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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: A31-00008
Interviewee: Betty Brown (BB)
Interviewer: Otis Anthony (OA)
Interview date: August 9, 1978
Interview location: Progress Village, Tampa, Florida
Transcribed by: Unknown
Transcription date: Unknown
Interview changes by: Kimberly Nordon
Changes date: December 9, 2008
Final Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson
Final Edit date: January 7, 2009

Betty Brown: All right, what would you like to know?

Otis Anthony: Something about like what schools you attended, how long you been in Tampa.

BB: I am a native Floridian. I came to Tampa in 1955. I was born in Monticello, Florida, Jefferson County. I grew up there. I attended school at Florida A & M University where I received my undergraduate degree—bachelor's degree—in English and I also have done some further study at Florida State University, at University of Michigan School of Business, and I received my graduate degree in education from the University of South Florida. And I've lived in Progress Village since 1962 with my family, with my husband Alfonso and two children—Donald, who is now a junior in pharmacy at Florida A & M University, and Debra, who will be going into her junior year at Tampa Bay Tech. She's fifteen years old.

OA: Okay. Now what was the condition of blacks say in 1955 in Tampa?

BB: In Tampa it was very much the same, pretty much the same, as it was all over the south. Perhaps there were some exceptions. I think the climate was not as, I'd say, not as, as rigid in terms of some of the conditions that some of the blacks were exposed to, somewhat more liberal. I could make a comparison between, for example, my home county, Jefferson County, which was north Florida and, you know, had the Panhandle flavor, and then you come to Tampa with a more cosmopolitan flavor, and beyond that I think the conditions were quite similar, which was there was very definite segregation all over. So the society was fairly closed as far as blacks were concerned.

We still had the separate and unequal facilities as far as the schools were concerned, as far as accommodations. I recall that there was no public beach facilities for blacks at that

time in Hillsborough County. All of the lunch counters were segregated. All of the restaurants were closed. Public facilities, transportation, the buses were segregated, you know, "the back of the bus concept," and so on. The churches were segregated. The movies were totally segregated. You had a couple of movies, one down on Central [Avenue] for blacks, and, I believe there was one in West Tampa, on North Boulevard, for blacks, and of course the downtown theaters and whatever others that they had were totally off limits as far as blacks were concerned.

OA: By analyzing the politics of blacks, how would you read politics in the early fifties [1950s] particularly as it affected black people?

BB: Well, in the early fifties [1950's], in the fifties [1950's], I was in college and I think that the conditions that I described were manifestations of the politics of the day, the society. The country was a segregated society, and I think there were certain things that had been effect for so long that it was pretty much taken for granted as a way of life. You know, this is the way it is and as far back as most people could remember that's the way it was. And I think that many black people were fairly much resigned to their fates, you know, as far as the opportunities and so forth. They had been brainwashed to a great degree. They had been pretty much brainwashed that we were inferior, and many blacks accepted this. And I think that the politicians were certainly maintainers of the status quo. In reflecting back I can see that they were custodians of the conditions that were, and I'm sure that they didn't think too much in any different terms.

OA: Okay. Having lived in Tampa prior to 1966, what prompted your move to Progress Village?

BB: Prior to 1966?

OA: Sixty-two [1962], I'm sorry.

BB: Well, I, ah, when I first came to Tampa, of course I was right out of college and I was looking for a job and just starting my family and so forth. And so we first lived in the project, in the housing project in Belmont Heights, and then we got a smaller—we got, I guess, a somewhat better home. We rented a home on 33rd Avenue and we stayed there until 1962 when we moved to Progress Village. And, of course, the conditions that we described as far as a segregated society was also, I guess the most entrenched as far as housing was concerned, because as you know there are still many problems today in housing, even more so than in certain other areas in which there have been many improvements.

So, when we, when Progress Village, started out as an idea back in 1957, it was during the time when urban renewal was coming into being and it was recognized by the "city fathers," if I can use that quotation, back when they came through and took away whatever housing blacks had. They were going to have to go somewhere. I'm sure it wasn't generally the concession that blacks would be going to Davis Island and to Brandon, and some of the other, and Temple Terrace and Interbay, and some of the other

areas. And so, I think it was partly out of, I don't know if it was out of conscience or out of goodwill, but for whatever motives, I think it was conceded that there needed to be some low, I'd say low-income housing, wherein people who could afford to purchase a home but could not afford to build custom homes would have someplace to go.

And so it was thought on that theme that a group of blacks and whites got their heads together. These were some of the most respected people, business people and educators and so forth, on both sides, nine and nine, eighteen people, white and black, decided that they would form a corporation, Progress Village, Inc. and buy some land and build some houses. It was also rather unusual for blacks to live anywhere except inner cities. You know, suburbia was unheard of. So this was sort of designed as a place where citizens could go and get a little fresh air and yet with the long-term mortgages and the very low down payments, \$100, \$200 at that time, it was certainly something that would be within everybody's reach.

OA: Was there any opposition?

BB: Oh, yes. There was quite a bit of opposition, because even though the idea that the homes would be open for all citizens, you know, that whites would not be excluded, I'm sure that it was designed with blacks in mind, and in this area, this is still a sort of rural area as you know. There were whites in the area who, I'm sure, felt threatened with the idea that blacks were gonna come out and live near them. And so even though it was gonna be a pretty much, it was pretty well conceded that it was gonna be an all black community, there was still opposition from some of the whites at that time in the Riverview area and the Palm River areas and surrounding communities, and the Gibsonton area and so forth. But the people who formed Progress Village, Inc., as I said, were people who had prestige. They had the know how, they had the money and they had the convictions that this would be—not a utopian situation, but this would be a beginning of a solution of a long-standing problem. So they just simply ignored the protests, and I think that made them more determined than ever that Progress Village would materialize.

OA: Were you all worried about being close to facilities, shopping centers, hospitals? Was there that kind of fear or problem?

BB: I don't think it was a fear, I'm sure it was a consideration. You see, when Progress Village was conceived it was—it has never really turned out to be, and that's a whole long story there—but it never materialized into what was promised from the outset. There were some shattered dreams with Progress Village.

OA: I'd like to hear about some of those dreams. (laughs)

BB: Well, with the idea that people would have housing that gave everybody a great deal of hope. You know, at last I can have my own home, and this kind of thing. I don't really believe that there was as much consideration, and as I look back I'm sure that there was not enough questioning in terms of what will we do for hospitals, what will we do for

some of the other conveniences, and so forth. I think the very idea of being able to own your own home in a brand new community and really be able to do your own thing was so appealing that some of the other things, you know, were sort of overlooked.

Nevertheless, a school was in the planning, and in fact concurrent with the first dozen families or so—I don't have the exact number—moving to Progress Village, a school was established. So that was recognized, a convenience store was brought out very early in the game, a playground very early in the game, and then later a recreation building. It was originally conceived as, probably, a community of 4000 homes which would be built in several phases. And so they had in mind schools, you know, more than one school, and some additional shopping centers and churches and it was planned along the lines of a total community. And so with these things being in the making, you know, you'll get bus service, you'll get street lights, you'll get the whatever in order to have a total community. Then, you know, some people went on what was actually there and that was the opportunity to buy a new home and along with the promise, you know, and hope that the other things would materialize.

OA: In the process of getting into a new home did the people have a choice of what kind of home they wanted in terms of planning or were they just sort of building a lot of very (inaudible) homes?

BB: Right. Well, the project was in a planning stage for several years, at least a couple of years, from the time they started talking till the time the first home went under construction. It was very well communicated to the black community, C. Blythe Andrews, Sr., and Perry Harvey and Nick Martin and we have the Board of Directors in that Village directory there. But they saw to it that the people were very well informed, so they got the builders—they got the FHA backing and then they got the builders. Maybe a dozen or more builders were here and they had their floor plans and they had each of the builders set up a model home. In fact some had several models, and these were the first things they constructed so that the people could come out and actually see what the homes were like, complete with furnishings and everything, landscaping and so forth. And then they had other homes which were merely on the plans and people could select, with some variations, what type of home they wanted, and their homes were built in units and they sold very, very fast.

The [prospective buyer] screening was not done very well, and almost—if I can put it this way—anybody that could get say \$50 to \$200 could pretty much move into Progress Village, and many were able to do that without even going through the normal screening process that you would have to go through for a home. You paid your \$50 down or your \$100 down and you moved on in while your paperwork was being processed to find out whether or not you qualify. And so some people came in and didn't even start the mortgage payment for two or three months later. And of course the competition was very keen among the builders, the sales pitches were very good, slick, and so it was a "come one, come all" you know, and people came. Excuse me a minute.

OA: At the time in this country when Progress Village was coming into being was, ah—

the economy was booming and the government was willing to develop these kind of programs.

BB: I wouldn't say the economy was booming. I'm sorry.

OA: What? You go ahead.

BB: All right. In 1957, I didn't recall a booming economy. I feel that ah, well we were not exactly in a recession, but there was a need. People had to stay somewhere and so the gover—and there was also backing, you know, there was money advanced by the Progress Village Board of Directors and their own personal money. They put up sufficient money, you know, just as they would have any other business venture and they had the backing of FHA which is insurance, which meant that if the homes were foreclosed then the FHA insurance would take care of that, you know. And of course it so happened that we had a very high rate of foreclosures, which suggests also that business was not exactly booming—that the economy was not exactly booming.

In fact, at one point, let's see, the first house, the first model home was set up probably in 1959, if I recall. And the first families moved in 1960. And right after that the others followed very rapidly so that by 1960—say about mid-1963, practically all of the homes that you see out here now were built and practically all were occupied. And almost simultaneously the foreclosures started, you know, the people who, many people who could not have afforded, and who if they were trying to buy a home today would just simply not qualify because they don't have the income or what have you. Those people couldn't make it. Many simply lost their homes, their homes were foreclosed and by 1965, I'd say the Village was 65 percent occupancy, and I think your statistics and the census follow-up will bear that out.

For a combination of reasons, not everybody who left were foreclosures; some people left because they were disillusioned with the community. Some of the things that had been promised did not materialize. The builders had sold their homes, they'd gotten their down payments, they'd gotten their FHA insurance and they were gone, and so the developers were left mainly with homes, you know. School materialized and some of the other things I mentioned but there were some people who could have afforded to live out here but they decided that this wasn't their bag, so they left on their own free will and, you know, got better homes. Some couldn't make it because transportation was still a problem. We got public bus service very early in the game, but it was sporadic at best and you know how that is, having to transfer wherever you went. Unless you worked right downtown you were going to have to transfer and take another bus and you're talkin' about an hour or hour and a half ride. So many people had to buy two cars, whereas before they didn't have to buy any, or maybe just one, and that was an added expense. In fact everybody who came out naturally wanted to buy new furniture, that was an added expense, they had to have lawns and landscaping. There were many expenses that had not been really thought out and had not been anticipated that people ran into.

OA: So on the whole you would say that it was one of the first real massive experiments

in black homeownership in Tampa, where we learned a lesson in home ownership.

BB: I'd say yes to the first one and no to the second one. I would say yes, I think that was the first time that anything on this scale had been attempted in Tampa for blacks, or in this county for blacks. As far as learning certain lessons of home ownership, I'm sure these had been learned long and hard before, but I understand the spirit in which you're asking that. I'm sure there were many lessons learned. But I think they were lessons already learned on a smaller basis.

OA: Okay, (inaudible) people as to the protection, police protection, how is that monitored?

BB: Okay, we're in an unincorporated area, as you know. This is Hillsborough County, so we're protected by the sheriff's department. We have—I guess you can expect about the normal response time. If you need a sheriff right now for whatever reason you may have one cruising in the area and you may not and that will affect how quickly you can get someone. There have been times, you feel, I feel personally, right now, that our protection is better than it has been at any point previously. And I say this over the past couple of years or so.

I think this has come about as a result of our increased—our making the sheriff's department aware that we were not satisfied with the, generally speaking—we felt that there were improvement areas in terms of response times, in terms of when they came out, how they conducted investigations and in terms of generally surveillance in the community. For example, you rarely saw somebody just cruising through, you know, just to see how things are going. We have now a crime prevention program that I feel is very effective in that a full-time deputy who is a volunteer with the sheriff's department, but he was assigned out here on a full-time basis and to stay in Progress Village as long as Progress Village wanted him to go from house to house and door to door and sit down with people and explain to them some of the common things that they could do in order to better protect their homes, locks and alarm systems and neighborhood watch, and you know how to do when you go away, you know, the usual crime prevention techniques. That, I think got some added credibility for the sheriff's department. We have gotten to know a lot of them personally and that I think has helped. We have asked for coverage on—you know, on some of our games and so forth. Many of the—several members of the sheriff's department know some—many of the kids in the junior high schools because they have that program in the schools, which has helped. So I think a combination of things, but particularly we have requested additional protection.

OA: All right, let's talk about you a little bit, because I keep getting (inaudible). You're such a collective person and that's really good. Ah, but I'd like to know a little bit more about the central role you played and we talked about bus service and transportation and the sheriff and all. I'm sure to a certain degree you have been involved very much in all of that but I'd like to know something about how you've gone about accomplishing some of these things. You are a leader.

BB: Well, first I shy away from the term being a leader. That term I try not to get the label "leader" because that can have some drawbacks. I appreciate the compliment.

First, I'd like to say that I personally, I don't really feel that I have, you know, done all of these things. I feel what we have accomplished has been really a team effort. And true I provided some leadership. You know, had I not provided it somebody else would have provided it. There's usually never a leadership vacuum in this community. And long before I emerged to the forefront there were people who took the lead. From the very get-go the city council was organized, the churches were established, people—those things required leadership, little league teams, scouting established, you know—you name it and it's here or it has been here in this community. And every one of those things required leadership. And in that directory, again, we have some people who are currently involved in some [of] those things. So it has really been a team effort.

I think that if I could say, what I wouldn't mind taking some credit for, is that I have helped to try to carry the torch. For example, the Civic Council was organized very early in the game when the community was first established. It has been active for the total length of time that Progress Village has been in existence. It has always been alive. There have been times when it was more effective than others, or more active than others, but we have sort of carried the torch from one to the other in this community. And the same thing has happened with the churches and the scouting movement and the little league, and so forth. But I have tried to bring some renewed vigor into the community. I have been very active in clean-up campaigns and I feel that—I feel very excited to be a part of the political maturity that has always existed in the Village and that has also been renewed in recent years.

OA: That's what excites you about Progress Village. It seems that you all have established some really positive relations with the government. You've also been able to get what you want. And, you know, I really would like to know, you know, how you all do that.

BB: Okay. Well, our batting average has fluctuated from time to time. There were times then we didn't get much of anything. But in recent years, I'd say over the last four years at least, I feel that we have gotten extremely good response from county government who we made the interface with. I feel that we have gotten the respect of the county elected officials as well as the various paid staffs and so forth. And I feel that we have gained a great deal of credibility in the larger community. There are a number of organizations—white organizations, for example, that have called us and asked us about our techniques and so forth.

There were times when we didn't get too much attention from our brothers and sisters and cousins and aunts in town, you know. They'd turn their noses—look down their noses at those folks out there in Progress Village. But we have gotten many overtures now from, I say "leaders" in the larger black community who have, you know, taken some second looks at what were doing and their saying, "You now, hey come on. This is great." You know, "Come on and work with us" on this or that or the other. We have called on

organizations. We have called on the Urban League and they have been most responsive. We have called on the NAACP, come on out and help us do voter registration drives and they have always responded when you've asked them.

But I think the thing that has gotten us the most respect and credibility where it also counts is at the county level. And I think it has been the way that we've done our approaches. We have some very talented people in the community, and we have utilized those people to our advantage. We have people in every walk of life, you name it, nurses. We've done clinics out here, we used the nurses. We have several members of the sheriff's department who live out here. We have people who work in various federal programs. We have social workers, teachers, and on and on. We have attorneys who live in this community who have donated their time and services for free to the Civic Council.

So it has really been—once we assessed the strength of our community by determining some basic statistics first, you know; we looked at how many of us there were out here. The Census Bureau would lead you to believe that there aren't that many, but you know they always under count by up to 25 percent, so we did our own survey to try to find out how many there were, how many and what age groups there were. We—

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BB—registered, we compared that to how many of us are registered compared to how many—first how many blacks, then predominantly black precincts, how many others, you know. We looked at our voting records to see what kind of turnouts we have. Then we compared that to the larger community. We then decided we would start really analyzing and scrutinizing, and evaluating candidates—and particularly county commissioners and people who held elected offices locally—and decided we would track them.

We have a political caucus and we assign people to track these people and see how they vote on issues that are really pertinent to us in this community as well as to blacks as a whole. And we endorse candidates and we get the word out through our village news that this is who we think will best speak out on our behalf, or act in our behalf. This is the way we're going to vote and we would certainly encourage you to do the same thing. And we tested that, we've gone contrary in several instances to some of our "leaders" in town. You know, they say we goin this way and we say uh uh, we goin this way. Not to be contrary to them, but rather just because these were our convictions. So we have operated in an independent fashion and yet we have used resources, you know, that were available to us.

And, I think when the elected officials began to see how we operated and, you know, they look at say 1,100 votes which maybe at first blush doesn't sound like too much. But when you look at the fact that in our last County Commission race there were some who won by, what, a hundred or so votes? And when you look at the fact that we vote almost entirely in a block, you know. It just happens that way because we inform our people of what the issues are and we also—then they can draw their own conclusions. Then I think it's significant. And so we have used this to our advantage. We don't have anything to

lose by endorsing or not endorsing a candidate, and so we try to do that, because we don't have any, you know, political debts or anything like that, so nothing ventured, nothing gained.

We have—oh, there was one other thing. Otis, you are quite familiar with some of the issues that we've had that—for example, when we had the dispute with the water company over rates and quality of water and these kinds of things. And, then, later with the people who were running the pipeline down through the main boulevard. We went before the County Commission, and—especially with the water fight. And even the attorney for the water company commended us in terms of our background research, our preparation, our presentations and the way we conducted ourselves at the hearing. You know, we didn't go down stamping and yelling and so forth. We went down armed with data and we presented it and it was factual. And we were able to get what we felt was the most equitable settlement that we could obtain, short of going to court—which we didn't want to do, but which we let it be known that we would consider if we felt we had to.

And I think it's been things like this; we contact mainly department heads and tell them what the problem is and ask them—it's no more than what they're supposed to do anyway. So we say we have this problem and we'd like to ask you what can you do to help? Or, can you do thus and so? We'll be specific, and most times they'll do it, because they know us. If we run into a problem, which we rarely do, and we feel that our cause is just, we will then appeal to the County Commission and ask them if they will take it under consideration, and ask them if they will rectify it or do whatever should be done. And sometimes we don't get results but I'd say in 85 to 90 percent of the time we do. And I think that's a pretty good batting average. Don't you?

OA: Yeah, that's real good. Let's back up a little bit. Do you remember the beginning of organizations such as the Young Adults?

BB: Young Adults for Progressive Action?

OA: Uh-huh.

BB: Yes, I was a member of the Young Adults, with James Hammond—okay, I was secretary.

OA: Can you tell us about that period and, sort of, could you elaborate a little bit on whether we've grown or where we are at as a community, politically, social education, whatever.

BB: I think we've grown. I see a great deal of maturing. I was a very active member of Young Adults for Progressive Action, and we—well, our goals at that point were really very basic. We wanted some basic human rights, just basic human rights, and you know what they were, going back to the segregated society and so forth. We wanted some jobs. We wanted entry jobs at that point. We weren't asking to be personnel managers and company presidents and so forth. We wanted entry jobs into industrial Tampa. That was

mainly what we were asking for, along with all of the accommodations and so forth that many other groups were fighting for, NAACP, Youth Council and all of those, fighting for schools, you know to lower the barriers they had, you know, to break down the barriers, to open accommodations and so forth.

But our main thrust was employment. We wanted—for example, if I can name some companies. We wanted companies such as the telephone company, the power companies and some of the larger industrial companies to just let us in the door, and when you do, give us something other than the janitor's job. And so we asked to be telephone operators. Telephone operators, just telephone operators, a cashier at a grocery store, a bag boy, a bag boy—we wanted a bag boy, you know, a little boy to carry out the groceries, which none of the supermarkets in Tampa had at that time. They had no cashiers. No department stores had black cashiers, and that's what we were talking about. We wanted some jobs, just a little piece of the action.

And we've always had good allies in the white community and they have had to help us in a very strategic fashion. So we were able to call in some of our allies and, you know, with the negotiations and with the pressure tactics that we used—that was selective spending, which [is what] I call it now—it used to be called boycotts. (laughs) "We just won't shop here, there and the other," and the word gets around in a hurry, and if you do you're naughty, naughty because they don't want you there. You know, you pick out one place where you—where you—you know—throughout the country you've carried the company so you say, "Well I don't believe we'll go over there anymore and, you know what the strategies were used, and finally they would fold, you know.

Okay, that was one pressure tactic, and then along with that we did appeal to the better sides of some of our white allies and the people who were in power and the people who could help us bring these things about. And finally, we were able to negotiate—okay, to try to get through the "they don't want to work" syndrome, to "Okay, if you will get us some, then we'll hire them." We said, "Fine. Hire them, even on a trial basis, and if they don't work out then you can fire them." And to make sure that blacks were ready to go into this job market, to be telephone operators, and cashiers and so forth, we set up a preemployment qualifications workshops in which we would really select—we'd select better than they would even, and get the best people that we could find. And there were many available. And then we would sit down and say, "Look, this is the name of the game, you're going into a hostile atmosphere, you know. They think you're not going to be able to make it. Here's what you've gotta do. You've gotta dress properly, you gotta speak properly," and I'm putting these all in quotes, and "You've really just [got] be able to hang in there psychologically, come hell or high water. You've gotta make it, and you've gotta give it all you've got."

And so we ran these kind of sessions. We helped people to even brush up on basic skills like taking tests, sample tests, filling applications, writing resumes, doing mock interviews so they would know to give the right answers and to "yes" and "no" rather than "yeah" and "no" and, you know, these kinds of things. And so we groomed these people and got them ready. And we said, "Okay here is a batch that we can ensure

success with. Now will you hire them?" And we got enough companies to say yes. Nobody wanted to be first. Everybody didn't mind being second along with everybody else. And so, "Yes, I'll do it if so and so will do it."

And so we negotiated some jobs for people in supermarkets and with the telephone company. General Telephone really went out in those days and I think they were sort of pioneers because they helped us conduct that first workshop and after that many of the other companies came in behind them. And we did some follow-up workshops. We put people on jobs, the majority of them made it. They didn't have any choice, you know, and um, that was an icebreaker as far as employment was concerned. Telephone repairman, telephone lines and the operators, cashiers, sales clerks, and so on. You know, visibility jobs where people could see blacks working in jobs where they never had worked before.

OA: Do you recall any organization that was on the level that was compared to Young Adults after that organization dissolved?

BB: Well, I would say the Urban League, the Tampa Urban League and the NAACP—see most people tend to forget those two organizations, but they have always—they are institutions, they're not just organizations. So they were always there, always have been, and always will be. The Young Adults I think served a very worthwhile purpose, and we came together from all walks of life and coalesced energies and so forth and we accomplished some goals and finally we just sort of phased out, you know. So I would say the Urban League and the NAACP share strength in their contributions that they have made to the total solution, toward the total solution of the problems. [It] would certainly supersede what the Young Adults did in that point in time.

And then I would say the churches, the churches as an institution, would certainly—and this is another institution that people overlook—are the black church, you know. Always been there, always has been, will be. And so, you know, you go and sing and pray over these problems, and you have ministers in many of the churches who are willing to take the leadership role in some of these social issues. Many are not that brave. Some are a little bit timid and don't want to venture out, or feel that that's not the role of the church. But you have enough ministers that feel that the church is a facilitator of change, a catalyst of change and so they're gonna get in there and they're gonna use—and the ministers can really influence their members to do what they want them to do. And so I would say that that kind of institution—

I'm sure that there were other organizations, there were clubs and sororities and fraternities, and so forth. And while they may not have been as visible, you know, as say the Young Adults, at that point in time, everybody was playing some role. It was a collective effort, and everybody was putting a few shingles on the building, so to speak.

OA: So you think we've grown?

BB: I think we've grown. I think we have a long way to go. Certainly we recognized that the battle has changed. There are more subtleties. They are less visible, the problems are

not as visible, as they were at that time. When I say that I mean, you now see the sales clerks, okay, you see the bag boys, you see the—you know, you see us in the personnel offices and so forth. It can be deceptive in that, you know, if you're not careful you might think that we have overcome, but when—I think you have to look beyond the tokenisms and look at the masses, look at the total problem, and see whether blacks in fact are better educated, see whether they are better employed, overall as a group, not just me with my job, but blacks in general. See what the batting average or the casualties have been with desegregation in the schools, how much have we lost that we can never regain. What price have we paid for integration?

You see where I'm coming from? So you gotta look at the total picture before you can say how much we've grown. But I certainly feel that we have moved a distance from where we were and I'm very confident that we ain't never going back there no more. But it's very frustrating when you see some of the same—some of the problems that we didn't really have to contend with on as large a scale at that time that have merged not, particularly among blacks. It gets to be a little frustrating and sometimes frightening, um, the turn-off syndrome of many young blacks, because they just haven't been able to, you know, to get with it in the terms that we feel that they ought to. And some of their values have certainly been eroded, these kinds of things.

OA: Well, the reason I asked that is because it's so good to hear somebody talking about a community having political (inaudible) and you can see it grow. Ah, we have had a few frustrating interviews and ah, we get that all the time from people (inaudible).

BB: Yeah, and we're worse off than ever.

OA: And what has happened after (inaudible).

BB: We have the same. I want to give the other side of the coin as far as Progress Village is concerned. You have a great deal of apathy in any community. I used to think Progress Village was unique in its apathy (Anthony laughs) until I started talking with many of the people in some of the other communities. For example, in certain areas in Brandon, you know, people say, "If we could just get a club or civic association organized!" You know, in certain sections, now they have some associations but some of them say, "If we could just get one going." And Palm River has been struggling trying to get—they have an association, but they have been trying to get some additional participation and so forth.

So I think the masses of blacks in Progress Village are no more or no less apathetic than, you know, anybody else. They're just plain ole normal people, you know. They have their share and they don't want to be outdone with apathy. It ain't gonna do no good, I don't know what the council is doin' now, they're not doin' anything, I don't fool with them, you know, this kind of thing. And so, I think that what has made the difference as far as some of the things that we have been able to achieve has been that those of us who do share the dream that you can really contribute and control to a considerable degree, your destiny, ah, we've gone on and done it anyway with a dozen people, you know. We never wait for a hundred people to come to a meeting. We wouldn't know what to do with a

hundred people at a meeting. We have fifteen or twenty, twenty-five or thirty, at a council meeting and that is really great, you know? And so most times we have a couple of dozen or so, more or less; usually the same people. But some others will weave in and out. And we go ahead and do whatever we decide we're gonna do. And when we have something that's really outstanding and we say, "Okay Progress Village, now we want everybody to come on," and Progress Village will come on, you know, like when we've had our cultural activities with the Progress Village Thespians.

OA: I missed out on that. I'd love to see some of that.

BB: We've had our Founder's Day activities and we have standing room only, you know.

OA: Do you have pictures of any of these activities? Does anybody have pictures?

BB: I have just snapshots in color like with my little Instamatic [Kodak camera], and I have some extras of practically all of the activities, you know, that I have participated in. We also have some old *Village Pioneers* newspapers that were started as a commercial venture by Mr. Gaither. That's Jay Gaither's brother, you know Jay Gaither, Florida A & M? His brother was a Progress Village resident and he was one of the founding persons of the civic association. So he started a newspaper out here when the village first started, and I think I have about three issues which are yellowed. There's no way I would part with those, but you could copy them.

OA: Even with your pictures—we won't take them now—we're having a big exhibit. We wanna do one big exhibit down at the County Commission and, you know, just show everybody what we're talking about.

BB: We have a file cabinet full of materials. I was able to gather up—we had a young lady, Alma Randolph, who was one of our teachers out here. She was secretary of the council for a long time and she was also a reporter for the *Florida Sentinel* for Progress Village. She had a column. And her mother, when Alma died—she was there for a long time and she gathered up everything, as far as her records and so forth that she had, and she gave them to her mother. And I guess it was several years after she died before her mother remembered that she had all of those little records, you know, clippings from the newspapers and so forth that Alma had collected for the Civic Council. So I have those in my file, in the Civic Council's files.

OA: You know when we really put this exhibit together, this is really gonna be something. We got pictures from Mrs. Watts Sanderson. We got stuff as far back as Clara Frye Hospital—there's a whole box of information.

BB: I remember Clara Frye and Urban League when it was on Lamar.

OA: Well, we know we got that information, right? This is good before we mention those things. We're constantly checking and rechecking.

Well, let's talk about hope. Did you have any—okay. So let's say a little bit about what are your hopes, for Tampa and Progress Village and what you'd like to see. (laughs)

BB: Well, that's such a philosophical question.

OA: I know. (laughs)

BB: You could go off on a tangent. I've been president of Progress Village Civic Council for a couple of years and I've held various other offices and so forth. It's my intention—although I haven't announced this publicly—but I will not seek or accept reelection to the presidency, office of the presidency, but will certainly give someone else an opportunity to serve as president of Civil Council. I still plan to remain to remain as active as I am now and to do everything that I can to continue to bring about change.

We have, as you have noted, a very active housing rehabilitation program going on now and this is under federal funds. We have received, since 1975—we have been funded, rather—since 1975 for improvements in Progress Village, totaling close to a half million dollars. Complete street resurfacing, additional land, and the housing rehabilitation program, a senior citizens program, a youth employment program now in operation, which the Civic Council administers, both of those latitude programs that I mentioned. So, we're gonna continue to seek out every means of support that we can financially so that we can continue the physical improvements. We can also work on getting increased participation on the part of the villagers. We feel that we can do that by making sure that people do have an opportunity to exert their leadership and show what they can do, making sure that they feel that they are part. And I'm extremely good at delegating responsibilities to other people and getting other people involved, so that's one of the things that I'll be doing.

We're gonna build our political base, we would like to see our voting strength double, say, by the 1980 elections. We hope to double our voting strength. And I think that we have the know-how in order to do it. We would like to have some model blocks, start out, you know, as far as the improvement angle, beautification, set up a block that would serve as a model, whereas the homes would be really well kept and landscaped and so forth. And we want to instill more pride on the part of our residents so that they will not wait for us to have clean-up drives to haul the garbage away—not garbage, but the trash that collects, you know, junk. We want them to feel the need to carry their responsibility toward keeping a beautiful community. If the community is not beautiful—when pride breaks down everything else breaks down, And we're gonna instill more pride in Progress Village so that as we get these other improvements from the county then we can show that we also can do our parts.

As far as the larger community is concerned, we're going to hopefully market some of our techniques. For example, I'm a member of a group now, a council on minority affairs, which is composed of a cross-section of Tampa residents. And we have some goals which are quite similar to the ones that we've discussed already. I would like to be able to show my brother and sisters in town what can be done and suggest that we can take one

community at a time, you know, Belmont Heights or Central Park or take whatever—take Seffner or Thonotosassa, or West Tampa, just take one group at a time and then set some goals and go in there and decide on what needs to be done, and then pool all the resources into getting some things done, and just stop waiting for Santa Claus.

OA: That's right. I like the idea of other people learning about your techniques. I think it's gonna make a difference.

BB: On that village directory we did, with the assistance of a major corporation which would not like to be named for obvious reasons, that was a very unique venture. We don't know of any other group that has done that kind of a thing in their community as a volunteer community effort. Our village newsletter, we feel, is very unique. And we don't know of any comparable effort in another community that's by a community-based group.

OA: You know, I'll be honest with you. I've heard little bits and pieces about what you all were doing and I often envied you, you know, how'd you do it. Cause I couldn't imagine, you know, how you all was doing it. I think I thought I had tried everything and I'm just beginning to try, just beginning to—

BB: We have a lot of—the people get along well. You know, you have little spats sometimes, but I think that overall that this really is a good community to live in. You know, the neighbors are nice. I get along very well with my neighbors and just have—there's just a certain amount of unanimity. Now the people who tell you otherwise probably need to look inside, you know?

OA: Yeah, yeah, I know what you mean.

BB: Lot of cohesion, you'd be surprised. We have a lot of fun out here. And before you leave the Village I want you—

Oh, housing—one other thing. Even though the cost of housing has doubled, I say the value of my home has doubled since 1960, Progress Village housing still remains about the least expensive housing you can get for your money. I don't know any place else that you can get a three bedroom, one bath home on a 69 or 70 x 100 and some foot lot for, you know, \$16,000, concrete block. The homes that are being sold now that are FHA insured are completely refurbished with fences and carpeting, the whole works, just like they were. And some of them [are] in better shape than they were when they were built because the materials are better. So the range, the average range, is from \$16,000 to \$18,000, but that is not bad for a three bedroom house.

OA: No, it's not. I learned that during that housing survey.

BB: Right, and then there's some—

end of interview