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Antoinette Jackson (AJ): My name is Dr. Antoinette Jackson. I'm a professor here at University of South Florida working on the African American Burial Ground Project in the Black Cemetery Network. And today, we're talking to Mr. Joseph Myrick. And I'll let you go ahead and give an introduction to yourself like who you are, where you're at right now. And if you could also give me your date of birth and your place of work, okay?

Joseph C. Myrick (JM): Yes, my name is Joseph C. Myrick. C is middle name is Chad Myrick. I was born in Clearwater, Florida, at Morgan Plant Hospital. August 22nd, 1968. I am the daughter of Audrey Nee Dixon and Joseph Myrick Jr. Audrey Dixon, obviously, was one of 14 children of Mack Dixon Jr. I currently am employed as a supervisory United States Probation Officer in [?] Florida working for the United States district courts. I have been in this position for 24 years. And most of my adult career has been in the field of corrections and law enforcement.

AJ: Okay.

JM: Okay?

AJ: Yes, thank you, and how would you describe your race or ethnicity and your gender?

JM: Yes, I am a Black male.

AJ: Okay. And where do you currently live? Do you live in well -- I know in Florida, but where exactly in what city or whatever do you live in currently?

JM: Yes. I currently reside in Ocala, Florida. Okay?

AJ: Okay. And this interview is taking place via Zoom. So, um, could you just-- let's just get, just kind of a broad discussion going. So, you indicated to me that you heard the "60 Minutes" interview in which they -- in November of 2022, in which it was focused on the Clearwater cemeteries in the history of Clearwater communities. So, what compelled you or what was what drew you to that-- watching that and what compelled you to reach out?

JM: Let's go the "60 Minute" spot expose was -- the link was shared the with -- from another family member. I wasn't, I wasn't aware of the of information that it would be airing on what day but it-- but a family member advised me that after it aired, that there was a link available in which I promptly received and began to watch it. And, and it was very eye opening. As far as the Black history and what's-- and what happened to the cemeteries of a lot of Blacks in that area, and specifically, how it affected the Dixon family, my family. And I was very touched by the, the photo that was that was highlighted in that "60 Minute" video at the very end of the Mack Dixon family. When I saw it, you know, that photo has-- is a photo that has been circulated throughout my family for last fifteen—about, about 10 years. So, when I saw it, I knew it was it was legitimate, you know, it was the same photo that I've seen, you know, in my early in my late adult life. And it really, you know, caused me to pause, you know, and really take in what happened and what, what needs to happen in regards to rectifying them or making a better-- fixing the problem.

AJ: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

JM: And so, because of my position with the federal government, we do a lot of outreach into communities and, and in some, in some form of fashion, but nothing too aggressive. But I wanted to share that video with, so I shared a video with my executive team, my executive team would include my chief probation officer and his so four deputies. Just to give them a snapshot of the Black history of Clearwater because a lot of our retreats and conferences is right there on Clearwater Beach. And a lot of my colleagues, especially my younger colleagues, have no clue of the history and a clue or when it comes to African American and Blacks and how that area was built and settled. And I thought it was important that video was shared with my colleagues across the state. So, they would know that this tragedy happened.

AJ: Mm-hmm.

JM: And a lot of people were affected, including your own that works with you. So, that's kind of how I got really involved in and got in with two feet and started asking questions, more questions with my, my family members who are still living and who were living who were, you know, young, young adults or teenagers around that time. And, and I hate to admit it, but I should have done this earlier in my life instead of waiting now to actually interview and have talks with my uncles and aunts, who, who were affected more than I was because they are almost second generation. They're first generation. And, and, and they actually lived through that that time. And it was something with the cemetery, it's something we all knew. But we never had talked about it for whatever reason, I wish I knew the answer to it. I mean, I growing up I did hear some, some some rumblings through the older aunts and uncles talking about it, but there was never no follow up from myself and, and. And I don't know because of my immaturity of being young. And, and, and just being, being in my own life, just not asking them questions. But I wish I would have asked the questions sooner because out of the 14 kids, they are only four left.

AJ: Mm-hmm.

JM: And, and I was talking to, um -- I'm sure we get into this. But yeah, I initially start digging into this, I was speaking with my aunt Brenda Buie. And she was she had given me a lot of factual background as far as names and places and what these people were and how they moved

in the community during that time. And, and this happened, Dr. Jackson, and maybe about a month ago, in last week, my Aunt Brenda has passed.

AJ: No, hmm.

JM: Yeah. So, I mean I think about that and these are things that I wish I would have done early because other have family members, who obviously were older than my aunt who passed and my uncle Bernard, who I've got him to help us out with the, with the, with the celebration last weekend, but, but those aunts and uncles are already gone and they couldn't give me more insight. So that's kind of in a general, generalbroad term of how I got to where I am now.

AJ: Okay, thank you. And I'm really sorry about your loss. I know that each, each elder that passes in our families, it's just it's really rough. And they take a whole lot of history with them.

JM: Yes. They do. Yeah.

AJ: So, could you go let's, let's back up a little bit. I know you said about the picture. And, and then you mentioned the cemetery. So, first of all, what cemetery or cemeteries were you talking about or, or connected with in terms of your family, family members, perhaps being buried there or, or knowing about? Could you name the cemetery or cemeteries?

JM: Greenwood.

AJ: Okay. Greenwood Cemetery.

JM: Yeah.

AJ: Okay. And where is that Greenwood Cemetery located?

JM: I believe it's on the Heights, there. Yeah, which was called the Heights back then. But that would be around the, the area that my great, great grandfather purchased the land, which is around Cleveland Street and Missouri Avenue.

AJ: Okay.

JM: So, but yeah, Greenwood, yeah.

AJ: And could you again, say your parents name and then then we'll start with your-- the siblings that you were talking about? Especially, especially your aunt that just passed? Was that on your paternal or maternal side?

JM: Maternal.

AJ: Yeah.

JM: Maternal, yeah.

AJ: So, could you restate your name of your father's name? And then your mother's name, please?

JM: Yes. Yes. My father's name is Joseph Myrick Jr. and my mother's name is Audrey Dixon Myrick. Dixon is the last name.

AJ: Mm-hmm.

JM: Yeah.

AJ: All right. And could you then -- your mom had, uh, how many siblings siblings did she say?

JM: There are 14 total.

AJ: Okay, do you -- can you name all 14, or at least as many as you can name? Full names.

JM: Yes.

AJ: Okay.

JM: All right. So, we have my Aunt Inez Dixon.

AJ: Could you spell it please?

JM: I-N-E-Z. All right. And I had let me go ahead and written down here because when I was working on this, okay, so my Aunt Dolores Wilson. W-I-L-S-O-N. My Aunt Jannett.

AJ: Spell it, please.

JM: J-A-N-E-T. I'm sorry. J-A-N-N-E-T-T.

AJ: Okay.

JM: And, you know, I didn't know what her last name was. She was married. Aunt Jean, J-E-A-N? Well, her last name is Chaney.

AJ: Could you spell it please? I just want to make sure we get--

JM: Yes. C-H-A-N-E-Y. She was actually married to the basketball head coach at Temple University, John Chaney. I'm not sure if you're familiar with basketball. Yeah, that was my uncle there.

AJ: Oh, okay.

JM: Yeah. Then you had Brenda Buie. And she's, she's the one who got me started in his rabbit hole.

AJ: Spell Buie, please.

JM: B-U-I-E.

AJ: Okay.

JM: B-U-I-E. Right. Then you have JoAnn. J-O, capital A, Ann Murry. And then you have Maxine Dixon. Then we have Betty. Betty. I'll come see... Betty's name was. last name was David. I got to come back to that, I think it was...

AJ: Okay, okay.

JM: All right. Then you have my Uncle Bernard, Bernard Dixon? And then you have Charles Dixon. Then we have Frederick Dixon. So that's 1-2-3-4-5-6. And Audrey Dixon was my mom. I mentioned her so 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11. And that's 12. And those are the ones and I'll talk of Uncle Bernard about it. I couldn't figure out the other two, I think two passed, but I'm gonna have to get back with you on those when I speak with him.

AJ: Okay.

JM: Yeah.

AJ: Yes. And, and then you're, you're saying all of these siblings of your mom, they're all born and raised in the Clearwater area.

JM: Clearwater Heights. Yep.

AJ: Clearwater Heights.

JM: Yep.

AJ: And in terms of that picture, the photograph that was shown on CNN-- "60 Minute" in the one that you just referred to, as well as a family photo that you'd seen around, are those pictures of the siblings you just named? Or who is in that picture?

JM: Yeah, those are my great uncles and aunts.

AJ: Okay. So, they're on your mother's side or your--

JM: Mother's side, right.

AJ: Okay.

JM: Everything we're talking about is maternal.

AJ: Okay. All right. So, who was your-- the parents of your mom then?

JM: So, the young male in you had the folder in front of you or you remember it, but there's a young man, there's a young man to the right. If we look at the picture--

AJ: I'm looking at it.

JM: Standing, standing in front of tall guy, the tall, the tall gentleman is my Uncle Leroy and the gentleman and little boy in front of him is my grandfather. That's Mack Dixon Jr.

AJ: M-A-C-K.

JM: Yes. And Mack Dixon Jr. was married to my grandmother Mello, M-E-L-L-O. Same last name, Dixon. Unfortunately, I did not have the pleasure of meeting her. She passed in 1961.

AJ: Mm-hmm. Okay.

JM: I've seen pictures over she looks just like my mom, very beautiful woman. And my mom looked like her rather.

AJ: Yeah. So, Mack Dixon is the one-- your grandfather who purchased the-- the cemetery land or, or? Who?

JM: Mack Dixon, Sr.

AJ: Oh, so it was his father.

JM: Yeah. His father - great, great-- And that's the gentleman in the middle there.

AJ: In the middle -- with the hat.

JM: Yes.

AJ: Okay.

JM: Yes.

AJ : All right. And so, do you know then, so the father of Mack Dixon Jr. was Mack Dixon Sr.

JM: Senior.

AJ: Mm-hmm. And his mom was -- and who is -- the mom was?

JM: Florence. That's Florence sitting in the chair there.

AJ: Okay, holding the baby?

JM: Hold the baby. Holding my Uncle Bubba. Yeah. And I did have a pleasure of meeting him. I was-- I was a very young kid, I think in about five or six years old. I just remember him. It was first time I was ever introduced, introduced to a Black man wearing a toupee. It scared the living daylights out of me, but so--

AJ: Okay, so Mack Dixon Sr. is the person who purchased the original land for the Greenwood Cemetery.

JM: That's right. He had the property -- he bought the property from between Cleveland and Court Streets. And from Missouri to Greenville Avenue. And my Aunt Brenda, before she passed, and when we put this stuff together, she told me that that he donated -- and he being the Mack Dixon, Sr. donated land to other churches in the area to bury their dead.

AJ: And what -- go ahead.

JM: Well, as far as I know, my—my, my descendants they're all in Greenwood. If they were not moved, and we don't think they were moved.

AJ : And the church that was associated with the cemetery was what?

JM: With ours? Our home church was Bethany CME¹.

AJ: Okay, Bethany CME?

¹ Bethany Christian Methodist, Clearwater, FL.

JM: Yes.

AJ: Okay. And that is a church that primarily buried folk in the Greenwood Cemetery.

JM: I think all three of the churches mentioned by the-- there was a there was a lady in the beginning to "60 Minute" clip she'd mentioned Mount Zion², Baptist CME. And, and another one. So, I think that they were all inclusive. It depends on where --

AJ: Right.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

AJ: Okay. And what happened to the-- you know, how long did your great grandfather own the land for the cemetery? And then what was the transaction after that transition?

JM: Well, that's the million-dollar question.

AJ: Okay. [Laughs.]

JM: That's the million-dollar question. We-- I-- We don't know. We don't know how the land was taken -- what -- how -- I was. I mean, well, I'm gonna say this, when, when I was speaking with Brenda and getting the background information. She made the comment, "They took the land." You know, so we can only imagine who they might have been. The land was taken from my grandfather. We don't know how or whether or not he signed a promissory note, he was swindled, we don't know. And how long he owned it, that's, that's, that's not known to me. That's not known to me as well. Now his, his grandson, who's my Uncle Bernard Dixon. He is 86 and he actually participated with myself and Kaleigh³ last week on the-- on our celebration. He could probably give more insight on that.

AJ: Okay. Okay. All right. So, and as far as you know, what is happening with the cemetery land at this point?

JM: I know little to nothing. I know that-- what I do know is that, thank God for you and what your, your agency and your-- and what you all are doing. And also, I think that the NAACP there in Clearwater, they're working with the city as well as the, the, -- that other company that has all the land.

AJ: Oh, okay.

JM: Yes. And my Uncle Bernard-- and I have older cousins that are working with the NAACP, but that's about all I know as far as what's being done on our side. Actually, the lot-- a lot of what I know I gleaned from the "60 Minute" celebration --I mean, "60 Minute" expose and follow up conversations with my uncle last week.

AJ: Do you know of any other institutions-- like what high schools or schools are in the Greenwood area? What was in terms of the Greenwood community? What can you-- What do

² Zion Cemetery, Tampa, FL.

³ Kaleigh Hoyt, Member of the African American Burial Grounds Project team

you remember when you were growing up? And then perhaps what your grandparents and aunts and uncles talked about in terms of their time period with that?

JM: So yeah. So, the only high school there was Pinellas Junior Senior High School⁴, and all of my uncles and aunts, um, they all attended this those that school before desegregation. And I think Aunt Brenda was the last one-- actually, I have an older cousin, Michael. He actually was the last one to go to Pinellas High. And they all attended the elementary schools at a time. I think there was two at the time. Williams Elementary, I think Carver or Carter Elementary. And but yeah, that's that's what I know about the, as far as the schools. And then, of course, after the, desegregation, then then they were bused to or sent to Clearwater High School or whatever local school they came from, Dunellen --I'm sorry, Dunedin High School. Dunellen's up here. But most of them went to-- afterwards, they all went to Clearwater High School. All the rest of the family members.

AJ: Okay. Okay. And do you remember a library? I know that right now there is the Greenwood Library, but in terms of when you were growing up or what you knew, from your, your, you know, grandparents or aunts and uncles, what was there a library or any kind of institution like that?

JM: Yeah, no mention of a library to me. I don't-- I don't recall anybody talking about a library.

AJ: Okay. Do you know any like funeral homes or were there any like stores and things like that, that were long standing in the-- in the community?

JM: Well, I know one funeral home that the buried most, if not all, my family is called Dallas Funeral Home⁵. And that's, that's the only one that comes to mind in that area. I know the gentleman who has it now is obviously, he's a younger Dallas. But I think that a majority of my older aunts and uncles who were who were eulogized in Baptists CME, I think the funeral home that handled their, their bodies were-- was Dallas Funeral Home. Yeah.

AJ: Okay. Thank you. And in terms of leisure activities, I would say when you were growing up, and then when especially during segregation from the standpoint of your aunts and uncles and your grandparents, what types of activities and where did they go? I know the beaches were probably segregated and things like that. But did you have any-- hear anything from them in terms of things that they did places they went, activities that they might have participated in?

JM: Well, my uncles were very athletic and I know that, you know, Michael Bernard prefers to play football and things of that nature, went on to college. As far as activities they may have done that I'm aware of, you know, I don't know.

AJ: Okay.

JM: I don't know what they did. Now, my generation, you know, we're all in our-- my cousins, you know, we're all in our mid-50s, early 60s. So, what we did we just played. And when, and whatever play, play entailed that day, that's what we did. It wasn't a lot of-- you know, and I was

⁴ Pinellas High School, Clearwater, FL.

⁵ TR Dallas Funeral & Cremation Services, Clearwater, FL.

talking to some of my cousins that we're same age, and we didn't have-- we didn't experience a lot of prejudices, prejudices or restrictions on our movements around the Greenwood area, Cleveland area. I mean, we would walk to the mall, walk across Green-- Greenwood there to the mall. We'd go to the convenience store and I never experienced anything nefarious growing up. Now, I primarily grew up in St. Pete, Florida; however, we spent a lot of-- especially Sundays-- a lot of weekends and things of that nature in Clearwater at my grandfather's house. But when I was there I-- you know, we did whatever kids did at the time. Ride bikes, play sandlot football, baseball, that's what we did.

AJ: Okay, so and we'll get to the St. Pete area. In terms of the Greenwood area, and in and of itself, it was a-- apparently a predominantly or more historically Black area or African American area of Clearwater. Could you say any other thing that you would want? I know, the history of that area is not, you know, talked about a lot. So, is it any other thing that you'd like to share about the history of the Greenwood area, in Saint-- in Clearwater and in other-- in relation to any other Black communities within the Clearwater area that you can talk about?

JM: I just remember growing up, when we would spend Sundays over in Clearwater, that Brownell Street is where my grandfather's home, the big house was located. And I just remember on that street, all the families, that everybody knew each other was a very close-knit community, you know, all the way down from, from one end of the block to the, to the other end of the block. Everybody knew each other. And we would play with the kids across the street next door, you know, that lived on the street. You know, I just remember I just have fond memories, just having, you know, Sundays after church, just changing my clothes into my play clothes and just going out there and, and seeing my friends who I hadn't seen in the week because I wasn't living everybody knew I would come there for Sundays-- for Sunday church and stay at my grandfather's house afterwards.

It's just a whole different environment when it came to accountability and one another when in the Black community and, and that's, that's not even that's, that's inclusive of the entire area of Greenwood. The Dixon family was well known, so they knew the Dixon kids. And if I would, if I was doing something contrary to how I was taught before I got home, my parents knew about it. My mom knew about it. That's how it was, you know, and, you know, but that-- I don't have any, you know, anything too exciting about that. You know, that time as far as what we did, and the Greenwood area, I just knew that I was safe to go anywhere on the Heights, if that wanted to. I didn't feel I didn't feel restricted at all.

AJ: Yes. And what-- could you name some other family names or any other family names that came to mind? I know you said you played with children in the-- on the block. Do you know any other names of families that lived in that block that you mentioned?

JM: Yeah, I remember the prominent Wickfalls. Now, I don't remember exactly how they fell into the history part of the of early Black history of Clearwater. But I do remember that name. That, that, that's a very prominent name, last name, in an area along with the Dixons.

AJ: Mm-hmm, okay.

JM: But that's about -- that's about all now. I'm only 53, so, so, so all I can share is what I what I probably heard of saw as a seven, eight-year-old around that time. Yeah.

AJ: Okay. No, no worries. And do you know if it was other predominantly Black areas in of Clearwater?

JM: I'm sure there were, Dr. Jackson, but I can't put a name to it.

AJ: Yeah, no, no, this is great. I so I think, I think generally, I have a, you know, good handle on, you know, some of the, you know, the connections with your family and things like that. Now, your father. Did he-- did his family grew up in the Clearwater area, though?

JM: No, my father's from Tampa, Florida.

AJ: Okay.

JM: And his connection is how he got-- how he married my mom is that they met at Gibbs Junior College. And as you know, back then, you know, they had to go --they had separate colleges. And so, Gibbs Junior College was where my dad had a basketball scholarship or he played basketball there. And my mom, because she couldn't go to the regular, to the white college, so she had to go to the Black college. So that's where they met.

AJ: Okay, and that, that was in Tampa at the time, or was that in--?

JM: That was in St. Pete.

AJ: I was like, okay.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

AJ: Okay, so that. Okay, that's interesting. That's a good segue for us, I guess, into the St. Pete area.

JM: Okay.

AJ: First of all, but any other thing though, that you want to say about Clearwater, Greenwood area, or anything that we should, you know, maybe focus on going further or that you yourself may want to know more about as this goes on?

JM: Well, what I want to know more about is what happened to the property and how was, how was a property moved from my great grandfather to this this is a Fromm company, Schromm company⁶? That business there that, uh, was mentioned in the "60 Minute" clip. Yeah, I don't. That's my curiosity is, is, is how did that transaction take place? Is there is there any documentation of the sale of property? Or is any, any anything in writing that my great grandfather might have done to, to relinquish that property to city of Clearwater? That would be, if I had to point to one thing, that would be my focus.

AJ: Yeah. Okay. That's a good that-- like you said, that is the big question. And in terms of family members that are perhaps still buried in that area on that spot where the cemetery was,

⁶ FrankCrum, Clearwater, FL.

was it ever any talk of relocation or other cemeteries that this that your family members could have been moved to, or buried in, or anything like that? Had you ever hear of any, any of that type of conversation?

JM: Yes. And I was speaking with Uncle Bernard, and I'd be happy to share his number or phone number, all that information if you'd like. And he was telling me that we were-- we were the kids were led to believe that the some of the graves were moved. And that my grandfather, Mack Dixon, Jr, purchase several, several burial sites at another cemetery. And as we go through the interview, I think of the name of that cemetery, that's where that's where they buried my mother about a year, a year and--about seven years ago. That those relatives supposedly were moved, however, we don't, we don't think that they were moved. And if they, if they were moved, it was only a couple of them, not all of them. He did say that the headstones were removed, and that, that led them to believe that because the headstones were removed, that the bodies were relocated. But he is, he is not 100% sure that they have been moved. And from a little bit of research I've done, I don't think any of them have been moved. I believe that the headstones were removed, and they were told that they were moved, but--

AJ: Mm-hmm

JM: Yeah.

AJ: Yeah. And that that is another part of that is another big question for most of the people that, you know, perhaps were buried there, like, what were they actually moved?

JM: Right.

AJ: And so, do you have anything that you would want to see done in terms of, you know, going forward with respect to the business? Is that FrankCrum building? Yeah, that's on the site. Now, do you have anything that you would want to say in terms of your family, or in terms of, you know, a memorialization and things like that for, for that site or for, you know, anything that you would want to see going forward, especially in relation to the FrankCrum organization that is now located on that site?

JM: Yeah, I will say that accountability, and acknowledgement of a wrong that was that was done to the Black community during that time. And that there is some sort of retribution in, in form of maybe a memorial site, actually tearing the parking lot up and moving the bodies. I think that there needs, there needs to be a very aggressive response from, from those organizations that they that they now know, that their bodies buried on their-- on that property. And, and accountability part is more important to me and acknowledging that, yes, it happened, and this is what we're gonna do to fix it.

AJ : Yes, yes. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you so much. And I think that, you know, that is part of what the conversations that you know, the group like the Black Cemetery Network, and an African American Burial Ground Project, those are the things that we're really focused on, is how do we, you know, figure out and help people figure out, or work with to give people input in terms of what families and people associated with these, these cemeteries, what do they want done and get those kinds of that kind of information as part of the public record. So, thank you for sharing that.

So, I want to move on for right now. I know you have you have time constraints as well, but I want to do a little bit of a connection and move on to the perhaps the St. Pete connections that you and your family have to the area and talk a little bit about that. So, as a segue to the St. Pete connection, it sounded like the biggest connection is your, your father. Joseph Myrick Jr. was married, was married to your mom Audrey Dixon Myrick, and they met as you could you repeat that story in terms of the St. Pete connection they met where, and just go over that story again as we focus on the St. Pete. connection with your family.

JM: Okay. Yes, sure. So, Gibbs Junior College was the only junior college here for Blacks around this, --around the Pinellas County area to attend for further education. So, my father was a pretty good athlete. He played baseball and basketball at Middleton High School there in Tampa. And so, he attended Gibbs Junior College, and he played both baseball and basketball for the college. My mother, in turn, attended Gibbs Junior College as a student. And, and that's, that's where they met. That's where they met. And subsequently got married, and we eventually settled in St. Petersburg.

AJ: Okay. And where in St. Petersburg did your family exactly live? When you were growing up exactly, right.

AJ: Yes. When I was growing up. Yeah. And my dad --my father still lives here. As I mentioned, my mom, my mother passed in 2017. So, we lived off of 34th Street and Queensboro Avenue. So that's, uh--if you familiar where Gibbs High School is located. That there, we're approximately three miles south of that, that's Queensboro.

AJ: Okay.

JM: Yeah. And I grew up there and the home, and the home's still there. My dad still lives in the same home.

AJ: Oh, okay. So, so that's where you basically spent your childhood and all the way until you, I guess, went to college yourself.

JM: Yes. Yes. Yes.

AJ: And so, would you consider that historically African American community? Was it a predominantly Black community or what, what is the area where you are describing that you grew up?

JM: It's interesting that you asked me that because I remember,-- it's funny what you remember as as, as a toddler, or, or two or three years old. But I do remember that the area that we settled was, was a predominantly white, white neighborhood, because the people that my dad bought the home from was older white couple, and now I don't know why I remember this what I do. I remember walking in and older white man said, "Welcome to your new home." And it was just a two-bedroom, one bath home about 15-- about 1200 square feet. And, and the people across the street from us-- it's an apartment building there, and the family lived there that owned it were white. And really a lot of people around us with were white. And if I remember the story correctly, I think that when we moved there, we were the second or third Black family to move on Queensboro Avenue. And, and, and, and there were white families there that lived there until,

I don't know, I must about, been about a seven, eight years old. And that's when I start seeing the migration of, of the whites moving out and Blacks moving in.

AJ: And right now, where know you said your father still lives in the same house. Is it now predominantly Black neighborhood, as far as you can tell?

JM: It is, it is a predominant Black neighborhood, but I've been I've been told by family members-- I haven't been home in years, but I've been told that there are, there is a reinter-- What's that word they use?

AJ: A regentrification.

JM: Yeah, regentrification! Yeah, because my dad made a comment this Thanksgiving that he's seeing more white people walk around, walk around 34th Street that he's seen in years. And, and you know, and talk about areas like the downtown, say what the, where the Rays play. All that was, all that was-- when I was going up, that was the projects. They tore down projects to, to build that that stadium there. And, and that remember them building this I-75 that they cut right through the neighborhood. Growing up we used to when, when it was being constructed. We kinda played baseball at Wildwood-- Wildwood Park. So that was our shortcut. We would walk and walk up the side of the interstate there. And there were no cars. It was open and we walked the interstate to Wildwood Park to, to practice and play football. So, I remember when that place -- when that interstate was constructed back in the late 70s.

AJ: Yeah. So, the time period that you actually grew up in St. Pete, on 34th Street area was which years?

JM: Yeah, I will say Dr. Jackson, probably from '70, Probably '70 to when I left and left after graduated in 1987, '88.

AJ: And what high school and what schools that you go to in the area, then we'll get back to your, the, to the Tropicana Field area, but right now what, what schools did you go?

JM: Yes. So, I went to elementary, I went to Perkins Elementary. And I think they changed the name now. Perkins Elementary, then, then I was, I was actually bussed to, uh, middle school to Azalea Middle School. Then I did the three years there, and then I went to high school at Gibbs Senior High.

AJ: Yeah. And matter of fact, I interviewed Mr. Jack--

JM: Jet.

AJ: Jet Jackson. So, did you know him in any type of time when you were at Gibbs High School.

JM: I knew of him. He was quite the athlete. I knew I knew of his exploits as far as of high school football in that area. And actually, he is --I think he is the chairman of the Gibbs Alumni, Gibbs Alumni Association. And he actually, he actually was on the board that inducted me into the-- into that athletic. I'm sorry, I have -- I'm drawing a blank, but Alumni Association. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So, but I knew I don't, I don't know him. I knew of his exports. And I just met him maybe once or twice growing up. But I did hear a lot about him. Yeah.

AJ: And you were an athlete yourself. So, you said you primarily played what sports?

JM: I played baseball and basketball.

AJ: Yes. And so, and in, in the course of you growing up, you said you also you know, spent some time you know, moving around the city is one of the things you said you remember I guess is the going over to where --Tropicana Field and downtown St. Pete. What communities and things that you particularly remember again in that area of St. Pete?

JM: Yeah. Yeah, what's interesting is that growing up Central Avenue was, was, was an area that we were told that we couldn't go around because you can pretty much get anything you want on Central Avenue. That was a red-light-- that when I was growing up that was the red-light district, so to speak. And so, I remember there was a there was a little shopping area there on Central Avenue called Webb City and that's where we, that's where my mom used to go to shop and there was a Sears there, I think where Walmart is now. That was a Sears shopping, shopping center. That's where we go do our Christmas, Christmas shopping and school shopping. And Webb City was there as well, that's where you have, they have cafes there, they had a drugstore there they had you know all kinds of little small stores. And that area was eventually closed down and sold-- the property sold, and I think now they have there is, is a, a gymnasium-- not gymnasium, where people work out -- YMCA has the property now. That was that was Webb City.

So, I remember that the Central, Central, Central Avenue was an area that we shouldn't-- we were not allowed to go because of all the stuff that was going on there. The Pier⁷, we would go to the pier to, you know, for you know, Fourth of July celebrations and the fish, you know, we want to go fishing go fish off the pier. What it, where the, uh, like I said before where Tropicana Field is that that area, there was all Black neighborhoods and Black businesses. And, and I was too young to understand what was happening and, and how that, how that property was eventually taken over by the city maybe by eminent domain. I'm not sure. But they wanted the baseball, a professional baseball program there, so that's what happened. Campbell's Park which is right there behind the Tropicana Field, that's where I grew up playing football, baseball, that right there. And when I was in college I also played there, there used to be a, a Negro League Baseball that I played for one summer with the, um see, it was the Alouettes is the name of the baseball team.

AJ: Okay.

JM: And I played with them for a little bit. So, but that in Campbell's Park that area there I was, you know, I spent a lot of time in that area as well. So, where the, now where the St. Pete Police Department is there early, early on, and while I was a teenager, my dad actually had the contract to maintain the grass, we cut the grass and maintain the property there. And I went home maybe about five years ago when I was riding in the area, and I'm amazed at all the restaurants and, and, and businesses that are down in the area. There was nothing there when I, when I grew up-- when I was living there growing up as a teenager, there was nothing there.

⁷ St. Pete Pier, St. Petersburg, FL.

AJ: So, you said your dad had a contract cutting the grass? Where?

JM: At the police department there.

AJ: Oh, Okay.

JM: Yeah, he had his own lawn service. So, he would, he would put in bids to see, you know, whatever bid he can put in for. Yeah.

AJ: Okay. And what was your dad's lawn service, actually.

JM: It was it was just a Joe, Joe, Myrick and Sons. Myrick and Sons Lawn Service. Yeah.

AJ. And so, do you remember Laurel Park? The housing complex right there? And--

JM: Is that where the Tropicana Field was?

AJ: Where it was.

JM: Yes.

AJ: Do you remember it before it became Tropicana Field?

JM: Vaguely. I remember. It's funny. I remembered that when, when it, when the construction was getting ready to happen and get removed-- tear those apartments down that my mom and dad were talking about, you know, "It's a shame that they moved those people out of that place." Something like that. I might not have even been nine years old at the time.

AJ: Okay. Okay.

JM: Yeah, yeah. But I couldn't remember the name of that, that that project, but you're right Laurel Park, that was the name of it. Sure is.

AJ: Yeah, yeah. So, and then after that, you do remember the construction of the, the construction when it was happening into Tropicana Field?

JM: Right. Yeah, I do. I do. I don't remember when it started, when it ended. But I do remember, just a little talk about people being moving being, being displaced, or being relocated to the other housing complexes in the area. And, you know, but I don't remember the specifics as far as when it started when it ended, you know, I just knew it was-- I knew it happened.

AJ: Right.

JM: And I know I'm a teenager then, I'm only 13, 14, 12, 13 or something. So, I'm oblivious to the world events at this time. Yeah.

AJ: Yeah. No, but what did you actually see though, you could see though, that construction was happening, right?

JM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You can see that, especially on the interstate, you know, you can see it, you know, because, because they didn't say it was the, was the thoroughfare that's where you pretty much got around if you want to go to, you know, go to Tampa. Obviously, because that's where my dad is from you will see it being constructed there. Yeah.

AJ: And so, did you have any big memories of anything that you actually saw in terms of the construction or was anything that stood out in terms of the construction in that area?

JM: Nothing that stands out, Dr. Jackson.

AJ: Yeah, no, no worries. Just checking. Now. Were you aware of any of the cemeteries that were in that area at the, you know, prior even to the, uh, even to Laurel Park or anything like that? Did you hear about that or know anything about cemeteries in that area?

JM: I did not. I did not know anything about cemeteries in the area until I was watching the "60 Minute". Yeah, I didn't when I saw the little clip about the Tropicana Stadium. And I said to myself, that's not surprising. That's not surprising.

AJ: Yeah. And in terms of just going back to your general connection to the St. Pete area, do you remember I know you talked about the baseball and the sports do you remember any other, other and you talked about Webb City and YMCA and these things? Any other businesses that you can remember gas stations, stores, or anything else in that general area around the Central Ave, Tropicana Field, gas plant, anything like anything in that area.

JM: I just remember going out going downtown every once in a while, as a kid, when my parents go to Walgreens, I think it's still there is that old Walgreens store down near downtown there. I remember there's a skating rink that that us kids and the middle school and high school went to. It was located pretty close to St. Pete High, and I can't remember the name of the of the skating rink. I remember those were fond times and Saturday nights that we would go as a as a group from my neighborhood to the skating rink. Movie theater, which is right there off of-- I think that's all Central Avenue. We would-- They closed that down-- I don't know what I think that became a church after a while. But the movie theater there we would-- we were allowed to go to movies there around when I was growing up. But I just remember the 34th, 34th Street area being very busy. There were a lot of businesses there. Central Avenue. A lot of, a lot of old, old businesses there, I think, they were some most of the businesses down they were Black owned if I'm not mistaken, in the Central Avenue area, but nothing you know nothing too dramatic, that I recall. Yeah. And I apologize--

AJ: No, no, no worries. I was just, just seeing whatever you know is it's fine with me. I just was trying to, you know, see, see with the range anyway. Anyway, so I'm just kind of feeling that out. And so, I think the concluding thing is there anything about churches? I know you went to church in Clearwater, but we're attend or know, or had any family members of your father's siblings or anything that attended churches in the St. Pete area?

JM: No, unfortunately, all my church life was in Clearwater.

AJ: Okay.

JM: And I know that my neighbors went to their churches in that area, but I know little about those churches there.

AJ: Okay. And did your father, siblings, and things like that where they grow-- did they grew up in the St. Pete area?

JM: No, they all grew up in Clearwater.

AJ: Okay. Okay, so--

JM: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Tampa. Tampa, Tampa.

AJ: Yeah, that's right. Okay. Okay. All right. So, I think, did you-- was it any other thing that you want to share about your, you know, growing up in the St. Pete area that, you know, from on the 34th Street area, and anything you knew about Tropicana Field? Any other thing you wanted to share about growing up?

JM: Yeah. Yeah. I think growing up and growing up in St. Pete is when that time I grew up was a was a very, very nice experience, experience. Like I said, a lot of the neighborhoods there Queensboro Avenue, you know, 49th Street, all that was Black. And I just remember that on any given Saturday, you know, all of us kids will be playing basketball, whatever, whatever sport was going on during that time. If it was baseball season, we played baseball out the middle of the street with tennis balls and a broomstick, you know, if it was football. We'll, we'll go there, we go down a couple of couple of lots down the-- we used to call it 'The Lot'. "I'll meet you at The Lot, we're gonna play football." You know, it was just a sandlot and we would just mark off, you know, what's touchdown area was not a touchdown area. Basketball. We would have, have one of the dads and they would, be it my dad and my friend's dad, put a rickety basketball goal with a with a rickety backboard nailed to a tree, and that was our basketball goal. That's kind of what we did. And I shared this with my kids too, because they don't understand the, the community we had back then. You know, there were, there were times when I would get in school. And I'm sure you heard it before Dr. Jackson. You know, when it comes to Black kids, you get in trouble in school, by time by time you get home, your neighbor knows it, and your neighbor knew it, and back then, my neighbors had the authority to whoop me if I was out of line.

AJ: Yep.

JM: And then when I got home, I got another whooping from my parents. You know, that's how we grew up. And my kids, kids today they have no clue of that concept of raising-- of a village raising, raising their kids. And that's how it wasn't I grew up in this and it saddens me when I go back home-- and that's one reason why I don't go back home. It's just it's just not the same neighborhood. It saddens me that nobody, nobody knows anybody. No one knows anybody. The kids they are, the kids are not out in the community just doing playing. What's wrong with playing? That's what we did. That's what we did. I mean, every 15, 20 of us all boys, Black boys in the middle of the street, playing football or baseball instead of doing something crazy, like these kids are doing today. So that's, that's what, that's what I remember growing up as far as that goes.

AJ: Yeah. Well, yeah, no, I appreciate that comment as well. Because definitely, that's, that's what I remember.

JM: Right.

AJ: So, I just really want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me today and to share with me, you know, some of the history that you understand and know, lived in the Clearwater area

and the St. Pete area and the connections you have all over the Tampa Bay area to Black history and Black communities. So, I-- it really was very insightful for myself as well. And it linked together lots of different things that we're working on this project. So--

JM: Great.

AJ: It's really very helpful. I will stop the recording shortly. But I just I'm going to talk to you about naming all the people in the picture again, or you can maybe you can name-- do that and then send me you know, a copy of the picture with the names on them. That would be helpful for me. And then we can talk later about some of the other people possibly I can talk to.

JM: Okay.

AJ: So, I'll stop here, and I want to again, thank you so much for your time. I'll stop the recording.

JM: I understand. I understand.

AJ: Okay.

[End of recording.]