

Who is the interviewee?

Larry is a retired elder who is 73 years old. He lives in Richmond, Virginia. He grew up as the oldest of seven siblings, 4 brothers and 3 sisters. In his pastime, he enjoys hobbies like playing tennis, putting together puzzles and cars, walking his dog, Charlie, listening to records, and spending time with his grandchildren. When Larry was younger, he used to play other sports, draw, work on cars, and hang out at the mall with his friends and siblings. Before malls were all in one place where a person could shop and dine at, he and others would often visit shopping centers like Southside Plaza and Azalea Mall through the Richmond bus line or they would walk to get there. On the way there, they would grab something to eat like a slum dog (deep-fried hot dog) or a simple cheap meal like a hamburger, fries, and maybe get a dessert if they wanted one. At the shopping centers, they could walk around and shop comfortably and freely without a care in the world. Once Virginia Center Commons Mall became a place to be, it opened new avenues; they could shop and eat there provided that there was a food court. However, Larry and his friends/siblings would encounter a different environment where people would often have their eyes always trained on them and just because they had green money like everyone else, it did not mean that Larry and his crew weren't easily respected. This meant they were "always on our P's and Q's" meaning they had always be polite, careful, and on their best behavior. He provides this project with the perspective of someone who is knowledgeable about the ebbs and flows of shopping and attitudes that in turn changes what's available around and not so easily accessible or affordable. He was able to provide me a perspective of an African American who lived during the times of visually apparent discrimination.

Historical context that was provided in Larry's interview

There is much that can be said about the history of Virginia Center Commons and other places of commerce in Larry's interview. In his younger days, he mentions that he and others around him would use Layaway and cash to purchase clothes and shoes at this mall and other shopping centers.¹ Back then, the Layaway Plan was often used instead of credit since you could "take your time and pay installments before getting to desired purchase."² In Virginia Center Commons, there was anchor store named *Sears* and I remember that they would still issue these plans before this store officially closed in 2017. In fact, in 2008, when I was 8 years old, "*Sears* brought back the Layaway Plan because customers found it convenient and affordable than using credit, credit only promotes debt accumulation on the customer."³ Although many like Larry found the Layaway Plan affordable, it serves an example of how one shopping trend could be in one day, but can be out of use the next as others seek out other trends and methods of payment. This method of payment is as old as the 1930's. Oddly enough, I found a newspaper article that was published in 1950 that promoted it, stating that, "a customer could pay a single dollar, and the retailer could store it until it was fully paid off."⁴ These days, in 2025, Layaway still

¹ Larry, "VCC Interview Larry," interview by Joa Kearney, April 5, 2025, *Virginia Center Commons Oral History Student Project Archive*, <https://www.vccoralhistorystudentproject.com/interview-with-larry>, accessed April 5, 2025.

² "Layaway Purchase Plans," *Consumers' Research Magazine* 73, no. 6 (June 1, 1990): 31, <https://research-ebsco-com.proxy.lib.odu.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=c6c7e47b-79ee-3b74-9ed7-c529dec4657d>.

³ Teresa F. Lindeman, "Layaway Plans Gain Popularity with Shoppers, Stores," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Pittsburgh, PA), 2009, Tribune Content Agency.

⁴ "Layaway Plan Featured," *Women's Wear Daily* 83, no. 62 (September 27, 1951): 2, <https://proxy.lib.odu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/layaway-plan-featured/docview/1523132746/se-2>.

exists in stores like *Burlington* and other stores, but under a different name like buy now, pay later, but you don't pay weekly, instead you pay monthly. For example, my phone, I purchased it through a monthly plan, but I was able to receive it before the full purchase. Just like how Larry's Chuck Taylor All Stars were purchased through him paying for it in installments every week, but he only received these shoes when he fully paid for it.⁵ Layaway Plan is just an example of one historical context in Larry's interview.

⁵ Larry, "VCC Interview Larry."