

African American Burial Ground Project (AABGP)  
African American Burial Grounds  
Oral History Program  
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: A67-00004  
Interviewee: Irving Sanchez III (IS)  
Interview by: Julie Buckner Armstrong (JA)  
Interview date: May 7, 2021  
Interview location: St. Petersburg, Florida  
Transcription by: Brandon B. Dezha  
Transcription date: July 2, 2021 to July 9, 2021  
Audit edit by: Matthew Barganier  
Audit edit date: July 6, 2021 to July 9, 2021  
Final edit by: Matthew Barganier  
Final edit date: July 12, 2021

**Julie Armstrong (JA):** Okay, here we go. This is Julie Armstrong. I am with Irving Sanchez, of the Sanchez Rehoboth—

**Irving Sanchez III (IS):** Irving Sanchez the third.

JA: The third, thank you, of Sanchez Rehoboth Mortuary and Cremation Service. And we are in Mr. Sanchez's office, and this is May 7, 2021. So I'm going to ask you a few questions, and if there are things you don't know the answer to, that's fine. Just say, "I don't know the answer," and then we'll move forward from there. So just to orient us in terms of factual information, when is your date of birth?

IS: July 11, 1959.

JA: Ah, just one year older than me. And your place of birth? Were you born here in St. Pete?

IS: I was born and raised right here in St. Petersburg.

JA: Okay. And I know you were away for a while, but how long have you been back in St. Pete after you lived elsewhere?

IS: I moved back to St. Petersburg in 2014.

JA: Okay.

IS: I've been back since then.

JA: Okay. And what part of town do you live in?

IS: Right now?

JA: Mm-hm.

IS: I live right on the outskirts of Pinellas Point, about one mile west from here.

JA: Okay, and what part of town were you raised in?

IS: I was raised in what they now call Midtown, which was the Wildwood area: 13th Avenue and 25th Street, near Jordan Park. Not in Jordan Park, but maybe a block away from Jordan Park.

JA: Okay. And I know from looking at other interviews with you or places where you've been quoted, that you did spend some of your time as a young person around the cemetery complexes that we are talking about—Oaklawn, Moffett, and Lincoln—in the general Gas Plant–Sugar Hill area, but that is not where you were raised, that you had family there. Is that correct?

IS: I had an aunt that lived in the Gas Plant area, on 3rd Avenue South. She was the matriarch who acquired the funeral home. And my dad was a descendant who took the funeral home over after she bought it.

JA: Okay.

IS: She was married to a gentleman named RC Calhoun, who was a builder. And he built a ton of houses right there in the Gas Plant area, and churches—namely, First Baptist Institutional Church on 3rd Avenue and 16th Street. He was actually the builder of that church.

JA: Oh, okay.

IS: He built several different places, but they were the ones that introduced my family to funeral service.

JA: Okay. And what was your aunt's name?

IS: Her name was Jessie Marie Calhoun.

JA: Okay. And she lived on 3rd Avenue South and what street? Do you—

IS: Just off of 16th Street, right as you're going down the hill, before you got to the bottom of the hill where there was a little store, and then there was the Better Way Cleaners down there at the bottom of the hill. That was going down towards Bethel Metropolitan Baptist Church that was on down the hill, on the right.

JA: And then your—you said that your family, you have a history of being in the funeral home industry. Your father owned a funeral home?

IS: Yes.

JA: Was it his father before him or just—

IS: No. Miss Jessie Marie Calhoun. They owned it first. My dad took it over and bought it from them. It was the Williams Funeral Home on 9th Avenue and 22nd Street. They purchased that funeral home, and my dad became the owner of it, and he ran it since, like, 1960, I guess, up to 2007.

JA: Was it still Williams, or did he change it to—

IS: The name was Sanchez Arch Royal Funeral Home.

JA: Okay.

IS: Yeah. And as I grew up, it changed from Sanchez Arch Royal to Sanchez and Son Funeral Directors. That was probably in the '80s, I think it was.

JA: Now, when you—and so you would sometimes spend some time at your aunt's house, is that correct?

IS: Well, as a child, and we're talking pre-school now—first grade to the fifth grade—after school, we went to the school that was on 16th Street, which was Immaculate Conception Catholic School. From first to fifth grade, we went to school there every day, and somebody picked us up and took us to Miss Calhoun's house, where we stayed until my mom got off work—who worked at Perkins Elementary.

JA: Ah, okay.

IS: She's a teacher. So that little routine happened every day up until I got out of fifth grade, going to sixth grade.

JA: So this was the early '60s, and by that time those cemeteries were not in use, but do you remember anything about that complex? Which would have been at Oaklawn, which would have been on the north side of—it would it have been bordering 16th, but that would have been on the north side of 5th, and then the others would have been on the south side of 5th?

IS: I have no knowledge of anything but Lincoln.

JA: Okay.

IS: There was no Oaklawn. There was none of that when I came up.

JA: Okay. Do you remember anything there—like, anything? Houses, buildings?

IS: I don't think there was a cemetery, known as a cemetery, in any of that area as I grew up. Everybody that was African American went to Lincoln. Everybody.

JA: And that's—yes, that's consistent with what we're hearing from other people. Do you remember anything that was there, like any businesses that would have been in that area around 16th Street and between 3rd and 5th Avenue South? Like, any stores or gas stations or—

IS: Between 3rd and 5th, from 16th going back towards 9th Street, there were homes in all those areas. There was a—I wouldn't call it a project, but there were some group homes, and they were all the same color in that area, because I had a personal friend who grew up there. And then on 16th Street proper—matter of fact, the book that I let your husband use, I haven't got back yet.

JA: Oh, no. You haven't?

IS: I have not.

JA: Okay, I've got to make a note for that. I'm sorry about that.

IS: All right. There were three old, dilapidated, like, two-story apartments, if you will, that were there. They were green. I never will forget it, because I always used to pass by. It just looked so rough, you know. But there were three of them there, and from there, there were homes, and all the homes went back down the hill to—I don't know what the name of that street was at the bottom of the hill, but it was maybe 10th Street \_\_\_\_\_(??) would be 10th or 12th Street, somewhere in that area. Because when I was growing up, there several people that went to—my mom and dad went to their church, which was McCabe United Methodist Church on 26th, next to where you go to church now.

JA: Right.

IS: That was—McCabe Church itself back then was back up the hill to 9th Street, on the corner of 9th Street and—\_\_\_\_\_ (??) will say it—I'll say 4th, 5th, 6th, one of those streets.

JA: Okay.

IS: Right where the entrance to the interstate is now, on 275. Right on that corner where the—it used to be the senior citizens home. I understand somebody bought it now. But that used to be a place where the seniors lived. Before the seniors—before they built that, the McCabe United Methodist Church sat on that corner.

JA: Okay.

IS: All right. I distinctly remember it because I went to church there as a kid. Not to talk too much—

JA: No, no, no. You keep talking. That's what we're here for. Anything you want to talk about, we got it. So yeah.

IS: Okay. All right. But in terms of a specific cemetery site, there was no specific cemetery site in that area.

JA: Okay. And yes—and well, it had been abandoned by the '20s and, you know, sort of was sealed off or re-covered by the time that you came along. Now, let's—since the specific cemetery was not really within your memory, we have a list of questions that we're kind of asking everybody—the same questions. So how about we turn to something that is definitely in your blood? Can you tell us a little bit about specific burial practices or rituals in your family or community? That may be too broad, but answer it how you will.

IS: Well, I think back then, everybody pretty much did the same thing. Somebody passed, we picked them up, they were embalmed and prepared for a funeral. Typically, the funeral either went to the church—mostly went to the church—very few were chapel services. Going to the church was probably a must-do, you know. There was nothing about cremation—I mean, if anything, cremation probably came in the '70s, I guess, and it was a phobia. Not a phobia, but it was something you had to do when you had no option, okay. With anybody—everybody was always trying to get buried, so there would be bodies out for viewing and that kind of thing. And after that, we would go into the church, then we would go on to the cemetery. Everybody went to the cemetery, okay. I can even go as far as to say that typically most people—African American—were buried in—they were buried in concrete liners, and they all went in a high plush cloth casket.

JA: Okay.

IS: That was probably the ritual. Some were basic, basic—what do you call them? A hinge cap or—Lord, I haven't sold one of those in so long, I can't think of the name of it, but they were cloth. But if you were somebody special, you went in a high-end plush cloth, where you could actually press on it and feel the thickness of the cloth. If you were going in one of those, you were better than average.

JA: So what was the cloth made out of? What material?

IS: Well, the cloth was just a—it was a—oh, boy. Golly. Oh, my goodness. Now, that's been 40 years ago already.

JA: Okay. Well, I have to ask.

IS: Okay. Oh, Lord. Now, my dad would love to hear that question, all right. He could give you the details. But I don't sell them, so—

JA: Okay.

IS: They were called cloth-covered wood, because it was basically particle board with a cloth material to cover it. But then the high plush cloth, it just—it was just an enhancer to a very basic type of casket.

JA: Right.

IS: You give me a little time, I can report that back to you, all right. I'll tell you.

JA: Okay, that's good. So, probably, maybe back—do you think it's safe to say that in the early—in the middle part of the 20th century, maybe the earlier part, something similar was going on?

IS: In terms of what?

JA: In terms of having like a—if you're at the low end, it's kind of a particle board with a cloth cover, but if you're at the high end, you have the more—

IS: The thicker cloth. Plush cloth.

JA: Plush. On the inside, right?

IS: No, this is outside.

JA: Outside? Oh, okay.

IS: Yes, the casket itself. The outside of the casket was a particle board covered with a cloth material, then the inside—the outside—exterior had—it was a basic opening, usually the half-couch open casket where the bottom part was opened. The front end part was opened, but the bottom of it was closed. If you had one with the plush—and then it actually had a flap that folded down to where it opened up the casket a little more—oh, man, you were just—you know, you were somebody.

JA: That's nice. So did it come in different colors?

IS: Different colors. You could get it in—usually it's pink or blue. Pink, blue, or gray. That's what I remember.

JA: Huh.

IS: Women got the pink, men got the blue, typically.

JA: Oh, wow.

IS: And then the lower end—if you didn't have any money or whatever, it's usually just gray.

JA: Okay.

IS: Now, those caskets are still around, but they were—back then, most—the people that I knew of or people that were being buried, were just basic. Didn't have a whole lot of means, you know.

JA: Right.

IS: So that was probably typical. Every now and then, you'd find somebody getting buried in a metal casket, okay. But that was pretty much it.

JA: Okay. That's interesting. That's interesting. And so the typical ritual might have been, you know, you would pick up the body at home, or at the hospital, or the mortuary?

IS: At a hospital.

JA: At a hospital? Okay.

IS: Mercy Hospital, I think it was.

JA: Okay. And then—

IS: Or Mound Park, which is Bayfront.

JA: Okay. And then you would bring them to the funeral home, embalm the body, then there's typically a viewing. Is that correct?

IS: Just about everybody had a viewing, usually at the funeral home, somewhere or another.

JA: Okay.

IS: Then going on to the church for the funeral. And that was pretty basic, pretty routine. Then after the funeral, everybody is going to Lincoln.

JA: Were there two separate ceremonies? One at the church and one at the cemetery, too?

IS: Yes. Well, that—the funeral was had at the church.

JA: Right.

IS: The burial was just going to the cemetery. It's just like it is now. You go to the cemetery, you have a body committed—committal, and then the burial. Pretty routine.

JA: Okay. Did the practices shift across different religious backgrounds or different racial and ethnic backgrounds, or were they pretty much standard locally?

IS: Well, back then, there wasn't a lot of mixing, so I can't say specifically what racial lines did what. I know African Americans pretty much did the same thing. I think white folks did the same thing as well, they just—they did probably the same type of thing in general, but just like now, the church rituals or customary rituals were still being upheld for whatever faith, whatever religion you were doing. So I think everything was probably similar, not the same.

JA: Right. Okay. Well, that's good to know. And yeah, I've wondered about that myself because I've wondered about how things might differ from region to region, across racial lines, across faith practices, and all of that.

IS: There was not a lot of—the funeral directors—now, me being a child now, so this is an observation. I think the funeral directors knew of each other, but they very rarely interacted with each other. Blacks did whatever blacks did with blacks. Whites did what they did, separate and aside from whatever we were doing. My dad probably got called sometimes across racial lines because of the quality of his restorative work. A lot of funeral homes called him to come and do restorative work on their cases. That's how he got to be known in more of the whiter circles, because of that fact. But typically, he did what he did in his area, and they did what they did in theirs. Only when they had difficulty or issues would he be contacted.

JA: Right. And just for the record, we had talked about that earlier, and someone else had mentioned it in an interview, that your dad had a reputation for being the best of, you know, restorative—in case there's damage or whatever that you want to make the person look more lifelike than he was—

IS: Car accidents, fires, some type of cancer, or what have you, you know, he'd bring them back.

JA: Okay. Good. Now, you mentioned—before we started recording, you were telling about riding in the hearse as a kid?

IS: Yes. Yes.

JA: Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

IS: Well, back in the day when I was probably 5, 6, 7, 8, somewhere like that, African American funeral homes were doing their own ambulance service. And one of the things that I remember distinctly was whenever we got an ambulance call, my dad and whoever else was going to pick the body up—or the hurt person at that time. I was sitting in the middle seat, and my dad gave me the privilege to—whenever he was driving a hearse and he was ready to hit the siren, he gave me the responsibility of the one hitting the siren button.

JA: Excellent.

IS: All right. Oh, my God! I lived for it. That's the reason why I jumped in the hearse—in the ambulance in the first place, so I could say, "We're going to get one." I'm trying to get in the ambulance faster than they were, right? Because I wanted to sit in that middle seat. And then we were riding down the street, my daddy would say, "Hit it!" That's what he would always say, "Hit it!" And I'd hit that siren, "Wooh!"

JA: Where was the button? Is it—was it by the—

IS: It was a little console right in front on the dash, and all I had to do was just—I mean, heck, I didn't care about nothing else going on, I was just waiting on him to say "hit it," right. So sitting



here, and the dashboard was right here, and then the little thing was sitting right there, and then the little jump seat where you sit on—where you put your armrest—was where I was sitting.

JA: Right.

IS: All right, so I sat on that, and he would tell me, “Hit it!” And I’m right on time. Click. It’s like a little flip button right here.

JA: Oh, it’s a lever. Okay.

IS: Yeah, a lever.

JA: And you flip the lever, okay.

IS: I’d flip the lever, and it went—and it started. Oh, my God! I was beside myself, right? And once we’d get to where we were going, he said, “Okay, cut it off.” And I cut it off, and whatever they did, they did, because I didn’t get out of the car. I didn’t get out of the ambulance. I just sat there until they did what they did. But I do remember that 99 percent of the time, we only went to the hospital on 22nd Avenue, which was Mercy Hospital. I do remember that. And every now and then—I don’t think we went to Mound Park, which is now Bayfront, but I do remember it being there. The only place I remember going was Mercy Hospital.

JA: Okay.

IS: Yeah, that was the joy of my life at the time. I think that’s probably what brought me into the business.

JA: Well, now when did you start—as you grew older and could on take on more responsibility, did you work for your dad?

IS: Well, yeah. I started working for my dad pretty haphazardly. Well, let me say this first. Coming up, my dad was meticulous and very specific about any and everything that was being done. My responsibility when I first got in line with the business was to wash tires—car tires. Back in the days, they had these three-inch-wide Caddy wall—they called them “three-inch Caddy walls.” Whitewall tires.

JA: Right.

IS: My responsibility was to wash the whitewall tires only, okay. I couldn’t wash the car, couldn’t wash the rims. I couldn’t wash none of that stuff. My job was to wash the whitewall tires. To this very day—I got my own funeral home right now—I am a stickler about my whitewall tires. I tell them, “Man, I can wash a whitewall tire better than any of you, all right.” Young guys want to come in here, and they want to tell me the car tires are washed. I said, “Man, you have not washed my car if I cannot see these whitewall tires, okay.” I will not pay them. And don’t come back, all right, if you can’t wash whitewall tires. I have them washing whitewall tires, and I’m specific about it because of that, you know, growing up in the business. I used to

wash tires—I mean, I could wash two cars—two cars—in 15 minutes, all right. Because I'm washing, you know, going around the car and knocking it out strictly because I was introduced to that. So I literally grew up in the funeral business from the ground up.

JA: Literally from the tires up.

IS: Literally. Every facet of this business, I have experienced it. So people—nowadays, being my own owner, people don't understand why I'm so specific about things that I'm requiring them to do. But the simple fact of the matter is, I have worked in your shoes. Everything that I'm asking you to do, I have done it. So you can't fake me out, you can't hand me a con line, you can't tell me the issues that you're having, because I've lived every facet of it, so I know when you're pulling my leg. I know when you're not putting forth the effort, you know. I know when you didn't get something done. You don't even have to tell me. I know it. So it's hard for me to find somebody that wants to stick with me and work with me, because I'm just that way. I'm hands on. I will not accept better than your best, you know. Because my dad was the same way: “You can't do any better than that? Why are the tires dirty?”

JA: Well, it's those small details that are—they are indicative of the larger whole.

IS: Absolutely.

JA: Yeah, absolutely. And if somebody can't take care of their tires, then I'm not sure I want them taking care of my grandma.

IS: Well, and some people may think I'm think nuts for having that type of attitude, but it's the same thing with embalming. You know, you can't come in here and you got the man's collar of his shirt all wrinkled, or it's not in his suit the right way, just not neat like it's supposed to be. I mean, my dad would drill me about that kind of stuff.

JA: And you know, that actually—I have a—that reminds me. I have a follow-up question about something we said before in terms of just rituals and the way typically things are done. What were people typically buried in back in the day?

IS: Everybody was dressed up.

JA: Yeah.

IS: You rarely found somebody in anything other than a suit and tie, and a lady being dressed up. It was just normal. You know, you find—nowadays, you find them wearing T-shirts or a cap or a baseball cap—any of that kind of stuff. When you were having a funeral, you were being buried, you were buried with a shirt and tie on, even if you didn't have a coat. Or we would go get you a coat, because back then we'd go to the Goodwill, you know what I mean. The veterans—you know, we were doing veterans, white, black, all of them. We were doing all of them. And they were doing immediate burials. Everybody had on a shirt, tie, and a suit coat, with pants and socks—and underclothes.

JA: And shoes? Underclothes, too? Shoes?

IS: No shoes, necessarily.

JA: Okay.

IS: But they were fully dressed.

JA: Right.

IS: And I'm still doing that to this day. You know, you find some funeral homes where, That's what they brought, that's what we're going to put them in. If you don't have underwear, we'll get you some underwear. If you didn't have a shirt, we'll get you a shirt. Now, that's not as routine now as it was then, but I can assure you, everybody that was being embalmed and dressed and had a funeral burial was in a shirt and tie [and] suit, because if the family couldn't afford it, we would go somewhere and get it.

JA: Yeah. Yeah, my grandma was buried in her favorite dress, so yeah. I have memories of that. So how do you think—this is kind of a different tack now. How do you think that today—now, we've talked that these are cemeteries that have been covered over or relocated or whatever, but there's still that space downtown where bodies were buried and could still feasibly—there might still be bodies there; we don't know. But how do you think that that space should be remembered and/or cared for today? That's—answer it either way.

IS: I think the first question is, can they be resurrected? Can they bring them—can we actually see the cemetery recreated? Is that possible? If that's not possible, with all that's been done, and it's paved over or what have you—if the area itself could be identified, wholly, then sure, there should be some monument or something, some representation that they were there. Because, I mean, to the core of the funeral business, and I've said this often, most people get caught up in the cars or the limos or the buildings at the funeral homes and who dressed them and all this kind of thing. But to the core of the business of what we do, the significance of it is to remember a life. That person actually lived, okay. So it is our responsibility to remember that person that lived, because they actually contributed to society. Recognizing that for what it's worth, we can say the same thing about those people as well, because generations come and go, but there has to be some representation of what was, in order for us to identify with what is, so we can determine where we're going to go.

JA: Right.

IS: So if you can't remember that there was a cemetery of that sort, then how can we compare where we are now to then?

JA: Right.

IS: It's just—it's proper to remember the dead, if for no other reason than they weren't all just dead. They were alive like we are alive. So if we can't respect our dead, then someone said,

“Who are we as a society?” You know, if we can only remember right now, then what kind of a society are we really? Because we’re just—we’re about today as opposed to yesterday or tomorrow. So yeah, there should be some sort of representation there of any person that’s been alive.

JA: And the details that you were giving just now about people being buried in their own best clothes or the best clothes that were provided for them, you know, it helps me, and I think it would help other people, too, to see—like you said, see people as people. It’s not just a cemetery with graves. Those are graves where there were people and—

IS: They were alive. They existed. They contributed to history.

JA: Right.

IS: Or they were victims of history. Whatever the situation was, they were there. And somebody should say, “I remember that” or “Who was that?” You know, at least ask the question. But if there’s nothing there but the interstate, nobody ever knew, so that means that that never happened, okay.

JA: Right.

IS: Which is the worst thing that can actually happen in history. You know, you speak of my dad—my dad memorized a poem from William Cullen Bryant which was called “Thanatopsis.”<sup>1</sup>

JA: Right.

IS: And he could recite it from start to finish without any document to read from. He recited it from memory. And it talked about the existence of life, you know, how it was when—how we all come into the world. And it talks about living, and when you die, how each one of us—one by one—will gather to that side. We’re going to come to the cemetery and say the final goodbye to that person therein—the same thing that—all these people that came, the same thing’s going to happen to them, you know what I mean?

JA: Right.

IS: So we’re all going to go through the same process. You can come there as a poor man, you can come there as a king, you can come there—whatever section, whatever you acquire, whatever you accomplished in life, but at some point you’re going to leave this Earth, you know. And it has one part that says, Well, what if you depart in silence and no man take note of that departure? So it’s such a significant poem, and people have asked me why don’t I learn it so I can continue the tradition, but I consider it so much a part of my dad’s legacy that I would be infringing upon who he was by recreating or continuing what he did. That was what he did.

JA: Right.

---

<sup>1</sup> Read at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50465/thanatopsis>.

IS: So that's why I just decided that I wouldn't do it. But I have so much respect for him for learning it, and the poem itself is magnanimous. I mean, it's such a powerful representation of life, and more so death. Thanatopsis, Thanatos, the study of death, you know. So taking all of that into consideration literally justifies the need, the right, the responsibility of us as people to remember those people that came before us. So that in and of itself answers the question, Should we represent? Should we have a ceremony? Should there be some replica of this person having lived? Take the excerpts from "Thanatopsis," which will simply give a justifiable position to say yes, that there should be that for that reason and that reason only. You know, argumentatively, it can argue with anybody's reason for saying no, that there shouldn't be, just by reading the poem.

JA: That is a very good point. As a literature professor, I concur.

IS: There you go.

JA: Now that—you know, when you say this—and I agree that we do have a responsibility to that space—who do you think is specifically responsible for memorializing it, or putting up something?

IS: If we want to just start from the core, I think it would be the family, okay. But see, we're talking generations now, so probably most of the family is no longer there, or doesn't have any recollection because they didn't know it was there either. Back to the point about the reason for the celebration, remembering the person with the monument: If you don't know it's there, how can you go and celebrate? How can you remember?

So I guess to answer your question, if you don't have family representation, then the powers that be, if they—I have to say this the right way. If they were shown, trained, informed, enlightened on the significance of why we have to remember, why we have to look back, then they would understand that there's a concrete reason that we should not allow these people to be forgotten. Then they should take a stance and say, Yes, we should do so.

The problem with that is, as—this is one man's opinion—as generations have come to be, there has been less and less and less and less of what I would call good morals, good folkways, you know, those things that made us who we are, that allowed us to become who we became. But if our generations are not informing us, like my mom informed me, like my dad, my grandma informed me of who I am to make me who I am—if you don't know where you came from, the old saying says, you don't know where you're going. Once again, we say it. So I guess to the point, people nowadays, unfortunately—I hate to even say this, but people nowadays probably care less about any history other than what's going on right now, because they don't know any better. They weren't trained to know. They weren't trained to care. They weren't trained to respect their elders.

You know, we used to make sure we looked out for the old folks when they got old, because they couldn't do for themselves. But we still said, "Hello, ma'am" or "Excuse me, sir." Or get up—if you were catching a bus—and let an old person sit down. You stood up because you respected the elders, all right. As generations have moved forward, there's less and less and less exposure of that type of more about those things that customarily we did. So from that premise, you say—

you got people that are in roles of power, roles of responsibility, roles of leadership, but when they were children, nobody showed them the importance or the significance of the point we're trying to address.

JA: Right.

IS: Then they would say themselves, Ah, you know, who cares? And that's a battle—it's an uphill battle to get those people who are in power today to say it's important to look back and commemorate a generation that in and of itself may not have done much. They just were people that were alive, just trying to exist.

JA: Like us all.

IS: You know, but—

JA: Yes.

IS: —but you still got people that's going to judge them. All right, well, they weren't attorneys, they didn't have big homes, they didn't have—they didn't do anything significant in life, so why should we make the effort to commemorate them? But the simple fact of the matter is they were a generation just like we're a generation. They were a generation, too.

JA: Right.

IS: The whole goal is just to remember them because they were a generation.

JA: Right. Exactly. Yeah.

IS: Not what they did, just the fact that they existed, right?

JA: If there wasn't a generation before us, we would not be here.

IS: Exactly. Where'd you come from?

JA: Yeah. So when we—and I appreciate the answer, and I completely agree with you—when we think about—like I said, we're part of a grant team, and our project is called the African American Burial Ground and Remembering Project. So when you hear that name, what—I guess I'll just ask you as a funeral professional: What do you think should or could be our role in that process of remembering, as a grant-funded academic team?

IS: Well, “grant” meaning you're going to get funding that you don't have to pay back?

JA: Right.

IS: All right, so that means that you have a reasonable amount of funding to put something together, inasmuch as somebody is not going to come out of their pocket to do so. The question

is where and how. So I think you're—the direction that you're taking, first getting information or knowledge about this generation of people that have been overridden—I think if you can gather some concrete information, from there go on to the city with documentation in hand. You know, we're proving that these people were here, and we're saying that these people are worth being recognized, being remembered. Then, if you can win that battle, it would be a matter of relocating if not the exact spot, but somewhere in the vicinity of where they were, and then enacting something, somewhere, where nobody would tear it down or run over it or—you know, it's got to be something structural, where it's guarded, it's strong, it's well represented, to where you can place it somewhere.

I think that if you can get those hurdles accomplished, then the responsibility of doing that—I hate to say it: You may not get as much of an appreciation or respect for doing so, because most of the people could probably care less, because the ones that knew them well are all gone. So it's just a—in my heart, I'm doing the right thing, you know. So it would pretty much be a self-satisfaction process as opposed to waiting for somebody to pat you on the back, because the city, the individuals, the families, all the people who would do so—they're all gone or don't care.

So yeah, I think that—now, I'm a cheerleader for it, because fortunately or unfortunately, I was trained to—or I was taught to—respect certain things and appreciate some things that may not be self-gratifying. I may not get any accommodations or appreciations or certificates or proclamations or what have you that people—you know, they need somebody to pat them on the back and tell them “good job.”

JA: Yeah.

IS: You may not get any of that.

JA: Well, it's our job as academics to contribute to the knowledge of the world.

IS: Then that would be the reason why, in and of itself.

JA: Yeah.

IS: If you were looking for any type of, What did I get out of it? That would be it.

JA: I guess I'm asking, rather [than], “What should we get out of it?” I think I'm asking you, “What do you think we should put into it?” That's kind of a different way of—

IS: That's—yeah.

JA: Different—yeah.

IS: That's a pondering kind of question there now. What would you actually put there?

JA: I mean, in terms—not just physically, but what kinds of things do you think should be done and how can academics help? That's—

IS: Well, academia is about information and knowledge and teaching that, teaching somebody else. I guess, in a word, we'll say that you did your job.

JA: Well, I'm happy to do that.

IS: You did your job. If informing and contributing to society is the goal, then getting that accomplished—spiritually, they had a statement, and I'm a believer, all right. I'm a believer in Jesus Christ. And they often talk about the great cloud of witnesses. And it may apply in this situation, because inasmuch as you may not get any earthly appreciation for your effort, that great cloud of witnesses who are resting and waiting on the resurrection, they themselves, if by chance—we don't know because nobody's been there—if by chance they—you know, in my church they talk about how that great cloud of witnesses is rooting for every believer, for what we go through here in life, that you can make it through because we made it through. You know, you can accomplish great things simply because we know the Lord, and the Lord led us and provided for us and showed us the way. Then, if that be the case—and I believe it—they can celebrate you for getting that done on their behalf. You may not ever hear it—

JA: That's okay.

IS: —but they're cheering from heaven.

JA: I think if we could do work that is celebrated by the great cloud of witnesses, that would be a wonderful thing.

IS: That's right, man. And nobody can take that from you.

JA: Absolutely. Absolutely. I'm going to let everybody know that you're pumping your fist in the air as you say that.

IS: I'm a believer.

JA: Okay. And I'm going to close because I think that is a great way to end this wonderful conversation. I feel like I've learned so much from you, so thank you.

IS: Wow. I thought I had nothing to offer.

JA: See? See, see?

*End of interview.*