

Eules T. Hunt: You want it done. You know, within reason, he got it done. I mean, got a teaching job, never finished high school. But she got a job and taught until she retired in the '60s. So it's now what you know, it's who you know. And he did a lot of good, too, because if it wasn't for him, we would be set back another 30 or 40 years from what we are now.

Paul Ortiz: Blair Hunt?

Eules T. Hunt: Mm-hmm, yeah. Educational wise, he did a heck of a lot of good.

Paul Ortiz: Mr. Hunt, during the 1950's when you began your crusade in the Parks Department to improve conditions for Black people, were there other Black people in the '50s who were doing similar things to try to improve life for the Black community at the grass roots level?

Eules T. Hunt: There were, but it seems like to no avail. The biggest people then that was trying to was the ministers, and they were trying to do it from the pulpit. And in fact, I was critical of the ministers because I could see more religion on the baseball field than I could see in the church. And frankly, I see more today than I see in the church. It's more segregated out in the South in America, 10:00 Sunday morning to 1:00 Sunday evening. And you walk in some of these churches, they stop preaching and look at you like you're something from Africa or lost or something. And those are the things that just disturbed me. But that was kind of thing that died down and raised back up where you'd get a lot of [indistinct 00:02:20] you'd get love, and it'll come back up. And in the '50s was the love period.

Eules T. Hunt: In the late '50s, that's when everything began to come back to life and everybody started pushing. But I tried to get them NAACP involved and I wasn't successful at that. They was working toward it but they wasn't successful it working in the field of recreation. They was with working through the ministers in the pulpit. And that's good. There's nothing wrong with it. I guess you got to attack it from every angle, but sometimes one end moves so slow you wonder if it's there.

Paul Ortiz: Mr. Hunt, earlier you spoke about the fact that you served during World War Two.

Eules T. Hunt: Mm-hmm.

Paul Ortiz: I wonder if you could talk about your experiences in World War Two?

Eules T. Hunt: Yeah, not many experiences. I was drafted, went to Fort Benning. And after I left Fort Benning we went to [indistinct 00:03:41], Florida. And there I made Sergeant, from Private to PFC and having to wear the PFC stripes, but they busted me back to private. Then they made me a Corporal, and then I made Sergeant. Then the company commander went off on vacation, a week's absence, leave. And I took all the guys that—I had care of 110 above and signed them up for gunnery school because we were a segregated

unit and you couldn't get in gunnery school if you were Black. So when he got back, he busted me. I was a Corporal again. They sent me to Camp Stone in California, and I went through Camp Stone, California. I didn't stop. They just kept me— put me on the ship and sent me overseas. Well, when I got overseas I played it better. I admit that. So we sat in the harbor at [indistinct 00:04:48]. And then when we left there, they started bombing us very heavily there, then went to New Guinea.

Eules T. Hunt: Well, in New Guinea it wasn't nothing there but natives and japs, and the japs was just about all left. So they just had natives and wild bull pig, and they had all kind of animals there. It was really wild. And the 92nd Division was there, and they had just killed all their officers and they had sent them up in the jungle, isolated them.

Paul Ortiz: They killed their officers?

Eules T. Hunt: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm. So I stayed in New Guinea 19 months. In the 19 months we never saw a lady or nothing but wild boars, snakes, pythons, and everything crawling. After 19 months they sent us to Leyte, from [indistinct 00:06:00] to Luzon. And we fought some at Leyte. And after we left Leyte we was in an attack at sea, and that was something I'll never forget. And then the in Luzon where we really had to fight the Japanese from house to house. They would come in this house, and rape the women in this house, kill the babies, stick them up on the wall, and then go to the next house, do the same thing there and then go to the next house, do the same there. It was just something you can't live down.

Paul Ortiz: The Japanese were brutal?

Eules T. Hunt: Oh, yeah. The Japanese did that. They would tell you Joe, there are no rules in war, and they meant it. It's kill or be killed. I might be wrong, but even today I told my wife, "Buy any car you want. Do not buy a Japanese car." And I don't say I'm right, but that's just the way I feel. I was blind for six weeks because the Japanese booby trapped me. And they are some of hell of fighters, I give them that. They don't fear death, and they don't mind killing either. I think that's about it. But I dug a lot a fox holes because those First Sergeants want you to shine their boots. I said I'm going to shine my own boots, but I ain't going to shine yours. "You're going to shine my boots." "Let's wait and see, then." Fox hole, fox hole, fox hole, KP, KP, KP.

Paul Ortiz: Wow, that's—

Eules T. Hunt: I thought I peeled all the potatoes in the world.

Paul Ortiz: Was the First Sergeant White?

Eules T. Hunt: No, he was Black.

Paul Ortiz: Black?

Euless T. Hunt: Blacker than I am. I wasn't going to shine his boots. I didn't give a damn what color he was. I never did shine them up. I [indistinct 00:08:18] shined their boots. I almost changed my mind, though.

Paul Ortiz: Mr. Hunt, do you think that, in the end, World War II made a difference in race relations?

Euless T. Hunt: Oh, yeah. That's where it all started. That's where it started. And if we were good enough to fight, we were good enough to be free, and that's the attitude most of us came back with.

Paul Ortiz: Could you describe how that attitude— how you individually and with other Black people, how you came to that?

Euless T. Hunt: When it comes to the point that most Black people were drafted and put in service units, quartermasters, behind the lines. But during the war service units had to be moved up to stop the Japanese and stop the Germans. In the European theater, they even put them in tanks and Patton commanded them. They had to let them fight in order to keep from being driven back. In the Southwest Pacific it was the same thing. Well, my attitude, and I told them, "I ain't go no business over here. The Japanese haven't done anything to me." And the Japs would tell them that. Their propaganda was to turn the Black soldier against the White soldiers. And of course, you had to remind them of that. They're not turning me against you. You're turning me against you because you—Japanese is not segregating me. He's just telling you what you're doing to me. You're the one doing it. So if you want to let us fight, let's get up here and fight together. And we had taken New Guinea. The Japanese came back and invaded New Guinea and damn near took it back.

Euless T. Hunt: So it didn't matter what you were in, quartermaster, medical corps, engineers, you got a gun and you started fighting. You was fighting to save your own life. But when that happens, and it happened over and over and over again, most of the Whites gained respect for you as a person and as a fighter. That's when the attitude began to prevail, that if I'm good enough to die, I'm good enough to be free, I'm good enough to integrate. [Indistinct 00:10:53] in some of the European countries, and in the Southwest Pacific. When you got to Luzon, well, you had some of the Filipinos was just as White as White, you see? And they would grab you. And on [indistinct 00:11:05], "Joe Joe, come and sleep with my wife. Sleep with my daughter." They would kiss your boots because the Japanese would see them, and if they wanted to have sex and she refused, they would just take and bayonet her stomach, just cut her down, just kill her right there on the spot.

Euless T. Hunt: But they witnessed that. So in his—we came in there to free them. They were anything but nothing [indistinct 00:11:35]. They were just that much appreciative. And so that's where the attitude began to change. And you'd see guys coming out of prison camps that were just nothing but skin and bones. And we'd see how brutal they are. I just couldn't see how people could be that brutal. Take the Germans, those camps were horrible. Sometimes you say, hell, an animal is better than a man in some ways, you know? At least he don't gas you. He just eats you up. But that's where the attitude began to change, and it prevailed, and most of us came back with that thinking.

Paul Ortiz: Were you thinking in terms of trying to change things when you came back?

Eules T. Hunt: Oh, yes. That was the whole idea, if I can fight for you over here, I want to be free when I get back. Or else I'm going to fight when I get back. If I'm going to die to save you, I might as well die to be free here. What's the difference?

Paul Ortiz: You actually acted different when you came back and thinking—

Eules T. Hunt: That's right. That's right, completely turned around. You went in thinking that I'm just going to go to war because I'm drafted. By the time you came out, [indistinct 00:13:10] he's belligerent, and I was. I admit I was belligerent. Some say I'm still belligerent. I guess I am in a way.

Paul Ortiz: Were you thinking in terms of registering to vote when you came back?

Eules T. Hunt: Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm, yeah, registering to vote. The only think I couldn't do, I couldn't [indistinct 00:13:30]. I don't like to be hit and I don't like to be spit on. And I knew I was going to get killed, so I just had to contribute another way. I couldn't be a freedom rider. Well, that's about my life. Well, that's a lot of ins and outs. Of course, evaded a lot of things. I walked into a lot of things. I've been investigated for being a possible communist.

Paul Ortiz: When was that?

Eules T. Hunt: I owed the IRS, and they took all my money I had in the bank. And then they said I still owed them some \$20,000. Hell, I ain't made \$20,000. How the hell can I owe you \$20,000? Then they locked up my store. And I had another beauty shop I was renting, they locked it up. But my dad had a little old store out there. They went and locked his store up. I said, "Now, you've locked up all my property. What you locking up his for? Does he owe you?" "No, but he's your dad." I said, "I know that. But does he owe you anything?" They said, "No, but he's your daddy." I said, "Well you take the lock off of his store, because he don't owe you." "No, I'm going to keep it on his store until you pay us." I said, "I'll be damned if that's so. You done killed all the Indians in America and put the Black man in slavery for 100 years. Now, you got to kill this one because I'm going to knock the damn lock off the door." And I went and got an ax and started knocking on that lock.

Paul Ortiz: What year was that, Mr. Hunt?

Eules T. Hunt: I bought this is '77. It was 1975. So they took the lock off though. And he pulled out the gun and everything, scared the hell out of me. I thought they was going to shoot me but they didn't. But then they wrote it up and said I was belligerent and a possible communist. It didn't say I was communist. It said possible communist. So they investigated me. About two years later, the man came down and said, "I've been watching you for two years. You're all right. They just made you mad." I said, "Well, they made me mad because they were wrong." So since then, I don't never get along. I always got a gripe with the city of some kind. We stand half the time. But I don't mind. It's all right. You need a good fight every once in a while.

Paul Ortiz: Mr. Hunt, what was the name of your sundries store?

Eules T. Hunt: Rose Lynn.

Paul Ortiz: Rose Lynn?

Eules T. Hunt: Mm-hmm.

Paul Ortiz: And I know I've taken up a lot of your busy time, but I just had a couple more questions.

Eules T. Hunt: Okay.

Paul Ortiz: What made you decide to become an entrepreneur?

Eules T. Hunt: Well, the city. Well, I'm going to say, really, I bought central while I was teaching school, but I'm going to call that being an entrepreneur. But the reason [indistinct 00:17:04], when I left the Park Commission I was Blackballed and couldn't get a job. I had to make a decision because I had started buying property. Now, I could sit on my butt and lose all this property, and that's what was happening, or I could up here an try to make a living. And I had been to the City and I had been to the County. I'd been to private service. I'd been to the truck lines. I'd been to bus lines. I said, "I got all this education. What good has it done me?" So I said, "Well, I'm going to go and I'm going to make my own living, make my own job." So I had bought about five rental units. So I bought me five more rental units and started renting them out, just paying them and collecting my own rent. When they City saw me doing that, they made me buy a license for repair, then to buying a contractor license.

Eules T. Hunt: But I did that for about 10 years. But it was all right because I made money off them. I had three houses on the National Historic Register. One, a State Senator tried to buy one. I would sell it. It burned down. A commercial [indistinct] representative tried to by one. I wouldn't sell it. It burned down. And the other one burned down, too. Ain't nobody tried to buy anything.

Paul Ortiz: So it seems that machine was still in power?

Eules T. Hunt: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. Mm-hmm. All right, 1977, I had insurance with H. Funk and Company on this building. It caught on fire. They wouldn't pay. I went to five lawyers, wasn't a lawyer to take the case. They went to Mr. Winchester, "I can't take case." They haven't paid yet. I got up there and repaired it myself. So it's not as dominant as it used to be, the the influence is still there. When I bought this place their companies wouldn't sell me food because I'm Black. Well, the one company selling me mix, and I had to buy it under an assumed name, Howard's Ice Cream Company.

Paul Ortiz: That was ice cream mix?

Eules T. Hunt: Mm-hmm. I've had stores that canceled leases, or they threatened to cancel them. Of course, I'd beat them to it, because a person put a Black ice cream company in their store. Well, when they'd tell me, I'd just pulled my box ice cream out. I said, "Don't let me get you. Close yourself down. Don't let me get you closed down." A White company come in offered \$200 or \$300, \$400 and \$500 in a lot of cases, so they stopped. They said, "I like your service, but this company is offering me this much money." I said, "Take it. When I came to you, I was in business, and when I leave you I'm going to be in business. It's not easy, but I'm going to stay in business, and I don't need a store to bend over. I'm going to obligated to the point to stay in business." But that just happened in the last two or three years. It's better, but it's not gone.

Paul Ortiz: Right.

Eules T. Hunt: I think I told you about Mr. Turner, the Turner boy, who worked there and called me Sunshine. That was about four or five years ago. He's still there and I'm still here. We still look at each other and halfway speak. It's still there. It coming up. It's better. But you have to adjust and work around it. If you're going to act a damn fool and think you can go in there and change the world overnight, no, you're no going to do it. I don't care who you are. That's not going to happen. But you can exist and fairly peaceful if you're a person with the right attitude. Now I admit one thing helps me, and maybe I shouldn't say it, but I'm damn near as prejudiced as they are. Now that helps me, because he don't think no more of me than I think of him and, hell, he probably wants to be with me worse that I want to be with him, because I had never saw him. I didn't give a damn.

Eules T. Hunt: But that's not the proper attitude for all of us to take because if we did we'd still be completely two different societies. So I know I'm wrong in it, but I just feel that way. So, well, I can adjust because I feel that way better than most negros. Here's a negro, well, take Martin Luther King, he couldn't feel that way because he started pushing to integrate. Well, I don't give a damn if I integrate or not. I can go to Lamar and be perfectly satisfied. I got degrees from Lamar. When I went to Wayne University and my wife went to Michigan State, everybody up there had to take entrance exams. We showed them our transcript. She ain't took no entrance exam the University of Michigan. Lamar is a good school. Come on in. I ain't doing an exam at Wayne State. Lamar is a good school. Come on in. But if you go down to for Memphis State you took entrance exam. So why should I want to integrate? Memphis State needs to be the one integrating, don't you think?

Eules T. Hunt: Now I said in the beginning that's the wrong attitude that I have, but you can see why I have it. And I don't know, one of the proudest moments in our lives overseas in the Army at Luzon. And we were saved by this P-51 squad that was trained at Tuskegee, because the Japanese was about to annihilate us. And those P-51s swooped down through there and put down a smoke screen, and that's all that saved us. But incidents like that that not only saved Black, but it was more Whites they saved. That said that you contributed to America, America the beautiful. It doesn't say America the White or America the Black, it's America the beautiful and that you did your part to contribute to this great country. But then you want this country to do its part in accepting you fully. And it hasn't happened, and it won't happen in another 100 years. In 100 years it'll happen but not until then. And I said it, and I don't care if you don't like. It don't make me no difference.

Eules T. Hunt: I don't owe nobody nothing but respect. The bills I owe, I pay. And people I don't like, I curse them out. And the people I do like, I have a cup of coffee with them. And that's about the way I live. I go to church. I sin. I pray for forgiveness. And I believe in God. He's a forgiving God. So I do pretty good, I think. Next question? You're going to say I'm crazy when you leave, it's the craziest guy you interviewed in a long—

Paul Ortiz: This has been one of my favorite, best interviews I've done.

Eules T. Hunt: I said I told you it was going to sound crazy.

Paul Ortiz: Mr. Hunt, I was wondering, you said earlier that you were married. What year did you get married sir? And-

Eules T. Hunt: Wow. Hell, I don't know. I can figure it out. I've been married 35 years this year.

Paul Ortiz: Wow, congratulations. And you met your wife in Memphis?

Eules T. Hunt: Yeah, mm-hmm. We both went to Lamar. She graduated the year before I did. That's great. I didn't see her again in, I guess, six or seven years, and longer than that. It's about six or seven years, something like that, because I saw her in the basketball game. I used to officiate, too. I officiated basketball and football. And was going to a basketball game and she was at the basketball game and we run into each other, and we've never been apart since. But we got married. In fact, it's been a good marriage because she's here today.

Paul Ortiz: Mr. Hunt, what would you and your wife do for leisure back then?

Eules T. Hunt: Early days, we'd usually take a week out, and, well, sometimes we'd go to the hot springs and Gatlinburg, probably take the weekend and go somewhere. But the last eight years, I haven't gone anywhere. She's gone somewhere. In fact, she's going to Pine Bluff. Last year she went to Texas, New Orleans. This year she's going to Pine Bluff, somewhere up in Tennessee. I want her to keep going somewhere three and four times a year. It's good for her. I can't go. I don't need to go. I've been about everywhere I want to go. I'm fortunate where I traveled when I was young.

Paul Ortiz: Mr. Hunt, by way of wrapping up, I wonder if you could tell me? You talk a lot about the struggles that you've been involved with throughout your life. Can you tell, in your opinion, sir, what have been some of the major changes for Black people in Memphis throughout your life? And on the other hand, what have been the things that haven't changed?

Eules T. Hunt: The attitudes haven't changed. That's the big thing. Everything else has changed. One thing hasn't changed, attitude. But slowly moving to better policing and a better police force. It's not good. I didn't say perfect. I didn't say perfect. I used the word, good. It's not good, but it's much better. Negroes have obtained better positions. Did you read this morning's paper about Judge [indistinct 00:28:58]?

Eules T. Hunt: Look at him down in the country. A few years ago it was Judge Murphy. That's the attitude. Whenever you take a step up you're going to be crucified if the opportunity ever presents itself in any manner. That's the attitude that hasn't change. Take Mayor Harrington, four years ago he was crucified because there things that he had did while he was over the school system, because, frankly, most of us didn't think he could win. I didn't think he could win. I said, I'm going to work for him and I'm going to vote for him because, well, I know Harrington well. I know Harrington very well because when I was teaching, he was running taking boxing. And he'd been good to me, everywhere he'd seen me. I remember going to a meeting and he was there. I allowed me to stand and recognized me and me and my company and praised all high heaven. Well, you couldn't ask for no more than that from a mayor. I don't give a damn who you are or where.

Eules T. Hunt: But it is said, in fact it was true, that he had [indistinct 00:30:20] and they promoted him successful and this and that. So it put that cloud over his head, but he was fortunate enough to win. That's the attitude. The attitude hasn't changed. Our system is better, the school system, I mean. Our judicial system is better. Our workforce is better, but the attitude hasn't change. And it's hard to make the progress you want to make until the attitude changes because you're going to always have stumbling blocks and somebody to kick you back or set you back or do something what would hinder you every step of the way until the attitude changes. I testified for Judge Murphy which he hadn't done anything legally wrong. He had trusted a man that lied on him, and the court saw he was lying on him because they was in a bingo thing and he was using a bingo number. But he did not have access to the bingo books. Which was really lodge books because it was the lodges that was furnishing the numbers that the bing used.

Eules T. Hunt: How could he use the lodge number if he never had access to the lodge books, unless somebody in the lodge gave him the number? And that was brought out repeatedly in court. Second place, the man that had him embroiled in it was politically involved in two or three other things, which I told him don't trust him, but he did. But he ended up getting two years in prison. He's out now and he's been trying to get his license back, and they've approved his license but he's got to wait until which is liable to take six or seven more months. But we're seeing the most Black advancement has been in the bus system, transit system. They seem to do more promoting on the basis of merit rather than friendship or race than anybody else. The police department does not. You know we got a Black commissioner. The sanitation department does not. They're top heavy with Black workers and White supervisors. Your medical establishment does not. It's just messed up, period.

Eules T. Hunt: And so I don't know whether that answered your question or not, but that's—I might could touch on some more to say but I don't think I'm ready to—. The educational system is stagnant. The lady has got potential, but she lacks experience, and you need experience and lack of potentials. See what we do? And we do it all over America, you can come all the way to PhD and they put you over Yale University. I know a millionaire. He died last year, but he had a son and he sent his son to London, and he come out of London with the equivalent. I don't know they call that over there, but a PhD. They made him third vice president of the Bank of America over there, a fresh man out of college. What the hell does he know about banking? Because his daddy is a millionaire. And so many things like that that I see that doesn't make sense. Of

course, now I know when I was in the Christian, I used to serve on the national board. In 1960 we met in Annapolis [indistinct 00:35:07].

Eules T. Hunt: We were preaching integration then, and the congregating to vote gradually. And they wanted a unanimous vote. Well, I voted against integrating gradually. They said, "Well, since you have lost, let's make it unanimous?" I said, "No, because Mr. Price wouldn't like it that way. He's over the whole Christian church worldwide. I'm sorry but Mr. Price don't vote for me. I vote for myself, and I want my vote registered as no. The bible doesn't tell me to integrate gradually. So now if you can show it to me in the bible, I'll do it. If you can't show it to me in the bible, register my vote no. So as a result, I got to meet [indistinct 00:35:57] Price. He's a nice guy, though. He's real nice. Yeah, he's Christian enough to see your point and not get cuffed about it. I had all kind of experiences. I'll tell you the truth, and I've been fortunate.

Paul Ortiz: Mr. Hunt, through all those experiences and throughout your life, what have been the main things that have inspired you to keep striving and struggling?

Eules T. Hunt: When I was 12 years old, two things. I went to Sunday school and they said God has got the whole world in His hands and He's a good God, and He'll give you what you want if you ask for it. The next thing is, I've always wanted to be rich and own some land. And the only way I know to do it is to work like hell and buy it. And I believe today if you give me five more years and come back, and I'm going to be a millionaire. And I might be wrong, but that's what I believe, and that's what I'm going to work for. I'm not going to stop until I get there. And that's what inspires me, those two things. If he owns the whole world and he's a good God—you know, people say you got to be crooked to be a millionaire. I don't think so. If He owns the world, he can make me a millionaire. He can give me the opportunity to be one and be honest with it, or else He's not the God I think he is.

Eules T. Hunt: And I might not do it when I want because I wanted it 20 or 30 years ago. But that's what inspires me and that's what's still inspiring me. But on the way, it does one thing for you, I can say this much. It keeps you ass raggedy and it makes you independent as hell, and those are two damn good things. And you got that thing on too, haven't you? Well, yeah, I said it, so that's the way I feel about it.