he going to make a living, if he's motivated. Okay. I mean it's like that and if a lot of American peoples nowadays are lazy. I mean not even black peoples, white peoples. You find white guys around here they don't want to work. Who? Me? Me go to work? No. And I mean, I met that don't want no heavy day job no more. All they want to go, if I make forty dollars, twenty dollars I'm happy. How could you be happy? When you're living with your girlfriend she's on welfare you got three babies. To me that's very, you're not much of a man. You know, you got three babies and you ain't set no good example. If you don't work what make you think you're kids going to want to go to work when they get bid enough. Because if they ain't seen you do nothing positive they're not going to do nothing positive. That's why you got generations of families repeat from welfare to welfare. I've seen, I've met peoples that their mother was raised on welfare. She raised her children on welfare. When her children got children, they raised their children on welfare. It shouldn't have been like that. You should have been able to, if you was raised on welfare you should have been able to teach your kid something better but it happens. It happens. Okay I seen daughters, mothers, their mother was on welfare and they raised her on welfare but when she got grown she had kids, she got on welfare because she didn't know how to do nothing. And back early in the 70s or early 80s, they started making the ladies on welfare go to school. Okay. Go learn something. Be a productive citizen. Go learn something. Don't depend on the system to take care of you. You know don't do that because there is some kind of job out there you can do. I mean there is, there is some kind of job you can do. If you apply yourself, if you don't apply yourself, I got a daughter right now she'll walk from [*Interruption in transcription; a friend of Mr. Davis's--Ann Sylves--enter; Timestamp: 49:06*]

[Timestamp: 50:33] **DD:** American black people and white people we need to come together as a family. We're too separated. I mean it makes me mad. It really makes me mad to see young guys at 28 years old ain't got nothing on their mind but all this crazy music. Hey there's nothing positive there. All negative energy they feeds off of it. If something positive happen, we're going to have a church event they won't show up but if I say we got a go-go you'd have them all here. Okay. You'd have them all here because that negative energy. Positive they don't want to do nothing. This lady she's been a beacon in my life okay. I mean she has. This is my little angel right here.

**Ann Sylves [AS]:** Well the reason I thought, when I saw you're thing, I thought of Douglass immediately because he was here when he was a kid and you were looking for stories about younger Danville. And not that Douglass is that old but he would tell me really cool stories and plus we've noticed as we go around for lunches her and there. You know, you notice people there's still our race difficulties in town here. We've talked about both things and I thought you guys would be so interested.

**DD:** I was telling them the same thing. I chuckle when me and her go in the restaurant sometimes. She don't know I be laughing but I'll be laughing inside. Okay because I can see the expression on their face.

**AS:** Well we've gone to some white restaurants. Then I want to go one of the black restaurants Douglass is like not today. Not today, not yet, I'm not ready for this.

**DD:** You know, like in Atlanta you and me been to already, you ain't seen what I seen because some of the black guys we done met when I'm with her I say back up this ain't what you think it is so you just get on about your business. I mean I'll tell them in a minute she's gets scared but I'm not scared. Go on about your business, mind your business. We'll go to park sometimes to do our lessons.

**AS:** Yeah, we like going there.

**DD:** And we got, you encounter all kinds of peoples but she don't know. I don't worry about those peoples because when I look at them they know. What not, how far to go, because you can only cross that line I'm going to stop you.

**AS:** Some guy speeding up the street and Douglass yells out, "Where you going in such a hurry?" or something like that and the guy backs up and I'm like, "Nooo. Don't say that." Couldn't help yourself.

**ER:** Outspoken.

**AS:** And the guy left after he talked to us for like a second. They guy just drives on and I'm like ooohh.

**DD:** You know you're wrong. You know you're wrong. We have a school across the street a kid could have been walking across the street. You'd a ran over and you'd have never seen them. He'd never seen them. I met the same guy later on. But like I said.

**AS:** Can I interrupt just for a second? What kind of questions are you guys asking him? I'm curious about that.

**ER:** Well, yeah, we've tailored the questions to kind of focus more so on the experience of your childhood in Danville which we've already talked a little bit about. So you said that you left Danville when you were seventeen but you were in ninth grade at that time. What year were you born?

**DD:** I was born in 1946.

**AS:** Where's my calculator?

**DD:** I was born in 1946 I'm 66 years old.

**AG:** How old were you in 1963?

**DD:** Seventeen.

**ER:** Seventeen.

**AG:** How did you get involved in the riots?

**DD:** Well, Bishop Campbell he was leading the march so he's was out of my neighborhood. Okay he was out of my neighborhood. He said well were going to go downtown and we're going to, we're going to protest. And he organized the peoples. I was young. Hey, that's alright with me. You know, I'm going to go down here and find out what's going on too and it was nothing nice about that. I mean even, they punished peoples after that. Okay. They punished peoples after that. Okay. And we came down here, I guess you guys have heard of Bloody Monday. It's just not the name it was really bloody because they whooped you. They cracked heads. I got a scar on my head right now from that same night. Okay. It's still there. Alright. And it didn't make a whole lot of sense to me why, why we was getting beat like this you know, I mean, the only thing we wanted was to be able to go into a restaurant have a hotdog on the same, I can sit down beside you and eat my hotdog okay.

**AS:** Did you tell them about Martin Luther King?

**DD:** Yeah, and then Dr. King came. And hey when he came we had been through the race riot but we had been through the riot after that and we, I mean, we had been whooped in broad daylight right there on Patton Street. Every white person that was in that town was standing on one side of the street had a stick at least five, three or four feet long and two or three inches

round and tell us get off the court house steps. We locked hands and said we shall overcome. And they said well ya'll going to overcome all right. And they turned and fire hoses loose that's when I discovered water was powerful. I mean you get shot down in the street with a fire hose that's some powerful stuff. That water is powerful, okay. Then later on Dr. King came and he was preaching non-violence. He say, "Well you can't beat them with a weapon, you got to beat them with your mind. Cause if you fight them with a weapon he makes the weapon so how can you win?" Said if you can't out think him them you ain't going to win cause he controls all the weapons. He makes them. And I learned from that moment that one day I met him, that one day, made a difference in my whole life. That one day. I never forget that day. That one day.

**AS:** Where were you?

**DD:** We was right on High Street.

**AS:** That's right. The church with the red roof?

**DD:** That church with the red roof was right on High Street. I remember that day. One day, he said, "You cannot beat the white man with a gun because he make the gun. He said you have to out think that man." And that one statement stayed with me from that day to this day and I carried it with me as went about, but I didn't hold no prejudice against white peoples because I got a couple of good white friends. Okay. Me and them was bosom buddies. Cause all of ya'll ain't bad. I mean all ya'll ain't bad. I mean right there on Main Street, right there at Main Street and what's that Main Street and, right there where...

**AS:** Union?

**DD:** No, Virginia Bank right down the street. Right there at Main Street and Craghead. What's the street after Craghead?

**AS:** Spring? Market?

**DD:** No. No. It's a little short street. Lynn Street right there. I had a white police man he was going to crack me beside my head in broad daylight. This white man from nowhere I never seen him in my life. Tall white guy, I remember he was tall, about six foot tall. He had blonde hair. That police man when he hit me with the billystick that man reached and got that billystick away and said no you ain't going to hit that kid. Said, "You ain't going to do that." He said "Go on down the street." I went on down around the corner but if he hadn't of stopped that man that man would have cracked my head. Just because I jay walked. Just because I jay walked.

**ER:** And that was on Blood Monday or that was a different?

**DD:** No that was a different. That was a different day.

**AS:** Just because you were black and he was white.

**DD:** He was a police officer. He was going to crack me upside the head with his billystick. This white guy stepped and this guy he said enough. He just grabbed the man by his arm and pulled him away from me. He said go on down the street. I went on around the corner. See that's why I say all of ya'll ain't bad. I mean it's just a few. It's just a few. It's just a few. We realize we all was human. I'm black and you white but if I cut my arm it bleeds red blood, if I cut your arm it going to bleed the same blood. So what's the difference? What's the difference? In blood, red. Okay. But we as Americans we can't see that. I mean we got a long ways to go. A long ways to go. Right here, we got a long ways to go.

**AS:** Um, Douglass has lived up north, DC area and other, everywhere, and he notices a difference just in the same state. Just this far south.

**DD:** Yeah, it's a difference. It's a big difference. It's a big difference. Now you find prejudice up there. Some people prejudice up there too. There's more camouflage than anything. I mean, black peoples are more accepted. Always been have since, ever since the Civil War. They been more because the white Northerns came down to help the black peoples to try to get out of slavery. I mean, it was the Union soldiers they was not from the South. They was from the North. They came down here to fight against racists. They didn't have to. They didn't have to but they thought like it was unjustice. So there's a lot of them gave their life just for that cause. A lot of, we don't look at it like, a lot of people don't examine but a lot of white peoples gave their lives to help black people. A lot of them. A lot of black people, white peoples in the union war gave their life just help, just to try to abolish slavery. See my grandmother was a slave. Okay. And it's I could never see...it was unjustified to impose on another man's will. It's still unjustified. Okay.

**AS:** How old are you?

**DD:** I'm 66.

**AS:** I know. Your grandmother was a slave. You father's mother or your mother's mother.

**DD:** My mother's mother.

**AS:** Good grief. I didn't know that.

**DD:** My mother's mother was a slave.

**ER:** Did she talk to you about it?

**DD:** Now my mother's mother died when I was born but she told my mother to tell me one day white man speak with a forked tongue. That means they'll lie to you. Okay. But it's a shame that one of the greatest countries on the universe, I mean there's been Jewish slavery. There's been all kinds of people in slavery. Not only black people. See black peoples, a lot of us fail to realize we weren't the only peoples in slavery. There is white peoples in slavery. Okay. They had white peoples in slavery, if you was poor, they would make you a slave. They didn't discriminate because all they want was somebody to do their free labor. Okay. Okay. Okay. The white man that ran the plantation, the white man that issued all the order was free but the man that he gave the orders to...

**ER:** It makes a noise, the video camera makes a noise [Talking to AS who was about to turn on the ceiling fan].

**AS:** I'm gunna melt! [Discussing the temperature of the room]

**ER:** Sorry we tried, we tried.

**DD:** See we're not the only race of peoples in slavery. I learned as I went through life, black peoples weren't the only people in slavery. I mean they had Jewish people in slavery. They had all kinds of people in slavery because it was always a group of peoples trying to impose their ideas on another group. I mean, it was always a group of peoples trying to impose their ideas. Trying to break. The only thing about us they broke us. They made a black man change his name, made him change his language. Now I met people from Africa, they don't like black Americans. And we all black. But they think they're much better than you. What make you think? I mean, I bet black Africans, people from Africa, oh man, like who? I'm better than you. How you better than me and we both black. Because it's there mentality that, they been taught that, they won't accept the idea that we all one agenda. It's a terrible thing but that's the way it is. You can see it right here today. You meet peoples. I was working at a nursing home before, my last job here in Virginia, in a nursing home. I met a little girl from Africa and she was telling me about some part of Texas she was going to. I was telling her about when I was through there. It was real racist for black people. Oh no. no. no. I said what make you think you so different. You black they at looking at different because you're from Africa. They looking at the color of your skin. She couldn't believe it. I said well you go there and you'll find out. You know. See people that judge now. Well I mean it's a terrible thing in American man. I mean it's terrible. You can go to, you can go to Germany and be treated better than you be treated here.

**AS:** Because they don't have that slave

**DD:** mentality. Yeah.

**AS:** Some people were looking at the houses next to me and they're a black couple we just met yesterday and they both have British accents. They come from London. I wonder if they would have a different attitude about these things.

**DD:** When so called slavery came got freed we went everywhere. We went everywhere. We just didn't stay in one area we went everywhere because black ancestors they felt like it was better if I went over there. If it was better if I went here. You know. And it turns out that why you find a lot of them with British accents. You got black Frenchmens. I mean I met a black lady from, she was French. I said what? she said yeah. I said whoa wait a minute. See when you don't know you don't know. When you don't know you don't know. Yeah but Danville still has a long ways to go.

**ER:** Is this the church you attended when you were a kid?

**DD:** Yeah, I'm a member of this church. No I didn't attend this church when I was a kid. When I was a kid black peoples couldn't come in this church.

**AS:** This was a white church?

**DD:** This was a white church. Only black man that came in this church was the man that cleaning up the church.

**AS:** Where did you go to church when you were a kid?

**DD:** Industrial Avenue, a little church called Holy Ghost Church.

**AS:** That's not where Bible Way is, is it?

**DD:** No bible way is on Industrial Avenue. Bible Way just came into existence.

**AS:** Oh, that's newer, yeah.

**DD:** But it's a little church that's been there for fifty years I know. Bible Way just when Bishop Campbell started Bible way, he's the apostle now. He got was the title Apostle Campbell he first came to Liberty Hill. He had a big military tent. Okay. When he first came to my neighborhood he had a big army tent maybe you could fit 200 peoples in and he didn't leave he stayed there. That's was in the early part of the sixties, then the Civil Rights came along. Okay. Then he

became one of the stronger members of the Civil Rights movement here. And he led us through the demonstration time and he ain't always been as well off as he had he was a poor man too. Okay. And he stood up and led peoples downtown he's the one that led us on Bloody Monday. Okay. He the one that led, that spear headed the demonstrations, the Civil Rights here. He became one of the strongest leaders here in the Civil Rights. Okay.

**AG:** Do you remember any of the other protests other than Bloody Monday? We know that there was the one at the library.

**AS:** The library which was the Sutherlin mansion, there was a protest there?

**AG:** Yea.

**DD:** No I don't remember that I probably left by that time.

**ER:** It was like a sit-in kind of, more so right.

**DD:** I remember when you rode the city bus you had to get on the back. You could get on the front and put your dime in there but you had to go to the back of the bus. I remember that one. Years ago I mean, certain buses white people didn't get on anyway. Ain't no body coming through there unless they got a key [*In reference to a noise coming from the church door.*]

**AS:** I thought it was the roof falling in from the rain.

**DD:** Some of that stuff up there is falling, when they was working on the roof they haven't got to that area yet. I was telling them they have to get to that area that was one of the main areas. But it's one of those things that you know you didn't go through it was terrible here. But it's got a little bit better. They had to change after Bishop Campbell kept marching and kept marching and they began to accept and to change the laws okay. They began to change. I remember when, when one, wasn't one black policeman in this town. And it this was I think is name was Terry. He had been in the military and he was retired from the military or something. He was a military police but he became a Danville policeman. And at that time he couldn't arrest a white man. When he first started off. When he first started on the police force, he could not arrest a white man. He could arrest a black man but he couldn't arrest a white man.

**AS:** Unbelievable.

**DD:** I got a friend that became a cop right here that I grew up with they didn't allow him to associate okay like the project, we call it the project. They didn't allow him to associate with the boys in the projects and he grew up with us.

**AS:** So all of a sudden he had to cut off his friendships because he was a cop.

**DD:** He then cut it off, I think he quit.

**AS:** Wow. And that's what they wanted him to do.

**ER:** And what year was that?

**DD:** That was '62, '63. If you can't, he had a brother named Dwayne Logan. He became a Danville cop he was the second black Danville cop. And they didn't allow them to arrest white people. You know it was quiet as it kept but I got this one from them right. They didn't allow them to arrest white peoples. So when I came back here and they had all these black cops I was shocked. I was really in shock. I said what?

**AS:** And that was for the better.

I said okay. You got some of these black cops just as mean as these white cops. I mean serious you got some black cops just as worst than the white ones. Okay. I don't know why but that's the way it is. But like I say in the 60s they had a brother named Terry he came out of the military and he became a Danville police, on the police force. Then they got my friend Dwayne Logan he became a Danville policeman. But he couldn't arrest a white man. I mean they told him one time that he couldn't associate with the people that he grew up with. That's how rough that was. How you going to? I mean somebody you known all your life who we went to elementary school together, we played in the sandboxes together. How you going to tell these people they can't associate with these people because you're a police man? You know I mean, like I said I came back here and they had all these black police I was kind of shocked. Really? Well. But then time changes everything.

**AS:** Let me just ask. Do you have any other questions?

**ER:** Well we have this question that we like to ask, how would you describe growing up in the Dan River Region? Pick three words. You can maybe compare and contrast maybe three words that you felt growing up and then three words, the way you feel about living here today.

**DD:** I would like to leave here. I would like to leave here really. I would like to leave here. Because some things I, I'm not used to cause I went to the North and I learned different. Okay. And when I grew up I didn't know any better but when I went away I learned, okay? I learned. But if I had a choice I'd move tomorrow okay but due to circumstances right now I have no choice. But Danville still has a lot of growing to do. It's still a lot of, most black peoples ain't

going to talk to you about the 60s because I had to give this a whole lot of thought myself. I even talked to couple of my friends that I grew up with cause I wanted to get their approval. Okay. Because we're like this. I mean I couldn't just I wouldn't just want to step out and then they'll pick up the paper and say, see this in the paper and say, oh we'll go get that fella. You know some of them would come chew me out. Since she told me about you I talked to a couple of them. They said okay I think you can handle it. I said well I come talk to you because I know how we are. Okay well I think. I said whenever I tell them something if you look around you see it in a paper or something I don't want you to get mad at me. You know. Because out of respect that I have for these guys. That's why I went and talked to them. Okay.

**AS:** You know when we first talked about this Douglass said cause it was mostly about childhood and growing up but then he said that the 60s were very painful and he didn't want to talk about it necessarily because it brings up, you know, it was scary times, probably exciting but also you could really get killed.

**DD:** I mean at one time if you got caught in a certain area you going to get, the white boys would whoop you're head. At a certain time, a night, if you were somewhere at a certain time of night, you better be in your neighborhood. You must be in your neighborhood. Okay. At a certain time, you had better be in your neighborhood because if a white cop caught you somewhere he would charge you with something that you had nothing to do with. Okay. I mean it was crazy but we knew this.

**AS:** Like unwritten rules almost.

**DD:** We knew this, at certain times that you better be at home in your neighborhood where you felt safe. Okay. I mean you hear of the Klu Klux Klans. The Klu Klux Klan used to live here. Same man you see downtown you might meet him at night with a sheet on his head trying to kill you. It was scary. It was really scary. It was nothing easy. That was one of the reasons when I got big enough I left here because I felt like there's something better somewhere else and a lot of black my age when they got bigger they left. When they got old enough they left. They left. Some of them joined the military some of them just, we all left. It was a handful that didn't go anywhere but the majority of us we left. And we began to come back as we get old, as we got older some of us come back. But when we was, shoot we left as quick as we could. As quick as we could we left.

**AS:** Did you tell them about being a newspaper boys when you were little?

**DD:** Oh yeah. I sold a lot of newspapers because like I say that you got three cent on a dime so three cent on a dime I mean if you made twelve, fifteen, twenty dollars a week sometimes you could be happy that was a lot of money at that time. If you had twenty dollars you had a lot of

money okay. You had a lot of money but you could do more with it because things was cheaper. Okay. Like I told you my mother had ten children, ten, my father died in 1956. My mother was uneducated but she took care of us. We never went hungry. I mean I look back and I wonder sometimes how did she do it. How did she do it? But she did it. Okay. I mean she did it you know and I salute her today because like I told you she instilled one thing in me wherever you go keep your clothes clean, don't go no where looking like a tramp, and always keep a job. You know. She said I always want you to keep a job I don't care what kind of job it is boy I want you to keep a job and I managed to do that.

**AG:** Was the newspaper job your first job?

**DD:** Yeah, that was my first job.

**AG:** How old were you when you started?

**DD:** Oh I think I was maybe 8 or 9, somewhere in that area.

**AG:** Did you do that until you became a dishwasher?

**DD:** Yeah, I became a dishwasher when I was about fifteen. Okay. But I did newspapers because I had a big route. I mean I built my route up. You know the more customers you got that means more money you're going to make. So in the evening when I got out of school I would ride my bicycle from Gibson School on Industrial Avenue downtown to the Danville Bee, it was on Patton Street down there and I'd get the newspapers. And I'd go to Dan River Mill over there my Woodall Chevrolet because another brother had the gate over there on Union Street. You couldn't take his gate because brother called Pinkey Lee, Pinkey Lee had that gate so I went down there and Pinkey Lee was a big guy, bigger than me so he'd run me away. So I said wait a minute if he's smart enough to, peoples coming out of this gate over here there's got to be another gate across the bridge. So I went across the bridge.

**AS:** Where the laundry used to be?

**DD:** Yeah, yeah.

**AS:** You pointed that out to me.

**DD:** Yeah I went across the bridge and took. I might go there I might sell ten fifteen papers but that was when you sold then fifteen papers you thought you done real good you did do real good. Okay if I took twenty papers over there and I sold those twenty papers in that days time, in that evening, in that one hours time, then I come back to the Bee and I would fill my paper sack up

and I walk down to Main Street I sell some more then when I leave Main Street I go to my neighborhood and I had neighborhood customers that I could, they got a paper everyday and everyday my paper route, I may have 40, 50 customers, I was getting fifty cent a piece from my customers every week. So I think I was like paying the Danville Bee like 12 dollars a week they was getting. I was paying them 12 dollars a week but anything else over the twelve dollars I kept. Okay. I kept. So like I say I made enough money one year to buy my sister some clothes, my brother some clothes, me some clothes, so we could go to school. So to me that was incredible.

**ER:** Just for our final question, who would you identify as your childhood hero?

**DD:** Who would I identify as my childhood hero? Muhammad Ali.

**AG:** What about Muhammad Ali stuck out to you?

**DD:** Because when Muhammad Ali won the heavyweight championship he announced his self as a black Muslim. Okay and I could see the fear on the white guys faces because he said he wanted to be Muslim. The little white peoples in the crowd I could see they wanted to know why he wanted to be a Muslim. And when I joined the Muslims it was after that. First thing they asked me said why do you want to be a Muslim? I said I'm seeking knowledge, how to be a real man, how to me a black man. And I learned. I met Muhammad Ali. Okay. And he's always been my hero. Then I got a friend that I grew up right here with named Robert Trent. Robert Trent is my hero because he joined the military he gave twenty-one years in the military and I tell all the fellas that I grew up with that Trent is my hero because he survived Vietnam twice. He survived Vietnam twice so he's my hero but Muhammad Ali has always been my idol. You know he's always been when he was Cassius Clay I just fell in love with him because he could box so good. But a Danville hero my friend Robert Trent. Master Sargent Trent. He's still here. After twenty-one some years in the military he's still here and we, we didn't see each other for years but we never lost our friendship. You know we never lost our friendship. So he's my hero Robert Trent.

**ER:** That's all the time we have for today but thank you so much.

**DD:** Alright thank ya'll.

**AG:** We know this isn't easy and we really appreciate you taking the time.

**DD:** Well like I said, I had to think about this thing. I had to think about do I want to do this. Okay. Then I went to talk to a couple of friend of mine before ya'll showed up since she told me about you wanting to do this. I heard you was some young school kids trying to get some info you know and I said okay. I think I'll do it. So.

**AG:** You've given us so much to think about and so much to learn from. Thank you so much. Can we just take a regular photo of you? So we have a glamour shot.

**DD:** Okay.

**AG:** Yesterday was actually the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the second time Martin Luther King came to Danville I learned that today.

**DD:** You know Dr. King lived on the other side of the church over there. The white house on the other side over there if you go on the other side brick church Dr. King would stay in that house when he came here and couple years ago they spent two hundred and some thousand dollars remodeling this place because it's a historical moment. Over on the other side of the Presbyterian church, that white house over there on the corner. Dr. King stayed in that house.