

Alfredrick Hughes (Class of 1981), interviewed by Erisa Apantaku and Olivia Obineme on May 20th, 2018.

Erisa Apantaku (EA): can you say your name and spell it.

Alfredrick Hughes (AH): Alfredrick Hughes. A L F R E D R I C K H U G H E S.

EA: Perfect. And then um, okay, pull up questions. One sec here. Sorry. When did you start attending Robeson?

AH: In 1978.

EA: One year after it opened.

AH: Absolutely. We were the first class.

EA: How did it feel to be the like the first freshman class? Right. Didn't know because it opened in 77, right? So

AH: You're right 77.

EA: So technically second class, but still going into a new school.

AH: Well, I first went to Corliss High School but I transferred to Robeson because they recruited me out of eighth grade to play basketball for them, but I decided to change schools because my mother was paying for me to go on the bus. But she really couldn't afford it, so I decided to help her out to go to a school where I can walk to because I lived right around the corner.

1:10

EA: That's cool. Do you mind putting your glasses down? Just so I don't get the... Was it exciting going to a newly built school?

AH: I was afraid because I knew nobody there. And um, during that time there was a lot of gang activities going on and that path going to Robeson. You dealt with at least about two different gangs if you're doing one or the other. But fortunately with basketball players, they gave you a pass.

EA: Do you remember the names of the gangs?

AH: The Vice Lords and the P Stone gangsters. I'll never forget that.

EA: Why?

AH: Because you're either part of one or the other. So 66 and Perry you had the Blackstone Rangers then For 71st you had the P Stone rangers, so you had a choice. You better join one or you're not going to school.

2:00

EA: Did you have friends who weren't basketball players and did they have to join one?

AH: Yes, absolutely. All my friends were gangsters. All of them. If you wasn't in sports, you was with a gang, but at the same time, during that time, they wasn't killing each other doing drive by shootings. They was more like a friendship thing. You're the part of a black fraternity.

EA: You already kind of said this. Why did you attend Robeson?

AH: Because, um, like I said, I went to Corliss first, but I just felt so out of place. No friends. I didn't know anybody there, but I just went there as far as the basketball aspects of it. But I just thought it was a burden, my mother's been paying--with nine kids, I'm being the youngest--to go to school.

EA: How did you get the score? You said you walked. Can you tell me the route?

AH: I went from 66 and Perry, up on the viaduct. And it used to be the old Kennedy-King was right there. We cut through. You went to Parker, and Robeson right there.

3:05

EA: Did you go to Parker?

AH: No, straight to Robeson.

EA: Cool. Where did you go to a middle school? Grade School?

AH: Deneen.

EA: How long did you attend Robeson?

AH: All four years.

EA: So you graduated

AH: In 81.

EA: Um, do you remember the names of any teachers that stand out to you?

AH: Absolutely. I would say Ms. Adams, and Dr. Simmons was the principal, and my coach Coach Collins.

EA: That's wonderful. Can you talk a little bit more about, um, you said Adam's first, right?

3:43

AH: Yup. She was more like, she was more than a teacher. She was more like everybody mother, she'd do anything for you. [???] you don't know. See, my first year, second year, third year where I played basketball, it was more of um, it wasn't about my education, it was more about the coach is winning, and the coaches really don't care about me. They cared a lot more of winning games and going into my senior year with Coach Collins, he changed my life around because the real truth is they had a system there where you really didn't have to go to school and they padded the grades to make sure that you play basketball. And I went through a system thinking they cared about me for the first three years and maybe they didn't. It about padding your grades. I went times, I didn't go to school for a month. But I passed. But when my mother found out it was funny. One day we sitting up in the house and um, she told me to read the papers going into my senior year.

4:51

AH: I had a hard time doing it. She said, wait a minute, how you get these As and Bs and just read The Sun-Times you have a hard time doing it. And she made one of the biggest moves in my life. I'll never forget. She walked up there at every teacher and the principal. He's off the team. What? I'm off the team? You understand I'm going into my senior year, I was named the best small forward in Illinois, and she said you're off the team. So how do I get a scholarship? So she had every teacher in my principal office and she opened up the Sun-Times, she said, read it.

5:36

AH: And she looked at all of them. How do we have A's and B's? She's said, all y'all are full of it. He's not playing no more. I turn to my mother. Oh my God. Oh my God, you can't do this. I'm going to go to college. I don't want to be back on Perry for rest of my life. So ends up, the best thing that happened to me was I didn't play the first half of my senior year and all the colleges laid back on me so you know what? We can't touch him because he going to the junior college. I went to three schools my senior year. I went to Robeson, night school, Corliss, then I went to Julian for summer school. I needed to get all my grades up, and another thing that all recruiting people came back towards me, and see the thing was then back then when schools came to towards you, the recruiting school, the coaches had some money. They all came in the living room, Mom's talking to them.

6:36

AH: This that. Okay. Depaul, Illinois, Indiana. We could give you this. My mom said, what is this all about? This money. I'm not selling my son to you. And my mother looked at more like, she didn't know the game. The game is this: when they come, they come with money who have the most money, but her thing was this: I'm not selling him. I'm telling my mother went, like, Bobby

Knight. He left. Bobby Knight just left out the house. Mommy, get the money we're broke. That's what they do. I don't do that game, but Loyola came in and said, you know what? He'll getting his education. He's close to home. Then they offered me peanuts, it was an insult. Momma said, you know what, you're going there? Because they didn't come with the bag.

EA: So Bobby Knight was in your house?

7:20

AH: And my mother kicked him out. My mother kicked him out. She kicked him out and Bobby Knight pulled this on me. The Olympics. I led the nation in scoring my senior year. They invited Michael Jordan, everybody, for the Olympics. Bobby Knight held a grudge on me and everybody knew it. How the number one scorer in the country is not invited? Because never forget, his mother threw me out the house. He held that grudge because he invited number two, three, four, five, six leading scorer in the nation. I'm number one, I wasn't invite it.

EA: So how does it feel, like looking back now, like many years later, do you ever think like, do you think, oh, this was like a good idea that my mom did this because she was trying to protect my future? Or do you think like she kind of overstepped?

8:11

AH: I think in hindsight it was the best thing and the best decision. My mother passed when I was a sophomore at Loyola when my mother passed away. It was the best decision she ever made because two months ago I was named the best player in Loyola history and if she would'nt've made that move and... Like, people tell me, you made history. You're the only, at your age, you're the only person, your jersey retired at Loyola, and you was named the best player in the last hundred years. She made a move as my angel, in hindsight, this is what happened to you in the future, and that's how I look at it.

EA: Okay. So I want to double back on this idea. Oh. Of the three teachers that were really impactful in your life. So you explained Adams was, what did she teach?

9:10

AH: English.

EA: And you said she was kind of like the mother figure. In what ways can you, is there a...

AH: Because she was one of the few people that, where, after school you go to her house to eat.

EA: How many people would she have come over?

AH: About 30.

EA: 30 students.

AH: Hmmm. About 30. About 30. At least.

EA: What would she cook?

AH: She wouldn't cook. She'll give us sandwiches and lemonade.

EA: That's so nice. What would you guys do? Just eat?

AH: Talk. Talk about school. Talk about um, our lives. But she was more than a teacher.

EA: What about, talk to me about Dr. Simmons.

AH: Um, her and my mother was very close. My mother passed away and like I said, I was suicidal and I went to her as far as... because during that time there was no such thing as a therapist. I went to her as far as having therapy because I was the youngest and it was [funny?], when I walked away from the funeral, I thought I was okay. But everything I did in my life was about her. And I thought about suicide because when I heard, why would I go on living for? Then Dr. Simmons, every day after school I go to her house, we just talked. And she basically kept me alive.

10:30

EA: Your mother passed away when you were at Loyola?

AH: Yes, my sophomore year.

EA: Where were you living at the time?

AH: I was living downtown.

EA: So you would go down to Englewood-- Where did Simmons live?

AH: Off of 78th and King Drive.

EA: Okay. So you would go down to there and you would afterschool and you would just talking to her?

AH: I had to because like I said, during that time black people didn't go to therapy and I didn't know what therapy was, and at a young age I needed help and she helped me.

11:06

EA: Do you remember what sorts of things she would say, like how did she help?

AH: She would tell me to live for my mother and do the right thing and keep going to school because I wanted to drop out. I just didn't see any motivation because everything I did with my mother was about her. The reason I played basketball was about her. The reason I went to college was about her. It was never about

me, so when she left, my life left. So like right now, I live for my mother and doing the right thing and try to be a good person.

EA: That's very cool. It's also cool that even though at that point Dr. Simmons wasn't your teacher, wasn't your principal. She still, you know, had a big impact on your life.

AH: It was funny. Long story short, my mother knew that before she passed away. I remember I was at her house and she brought out this letter, this letter, and she read it to me. My mother told her to take care of me, a long letter that my mother wrote to her. Did you take care of my son? And she gave her that letter before she passed away, but I don't know why she gave it to her. Which is that you take care of my son.

12:22

EA: Wow.

EA: Did she... how did they get to know each other?

AH: During the time, like I said, why I didn't play for those six months, she got ahold of her and told her what was going on and they bonded like sisters.

EA: That's cool.

EA: To go back to that moment, the six months where you were trying to get back on track academically. Um, can you just explain a little bit more in depth what you did, like, at Robeson during that time? And, like, what you said, you went to Robeson, Corliss, and a third place, right?

13:00

AH: Julian.

EA: Julian.

AH: Mmm hmm. Because I had to get my grades back, right? But at the same time, like I said, my first three years. The culture was a lot about winning. It wasn't about academics, it wasn't about-- unfortunately the coaches, they don't prepare you for life. They prepare you to win games and with some of these kids right now, unfortunately afterwards when they stopped playing basketball, are you prepared for life? Are you prepared to be a good person? Are you prepared to get a job and be a citizen? No, you're not prepared. You're prepared to play basketball. That's it. Like I said, my first three years, I was prepared to play basketball. I wasn't prepared to get a job. I wasn't prepared to be out in society and be a good person. I was taught basketball. But my senior year Coach Collins taught me how to be a man. He taught me how school is important. He taught me, if you don't make it to the NBA, what are you going to do? What can you do? And that's a question a lot of coaches don't do. What can you do if you don't make it to the NBA. And most people will say, you know what?

14:07

AH: I have no answer for you.

EA: Coach Collins. This is not for Fabray Collins, right? No, no, because he was football.

AH: No. Robert Collins.

EA: Okay. Was there any relation between them?

AH: No.

EA: Okay, cool. Just checking. Um, so at Robeson you took, did you take like three classes at Robeson? Like English and math and then you took like science...

AH: Right. To make up for those grades. So I was basically at school I didn't have a break because after school, I went to night school, then after night school I went to summer school, then back to night school. Then back to summer school, then back to night school, then back to summer school.

EA: Whoa! To make up three years.

AH: Exactly.

EA: Wow. That's dedication.

AH: I got home. I left home at 8:00 in the morning. I got home at 10:30 at night for six months.

15:04

EA: Wow.

EA: When the first three years at Robeson. You said once you didn't go to school for a whole month?

AH: Yeah, because what they did was the coaches--see my coach was my counselor. He had control of the teachers, so therefore they padded the grades. So, I didn't have to show up.

EA: What did you do?

AH: Ran around in the streets? I left home, played, then came back.

EA: With who?

AH: With the gangsters. We did.

EA: I was gonna say earlier you were saying we didn't want to join a gang.

AH: No, but we played basketball on the courts, so I came back home, as though I went to school. But when your grades are padded, Momma looks at my grades--A's and B's--why should she question me. That's the game they played.

EA: Wow.

15:59

EA: You've kind of already touched on this, but can you describe your friend group and say what you did in school and out of school?

AH: Well, my mother real strict that we didn't do the House party thing or the basement thing. There was no smoking, no drinking. It was basically coming home at 8:00 and there really wasn't much of a social life because it was nine of us. It was nine people. She kept us really close together and made sure we didn't deal with the gangs.

EA: So your friend group was mostly your siblings?

AH: Absolutely.

EA: Cool.

EA: What was your favorite class?

AH: Good question. I didn't really have one because I really didn't have to deal with it.

EA: Not even in the last year when you were...

AH: Ms. Simmons. I would say English.

16:55

EA: But this is not Jacqueline Simmons.

AH: No.

EA: Different Simmons.

AH: Mmm Hmm.

EA: Talk to me about that class. Why is it your favorite?

AH: Because all my buddies were there. We got along great and um, she cared about us. You can always tell when a teacher cares about you because when they talk about your life and you can call them. Some teacher, they be there from 9:00 to 3:00 and they done with you, but certain teachers you can call them.

EA: What would you call on Ms. Simmons for

AH: Advice. Um, the stress of going to school from 8:00 to 10:30. Having no friends.

EA: What did she say?

AH: I'm proud of you keep doing the right thing and you'll be okay and you're going to college.

EA: That's amazing. And that was before you actually knew, right? She was inspiring you.

17:54

AH: Yeah. Mmm hmmm.

EA: That's cool.

EA: What about, um, this seems kind of obvious but favorite extracurricular activity?

AH: Basketball.

EA: Talk to me about the team. Like what was that like?

AH: Well, like I said, we had--like you see that picture, right there? There were some gangsters on that team, but about four of those guys became lifetime friends that I really love. It's like a family outside the family.

EA: That's cool. What would you do like in school or between games or before or after practice? Like I want to get a sense for the community of the basketball team. What was it like?

AH: Well everybody is brought up on the South Side took a lot of pride in Robeson because you had Simeon, you had CVS, Julian, and Corliss. There was something about the teams we played against. But Robeson, my senior year, we ended up beating everybody that year. So, there was just a sense of pride.

19:00

EA: So, it was kind of this like the team had a... yeah, I, I, I know. I know that feeling where you're like, we know we do good work.

AH: Mmm hmm

EA: We take pride in each other.

AH: Mmm hmmm. Because we was jealous of teams like Corliss, Simeon. They had their pretty uniforms. We had, we sold Snickers and to just have gym shoes. We had to sell it, going around the block. We had to sell it. Simeon, and Corliss, Julian, they had money, they had pretty uniform and they had pretty gym shoes and we was always like secondary to them. But we ended up, my senior year, we beat every team in the state. It's amazing.

EA: I was reading, this might've been probably before your time or maybe after, but I was reading about rivalry with King High School. Right?

20:00

AH: It was King, Robeson, Simeon, and Phillips were the top teams.

EA: Okay. I think it wasn't necessarily your time, but it was like one year like King won and then the next year Robeson almost won, beat King, but then it. Yeah...

AH: The top four teams was Simeon, King, Robeson and Phillips.

EA: That's cool.

EA: That's interesting that they had so much more money. Do you know why?

AH: Because their program, because their program was more successful and that neighborhood, it's like they care more and the teachers and the parents was more together as far as helping those kids out

EA: Like a booster club.

AH: Exactly. Something was going on. They had money. We didn't.

EA: You sold Snickers?

AH: Yup.

EA: Wow. Um, what was the learning environment like?

21:00

AH: I would say more it wasn't about to the learning environment. It was about how much your parents cared because the parents have to be involved. If not, you can't have a teacher be your parent and your teacher. That's impossible. It's more of a parent. How much you gonna do when your kid get home to monitor them or they will be disruptive as far as going to school. So unfortunately these days they want the teachers paying them, what, \$45,000, to be either their father or their mother, but more than the parent. we keep blaming the teacher when we refused to pay them because you're not going to pay me \$45,000 and this kid and this kid and this kid right here I'm almost afraid of them. Because these days you talk back to a teacher, you do it. The teacher put they hands on you, you're going to jail, and you got stressed me out for \$45,000. I don't think so.

22:00

EA: Do you think when you were a student at Robeson there were more parents that were invested.

AH: Absolutely. Absolutely. They used to coming through the schools, pick up your grades, they knew the teachers, but these days unfortunately the teachers have no relationship with the parents because the parents not being parents. We go see this kid, take care of them, feed them, and the kid when they get back home until like 10:30 at night, where this kid been all day. We won't blame the teachers. The parents have to look in the mirror and blame themselves.

EA: Do you think your mom, when she heard that you didn't know how to read, do you think she thought that? Thought, what have I done?

AH: No, because like I said, what they did was they padded my grades to the point where she had no clue. She said, um, she said, I'm looking at As and Bs, how would you know?

EA: That's a good point. There was a lot going on there.

AH: Right, because the whole system, they said he's that good. They didn't look at my future. They looked at how can we help him win and help win games right now, but until my senior year when she got a hold of things, the whole school knew what's going on. The teachers know what's going on, but the same time, it's about winning games. Unfortunately with these kids it's about winning the games and it's not about preparing these kids for a future. Preparing them for college. Preparing them for life. It's not about that. It's about how many state championships I got. How can you help me win those state championships? And that's that. Because it's like hitting the lottery to go to the NBA. How many kids gonna hit the lottery. It's like you hitting the lottery, me hitting the lottery. It's a lottery game. What, one out by five million kids make it to the NBA. So, what do you do? All those kids who's in the streets who's not prepared for life, playing gangsters, drug dealers.

23:56

EA: What? Were there any negative learning experiences? I mean, you've already touched on it in terms of like you not learning and then prioritizing your basketball over academics, but in terms of like, do you feel like the environment was conducive to learning for students that wanted to learn?

AH: Yes. If you want it to. If you wanted to. like I said, my first three years, unfortunately with coaches, you have to teach these kids how to be men, it's not about you, not about the plaques, it's not about the state championship, but can you teach young men. And that's one of the reasons if I'm going into coaching, it's not about how many games I can win with you, it's about did I prepare you to be a man in life. It's not about the wins and losses. Not about you need to hit free throw, but when you leave me, did I make you better as a man or did I make you better as a basketball player. Take your choice. I want to make sure you're better as a man. I'm not guaranteeing you're going to the NBA, but I can guarantee you when you go into life, when people look at you, they going to see, you know what, somebody touched him. That's more important than Anything else.

25:10

EA: When was that Collins you're [coach]?

AH: My senior year.

EA: Just senior year?

AH: Yes.

EA: Who was your coach before?

AH: It was coach Hickman. Coach Cox my first three years. Because see, Coach Cox, he was the coach at King High School. He got upset when he didn't get the varsity job and see I [looked up to?] him. He was my counselor, so he was able to run that situation to push me through. But like I said, the man, when he went to King and just think about this, he won about 4 state championships and then developed one NBA player. Something's wrong with that picture. Very wrong picture.

26:01

EA: Because he was just pushing people through.

AH: And unfortunately. They call him a legend. He's not a legend. A Legend build men. He built championships and not one player went to the NBA. And not one player will deal with him. What's wrong with that picture?

EA: Describe your Robeson experience with five words.

AH: Best time of my life, as far as a kid. Great learning experience, as far as being an Englewood and surviving Englewood, because you have to survive Englewood. Englewood is a jungle. You have to survive it and you need help from the community to survive. If not, you get caught in that trap, in that jungle, it's still a jungle.

27:01

EA: How?

AH: Because unfortunately, with the killings going on, it's just a terrible rotation where nothing really changed and until they stopped looking for other people to change the neighborhood, it'll never change. We're looking for somebody else. We were looking for Father Pflieger. We looking to this person to march. Until the parents step up and name these people killing people, because these drive by shootings, that's somebody's son. That's somebody's sister. That's somebody's brother. We know who they are and they're sleeping with us. They go home. We know who they are. These aren't kids coming from the North Side. This is your brother. This is your cousin. And until we change that, it won't change.

EA: What about when you were a kid? How was it a jungle?

27:56

AH: There was no drive by shootings, but at the same time there was always gangsters. They was always been going on that you can get in trouble with, but during that time we had parents where they were telling each other, they were telling the kids, your kid did this, your kid did this. You came home to a whooping. These days, you're not coming home to a whooping. You're not coming home at all if you don't have to.

EA: What were the bad things that you could've gotten swept up in

AH: Selling drugs, selling drugs. The was the thing to do. If you didn't make it, as far as going to college, sell drugs. sell drugs. Right now, sell drugs and you'll make money.

EA: What drugs?

28:38

AH: Marijuana was really big and cocaine. Man, you gotta hold of some cocaine back then, you was big. Now it's crack, but cocaine back then. If we got, if you were big enough to get a hold of a kilo, you was real big in the neighborhood. You had your Cadillac, you had your house, you had your women. And when kids see that, that's their role model because during that time, unfortunately as you see, we didn't have role models. We had Dr. King, we had Malcolm X, but think about this. Who are we looking up to right now? It's not Jesse Jackson, that's for sure. Maybe Farrakhan if you're a certain religious, but... Obama. Who else? Who else

be stepping back to the South Side neighborhood to be saying, you know what, we respect you. We'll listen to you. Father Pfleger?

29:33

EA: When you were a kid, who did you look up to? Who did you want to be?

AH: We looked up to Martin Luther King. He was everybody's role model at that time, or if it you was kind of a halfway radical, it was Malcolm X. Those are the only two.

29:50

EA: How did Robeson prepare you for the rest of your life or not prepare you?

AH: Well, once they got involved in my senior year and I went those three schools, I was prepared. I was ready to go to college, and it was Coach Collins and my mother prepared me for life because like I said, it wasn't guaranteed That I was going to the NBA. But I felt prepared to not to go back to the streets, to do some more positive, to do things that make my mother proud of me.

EA: What specific skills... do you feel like he can point to any specific skills that you learned at Robeson that prepared you? Or you said Collins, you know, prepared you like made you a man, right? What does that mean?

30:44

AH: Your mannerism. How you treat people. To respect people. Because a lot of kids don't respect people. What he taught me was it just basically being a man is being somebody that's humble, respect people, and strive to do anything you can't be anybody else if you can. And don't be selfish because a lot of time, like I said, you can be a man and think you're a man, you can be 50 years old, you're not a man. What you are, you're a grown boy. There's a lot of grown boys out here. You're not a man. How do you respect your woman? How do you take care of your kids? Do you go to work? It's all of the above to be a man and that M-A-N word. People take lightly, but you're just a grown irresponsible boy, and nobody taught you how to be a man.

EA: How did Collins teach you to be a man?

31:36

AH: Because I was disrespectful as far as with teachers because being a basketball player, I was put on this pedestal that I didn't have to respect people because I was good. So, the word "no" was seldom used to me, and my senior year I heard the word "no" a lot of times. But it's just when you're good at something, you're halfway spoiled to certain things and you don't have to follow the rules, and he stopped everything. You will follow the rules, you'll be respectful, or you won't play for me, but I've never heard that word before. It wasn't about me winning games for him. It's about being respectful. And you will follow some rules. And I'm glad he did that to me. He smacked me upside my head, and you gonna follow these rules. and that changed my life because if not for that, if you don't follow rules in life in society, once you get a certain age... go out here at 21 and don't follow these rules. They got a place for you. It's called jail. It's called jail, and sooner or later in your life if you don't follow the rules that people set out for you, there's a place for you. Now they tear

down Robeson and they tear down these schools, but they're building jails for these kids and they building these jails for the Black man. Not for white man, not for Mexican. They building these jails to put us away. They don't want to educate us.

33:12

AH: Because why should any white man want to see a successful black man? Why? That's not his. That's not his job. That's not the mayor's job. That's not the government's job to make sure these young kids are educated and successful. That's not their job. That's the parent's job. And that's what we want to see. We want somebody to step in and solve our problems and we won't solve my own problems. That's why I said, if you see the news, somebody drove by and shot somebody. Who did it? You know who did it? It's Joe, it's Jack, it's John. You know who did it, but we are protecting criminals and that's sad.

34:00

EA: When... when Colin's smacked you. Did he do it more than once?

AH: He had to. until I got it.

EA: Was it during practice? Before Games. After Games.

AH: During class. We told you about this. If you don't do what you got to do, you're done. We're kicking you out. You're done.

EA: Did he teach a class to you?

AH: No.

EA: But he would come into class.

AH: Absolutely.

AH: Where are you?

AH: What you're doing because you--I had a choice: either going to do this the right way or join a gang, which one you want to do? But everyone, like I said, it took a community because my mother was involved, my coach was involved, my teacher was involved. Everybody had to be involved. Everybody had to be involved. If not, you just can't have the teacher involved the mother not involved. Everybody have to get involved. If not, you're looking at failure. It just like, what you tell me, you went to Princeton. People was involved in your life to go to Princeton. That's a really big thing. And you thought people in your life, people was involved. A lot of people because can't too many people say and walk around I went to Princeton. That's a lot of dedication.

35:20

EA: True, true.

EA: Yes. And you're right. It took a lot of people to get me there.

AH: Absolutely.

EA: Um, how do you feel about Robeson closing?

AH: I'm sad about it because unfortunately the history of Paul Robeson himself, you've taken away. You're taking away a legendary man who was a hero and you take away Paul Robeson and you will change it into another name. To me that comes from the top and as... who made the decision to disrespect one of our heroes Paul Robeson? That these kids won't even know about Paul Robeson and we're going to erase his name and turn it into something academy. What does something academy mean to the South Side, nothing. But you'll take away Paul Robeson name off that building and turn it into an academy for who? Right then and there that's telling you we're going to find a way to erase your heroes and that's sad to me because now you are bring three different schools together, three different sets of gangsters together, and nobody to the big picture. You just took away Paul Robeson, one of our heroes, and erased it. And nobody's going to stand to that.

36:46

EA: What do you think about? So there's this idea of like legacy, right? Like Paul Robeson history. The community will, will not be reminded of Paul Robeson's history.

AH: No.

EA: What do you think about in terms of without that legacy piece, what it means to have a school that's been in the community for 40 years torn down and the students who currently go there can't go to the new school.

37:10

AH: It's a form of disrespect. It's a form that... you know what, to show the government, and to show the mayor we're not going for this state, You know what I say: Transfer your kids to another school. Nobody goes to that school. You built that school. We're not going. If Paul Robeson's not on that name, on that school, transfer your kids to someplace else and let that building be there by itself. And why could that [change things that way?], because unless we make a change, they won't make a change. To take away Paul Robeson, right up in our faces and we gone push this on you, it's a smack in the face. It's a smack in the face.

EA: That kind of leads into my next question which is what do you want to see in the new school?

38:02

AH: How well are you going to prepare these kids for college? Like Homewood Flossmoor. These kids up a prepared for college? Are you preparing them for college and how dedicated are these teachers going to be? and you need security there too, so these kids can have a path to go to school and go home. Cause you bringing three different sets of gangs in one school. Can that kid... can that kid turn out to be like you? Is there a possibility one of these kids can go to Princeton. Because we know, like Homewood Flossmor, they're set up to go to Princeton. But at the same time if you stick with having the same rotation of kids maybe don't want to go to school, teachers really don't care, what you building the new school for? Where are your millions of dollars going? What's your point? If you gonna have the same ugly rotation. And somebody gotta

make up my mind that when this new school come, what's new about it? If the system is still old. That's my question.

39:14

EA: It sounds like you also want it to still be named Paul Robeson.

AH: Yes. I think as far as our history is concerned, you're on the South Side and [unfortunately?] give these kids a sense of pride and a sense of history about the South Side, and why do you think it necessary to change the name of one of my heroes. Who made that decision? Why we had to change the name of my heroes?

EA: What's one of the most striking memories you have of Robeson?

40:00

AH: I will say during that time with Robeson everybody was a family. We had a family sense to everybody. Everybody. We just go to each of the house and eat over there, play over there. But it was more of a family and um, you [dismiss?] that as being a kid because like I said, we didn't go through bad times, but we all watched out for each other. I don't see that right now. I just, when I go to the community I see a bunch of vacant houses. That's all I see.

EA: So that community aspect.

AH: Yup. Yup.

EA: Is there a particular story you could tell me that illustrates that?

40:45

AH: See, back in the old days, it was like there was no such thing as running away because you couldn't run to somebody else's house because they wouldn't allow you in they house. There was no such thing as talking back to your mother. There's no such thing as drive by shootings. That was unheard of. It was no such thing as far as... see, during that time, we protected our women. We had a sense of pride. You protected the kids. You didn't sell drugs around kids. You didn't... You didn't pick anybody up who didn't deserve it, but everything's so random right now because the sense of respect have left our community and that's what you see what's going on right now. Sense of... nobody respect the community. It's basically I'm going to do. And if I have to do about to do something bad to you, so be it and nobody will open up they mouth. If somebody did something bad, in those days, we know who did it. If somebody got robbed, we know who did it. This is not random. There was no such thing of somebody gonna shoot somebody. If you had a fight, you had a fight, you got over it. You got your lip busted, you cried, you talked to each other the next day playing basketball. But these day somebody wants to shoot you. For what? Until we start back loving ourselves, we gonna keep killing ourselves. It's that vicious rotation. Because we stopped loving ourselves. That's what I think anyway.

42:27

Olivia Obineme (OO): Are there any last things you want to say about Robeson? If there's any piece of advice that you would give to students? So like the students, uh, the underclassmen, they can't, they won't be finishing their schooling even at the new school.

AH: Really? Where are they going?

OO: We don't know. So, they had... a couple of months ago they had a student fair, a school fair for these students to get to know some other schools, um, obviously outside the neighborhood.

AH: So why can't they finish up their schooling at Robeson?

EA: So, so, so yeah. So Robeson's going to be torn down. It's already starting to be taken apart.

OO: Yeah, this summer. And the new school won't be opened until fall of next year.

EA: And then once it's open, like if you're a current freshman, even once that school opens, like and you'll be a junior, you can't go to it.

43:35

AH: Why? What's the rules?

EA: We don't know yet.

OO: I don't know yet.

EA: We haven't had the interview yet.

AH: So, you're telling me if you're a freshmen, they open up and you're a junior, you can't go there. It's pretty obvious. What they want to do is we want to completely clean out anything left from this school, including the students, and we're going to bring in a select set of students to go here. So, it's pretty obvious they're telling the people in the neighborhood we don't want your children no more, we don't want this garbage anymore, and we're going to bring in our own system and we going to bring in the people who we want, and we will choose them. That right there in that community. And let everybody know we don't want you.

44:27

AH: I can't go back. Why? What did I do wrong? We don't want this old blood no more. We gonna flush everybody out, put a new system here. And it wouldn't shock me. No disrespect. You're gonna look up and less than five years, that's school gonna be at least 60 percent white and we will protect those kids and y'all won't deal with those kids and we can protect our community. Those kids will be able to get on the El station that's right down the street, four blocks, and walk to that school and they're going to get prepared for college, but you people in this neighborhood, touch these kids if you want to. And that's sad and it's coming. It's right up in our face. We're going to make that school a white school. We gonna get the best education. We gonna bringing the teachers and pay them. To come from the suburbs, downtown to teach these kids and that's what's going to happen. Because the teachers right now, they probably getting \$45,000, \$50,000. We'll

pay you \$90,000 to go that new academy on the South Side and they will come for \$90,000 and they will get the best of the best.

45:47

OO: So what do you say to those students that won't be able to finish school at Robeson. They have to deal with the process that CPS is putting them through, so they're giving them some, they call them a transitional, it's like a transitional process. They've given them there like some sort of counseling and some sort of, um, they've given some kind of transportation

AH: Like a voucher?

OO: Vouchers and stuff. What advice do you have for those kids?

46:21

AH: Unfortunately, what they doing to those kids right now, they throwing you away. We throwing you away. We gonna give you vouchers move over here, go over here but I don't see, unfortunately, where is the outrage from these parents. There should be an absolute outrage. You're throwing my child away. My child could not live four blocks from there. Now you gonna send them all the way over here because you don't want my child. Why can't my child finish up there with the new computers you've got to come up with, with all the academics you will come up with and all the things will come up with why can't my child enjoy this? What did my child do? Somebody like you coming up. Why could you enjoy that? They gonna throw you away? Because there's a lot of kids is really, really, really want to learn. So you're going to give me vouchers to move me all the way over here. We'll pay for you to go all the way over here, but we don't want you that you come from the same community.

47:24

EA: So, what would you say like, let's say we had a student here, I was just talking with a freshman the other day and let's say you had a freshmen in this room. What would you say to them?

AH: Um, the biggest thing is with people like myself, your parents, what can we do to help you? What can I do to help you? What do you need from me to help you? Because it was the thing that you're not alone. And like I said, too many people that came from there, what? Because I deal with kids all the time and they sit here in my place and we play basketball. And while we're sitting here, we have some ice tea. My biggest thing is what can I do to help you? I came from Englewood. I went to Loyola, they retired my jersey. They made me the best player in history there. If I can do that, go around the world, you can be a heck of lot better than me. If I can come from Englewood, 66th and Perry, who would imagine that?

48:32

AH: But what can I do to help and not about sports? What can I do to help you to be a better person? Because what I do is I know how to get you as far as basketball. I got your attention and when you come here I really got your attention. Now what can I do to help you be a better person? Do you have problems at home? What can we do? You need some shoes? You need some clothes? You need some money? What can we do? And that's what we have to do. I mean, unfortunately, it don't have to be your legal child, but everybody's connected to everybody else. What can we do? Because like I said, those kids you're talking about,

as far as whether you go to the schools, they're going to help. You have to feel like you took me away from my friends, threw me way over here to a whole of people I don't know, and you're going to make it. They need help, and I just hope that, um, they get the right help

49:35

OO: At some point, we've talked to a few people and Principal Simmons was, she was in charge of Robeson during a time that Robeson's, I guess, cultural sphere was of declining a bit. Can you describe her more? Can you describe how she acted?

50:14

AH: What she did was... When she came in. When she came in there was a lot of things going on that wasn't clean and when she came in as a woman, as a Black woman, as a principal to take over that school, she came in and took over and cleaned a lot of things up as far as teachers pushing kids through, as far as people not being accountable for their jobs. She fired some heavy people up there. She fired some people that was head of things up there. She, my man Cox, who was my coach. When she found out about him, what he was doing to me, you won't get that job at varsity, then he went to King and became a so called legend. But she the one that fired [Leonard?] Cox. She came in and cleaned up a lot of mess that was going on. And she saw it, and she didn't tolerate it.

51:12

AH: She got to the point where people were fearful of her. You went to her office it wasn't no joke, you had a problem. And my mother came towards her, you had two dominant Black women went head to head with each other because my mother don't play, she didn't play. And there were two storms that hit and they became the best of friends. Because with my mother know what was going on and her and Dr. Simmons, every teacher come through, that I had in that place. My mother was the head of that table, Dr. Simmons was the head of this table. How did this happen? You answer it, you gave him this grade. How did it happen. You answer it. People lost their jobs because of that one. People lost their jobs. You're fired, you're fired, you have one more chance, but you're definitely fired. That was a storm because these teachers could not account for why we gave you this because [Leonard] Cox paid you to make sure you did this.

52:23

AH: It was a scandal. That was an outright scandal that was going on. But she came in and cleaned things up. That's why her and my mother got so tight, because I'm her son obviously, but I can't tight with her. That's why I said something happened after my mother passed away to write her a note and say, you take care of my son. It was beyond me because she wrote me that note I was crying like a baby. How did she know for you to take care of me, and how did she know she was about to die to give you this note? It was beyond me.

53:00

OO: Can you explain to us what your mother died of?

AH: She passed of cancer? She died of breast cancer and unfortunately during that time, that was 1983 she passed away, and when she had breast cancer, she was sent to St. Bernard Hospital. St. Bernard Hospital was a death trap. If you think about it, they had no idea what to do with cancer. They didn't have the technology to

deal with cancer, but that was the hospital. During that time, my mother didn't have great insurance so my mother had to deal with them. It was basically, it's like her having cancer. Here you are, take an aspirin and go home. We all know about this. We're not prepared for it. We need to go to school for this. Cancer, in '83 to go to St. Bernard, you're dead person. And when she was diagnosed with cancer. She passed what, four months later.

54:07

AH: They didn't have a clue in the world. They'll know going to Northwestern, University of Chicago, Loyola. St. Bernard Hospital. You in trouble you get shot over there. So like I said, it was funny that... I just didn't believe she was gonna die because she passed away. I didn't cry. I didn't cry until I went to the funeral and saw her in the casket. I said, you know what she's actually dead and she ain't coming back. And that's why I fell apart. Because it's St. Bernard Hospital. I would used to come home every day off the train. And my mother would have me rub her feet. Just rub my feet. And we'll talk. I'll go back to school, come back on the train train, rub her feet, rub her feet because she ain't talking about her pain. She was just telling us to be good, but she don't talked about a pain though. I knew she was in pain, which I think was why I'd rub her feet. Rub her feet with green alcohol. Still know that smell. Green alcohol. I won't touch green alcohol in my life because I know what it remind me of, rubbing my mother's feet. I can go to Walgreens, walk past green alcohol, no. Green alcohol makes me sad because it messes me up. And that's that.

55:35

OO: And how did, you said your mother, your mother passed within four months and she didn't really talk about it, you know, but since you had a clue. So what was, what... could you describe the, the emotional toll that you went through? Like knowing about her diagnosis and then like also trying to deal with know the advice that you were constantly getting from Simmons, your mom, your coaches. How did you... what was that role?

56:13

AH: I just... I just... Really? I didn't really think she was gonna die. I just thought, she gonna make it through this because that time, in '83, cancer, I mean, okay. You can live through it because she was the first person I'd ever known who would pass of cancer, so I just thought she'd get through it. One day you'll get better, you'll get better. I'm not going to accept you'll pass away, you'll get better. But I started seeing her lose a lot of weight. Said, you know what, she'll gain that weight back. Just wait. But she got smaller bed. She went to the hospital. I never forget. St. Bernard Hospital. I was going towards go. My sister, my brother and my cousins were there, and I never forget while I was going towards the room, I heard my sister give a big shout and start crying. I said, my mother passed away. I'm not going in there. I'm not going into that room. I turned right around, walked to Robeson, and got ahold of Ms. Simmons and said, my mother just passed away, because I didn't want to see her dead.

57:28

AH: But I knew that cry, that my sister cried out and how loud that scream is, whenever going in that room my mother is dead in that room. I never walked in. I just walked to the school. I said, you know what? I said, Ms. Simmons, my mother passed away.

I won't ever forget, it was Coach Collins, I told Coach Collins, what can I do for you. I said you know what coach? Guess what I need. I need a suit because I didn't have a suit. And I went to Halsted and I bought a suit and I still didn't really take it seriously until I actually, uh, went to that funeral place and like I said, my mother was an extremely, extremely strong woman to go back to school at the age of 34 and graduated from high school was an example that I saw that, um, if she can do that, I can do anything. Because my father left, I was eight years ago, and he left and she never skipped a beat. We wasn't homeless. We wasn't starving. We didn't have everything, but we had enough. We always had enough. We had good Christmas. We had good thanksgiving, turkey, pies, the whole nine yards. I don't know how she did it, but she did it. But her strength, is strengthening me to always every day be a better person.

58:55

OO: Is this an example of, is this what you will justify, you know, the things you were saying, your opinions about how pretty much like school is what you make of it and like parents need to. It's not the sense of like a broken home.

AH: No. No. I'm the youngest out of nine people. I could easily dropped out of school. I could've easily joined a gang. Where's your sense of pride that your parents instilled in you and so you know what that's not an option. You go do something and it's up to that person like yourself. I'm going to make something out of myself. I don't want to go back to the South Side. I want to do something with myself. Your parents can't make you do that. They could show you by example. Never forget going to graduate on that picture. Mommy why you going back to school? What for what? In light of having nine kids, I don't have a high school education as far as diploma and I want that before I die. I kept telling her, you're getting dressed, why are you going to school? We go to school. Why are you going? What are you gonna get out of this?

1:00:15

She did that as an example. I'm going to take care of these nine kids, I'm going back to school. And she got a job as an assistant teacher at Deneed and I hated it. You can't imagine having your mother assistant teacher at your school. You can't get away with jack. She's right here. You can't dodge no classes. You can't. Then she got another job, a full time job at a currency exchange. Thank God you got a job out of the schools. Thank God, get out of here. I can't see you every day they come home. You can't ditch. You can't do nothing. The teachers gone rat on you. But that's just an example she served though.

EA: Real quick. Um, when you, when you found out your mom passed and you didn't go into the room, you went to Robeson, went to Dr. Simmons, do you remember what she said?

1:01:10

AH: I just... I got down on my knees and I hugged her and she told me, baby, you going to be okay? And I said, no, I'm not. She said, you going to be okay. I said, no, I'm not. She's dead. My mother's dead. She said, baby, you will be okay. And I said, no, I'm not. And I went back to Loyola, caught the train and then sitting in that room, and I said to myself, I gotta get outta here now. I'll just go to go to Ms. Simmons. She'll cook me dinner and just talk to me because my mother supported me. I'm youngest of nine, I can say I was spoiled when I was a kid. Ain't nobody whoop on me, couldn't nobody touch me as long as she was around. The teachers couldn't whoop me, nobody. And if my mother found out any of the other kids try to beat on me, she gave them the business. You could not touch me as a kid. But I love her for that. She's my shero.

1:02:14

OO: Seems like you had two sheroes.

AH: Yup. Yup, sure did. Absolutely. Like I said, I have just a perfect example for these kids. It's going to take more than just a teacher, your parents. It takes other people to care about you, watch over you. There's no telling when your parents might pass away who will step in and be a parent because most people, like I said, Black people just don't deal with therapy. There's a lot of kids out here that need therapy badly. Badly. I mean just think about a kid, if he had the audacity to drive someplace and kill somebody, you don't think he need therapy. You gotta imagine what's going on in his head to think that type of evil and shoot somebody and kill somebody and he's got this in his head, I killed somebody. That's therapy. Someone who gets shot needs therapy. But do we have the insurance for therapists. No, we don't.

1:03:15

EA: Can you describe, Jacqueline Simmons in five words.

AH: My angel for life.

EA: Could you, do you mind, can you describe? Yeah, describe these and specifically if we could take the Robeson photo and if you could hold it and would that be a cool shot and was talking about the people on the team? Yeah.

1:03:51

AH: So, this picture right here. The other picture, in my junior year, I was the second leading scorer in the nation. I was announcing right there I was about to leave school and I was pretty sure of it. But 10 minutes before I walked in there, I decided, because the type of team we had, we can do a lot of things for the NCAA. I looked around at my peers. I said to myself, I can do one more year here. So they came there because the announcement was I was go into the NBA, but I decided if I stayed one more year we could probably go to the NCAA and do some damage. This picture right here, this is my senior year. We absolutely end up going to the sweet 16. Now you have 1962, they won the NCAA Championship. 1985 we went to the sweet 16, and this year we went to the final four, so really in Loyola history, there are only three teams to talk about. '62, '85, and 2018.

EA: Can you show us this one?

1:05:10

AH: Now this picture right here. Now what you had was they had the mayor tournament. This is the first time we beat Phillips and see during those times the policeman was involved with the community and they had like he was the chief of police right here. Now think about this, when the last time the chief of police held the tournament to get these kids together? And that's the problem, that the police had to get involved with the neighborhood. We knew this guy and we all shook his hands, so we had a fear for who the chief of police. How many times this chief of police we have right now is shaking kids hands? The only time you see him get a murder involved, but during that time the police actually, because like I said, watching this game, they're like 40 cops there cheering us on. They liked different teams. They was involved and we weren't afraid of the police. Right now I'm afraid of the police.

EA: Is there any like... I mean what about the racism? Like, you know, I feel like the Fraternal Order of Police at least historically, right? Like huge kind of racial breakdown of, of the police and how, you know, police come from Bridgeport, which is like a racist neighborhood. Was that, was that a thought in your mind knows tournament?

1:06:34

AH: Nope, nope. Not at all. Because they was involved with us and we see. See, you see all the Black kids. Right. And we see this guy right here is willing to put on a tournament for us to do something. For us to do something positive.

EA: Talk to me about the teammates. Also, what year was this?

AH: This was 1979? Yup. Right there. '79. Now that's Isaac Carter who went to Princeton like yourself. Now, I was say I think about the in my life. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12. Out of the 12... one, two, three... Out of the 12, you only have four people who really lived their life and discipline as far as being a productive student and a person out of the 12

1:07:40

OO: What were the other ones?

AH: Gangsters, in jail. I can't say as far as a productive life, even though you went there, I can't put him in there. No, I won't put you in their productive. He became a five fireman. I ended up going to NBA, he's a good guy. Jail, jail, jail, jail, jail, jail, jail, jail, jail.

1:08:22

AH: Like I said, as a perfect example, if people don't get you prepared for life, you got two shots. You better hope your parents did a darn good job, or you seeing a penitentiary? One or the other. Or you selling dope.

EA: Can you show us the names of the people who you count as productive. Do you remember?

AH: Calvin Holiday. Alfredrick Hughes. Maurice Jackson.

OO: And who's the coach?

AH: That's Coach Hickman. He passed away three months ago and unfortunately, God bless his soul, he had no business being a coach. No business, no business because, perfect example, if you're going to be a man, your job is to teacher us to be a man. Never should've had that job because if you have that job, you are responsible not for winning tournaments, but helping us as far as after basketball.