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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project  
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[Transcriber's Note: The following oral history interview contains mature language. Researcher discretion is advised. Interview begins mid-sentence.]

**Clyde Hudson:** (inaudible)

**Herbert Jones:** Monticello, Florida?

CH: Umm hmm.

HJ: In what year?

CH: Nineteen aught-four.

HJ: Your birth date?

CH: Twenty-fifth of November.

HJ: Nineteen aught-four. Okay, and how long have you been in Tampa?

CH: Came in 1940.

HJ: Nineteen forty. Okay, in 1940 there was a thing called a Depression. Do you remember the Depression in Tampa and how things were then?

CH: (inaudible) I recalled because it was payin' twenty-five cents an hour. Thirty-five cents an hour was (inaudible).

HJ: For workin'?

CH: Umm hmm.

HJ: And what was the cost of livin', like for rent and stuff like that, how much did you have to pay?

CH: Let's see—I think \$2.50 a week.

HJ: Two fifty a week? All right. Do you remember the soup lines? Were you around when they had the soup lines and things like that?

CH: No. They didn't have that when I came here.

HJ: Okay. What were the housing conditions like when you first came to Tampa? How were the housing where black folks had to live?

CH: Well, they only—at that time, when I came here, the biggest majority of the houses was these frame houses. And at the time these people who I was rentin' from—for them to go up on rent they had to put you out pretendin' they had to repair the house, see, and you go up on rent. So, I had that problem back in those days. Back in the forties [1940s], and when I came—

HJ: Did they have a lot of roaches and rats and things like that in the houses?

CH: In some cases if you didn't try to keep 'em down yourself you would be havin' (inaudible).

HJ: What's it?

CH: I say, if you didn't try to make arrangement—you know, get you some spray so you could keep 'em down—you're liable to have rats.

HJ: Would the people—the owners or the landlords, would they try to keep the houses up or was it left up to you to keep the—

CH: Well, the people that I was rentin' from at the time, they was pretty fair, they would try to keep 'em up, you understand, just to have us show 'em—they would condemn 'em and make you vacate 'em. But when the time come they want to go up on rent they would pretend they gonna repair house, then you'd have to vacate so they can paint 'em or what-so-ever, and they would go up on rent.

HJ: Okay. Do you remember the land boom in Tampa when everything was—and the livin' was good and stuff? Land was plentiful?

CH: I came back in the (inaudible). It was pretty good around here then.

HJ: But you don't remember, per se, a thing about the land boom?

CH: No. No.

HJ: All right. What about Jim Crow and segregation? Did you have—Did that affect you directly? Don't you—

CH: Umm mmm.

HJ: You didn't?

CH: Umm mmm.

HJ: Didn't come into contact with any of that?

CH: No. I lived my life where I didn't be bothered with that little (inaudible), with all those people (inaudible) themselves in a way. Couldn't be in that rowdy crew. That's just something that (inaudible).

HJ: What about the social life in Tampa? What were blacks doing for entertainment, like for night—where would they go and what kind of things were presented here for y'all?

CH: Well, they had some little ol' beer gardens, there was things like that, you know, you could go in and have fun. A lot of places were open for drinkin' beer. Playin'.

HJ: Umm hmm. What about Central Avenue?

CH: I didn't hang around down there.

HJ: You didn't hang on Central?

CH: No.

HJ: Do you know anything that was—some of the buildings that were on Central, some clubs and some things—?

CH: Quite a few back when I was Charlie (inaudible) Moon called that place, you know. Moon and all of 'em down there, you know, in the bars and things like that. I didn't hang around down there.

HJ: Was that supposed to be a bad area?

CH: Pretty rough.

HJ: Pretty rough?

CH: It got pretty rough.

HJ: So, did they have any nice places out—off Central—for blacks to go?

CH: Well, at the time—see, I didn't go out with no woman at the time. When I would go out to something, like I'd go down there to a picture show. And after the show I'd go on back home.

HJ: Okay, but the picture show, did they have a black movie house or did they have one that was—?

CH: Yeah, black.

HJ: Black movie house—and it was black-owned and everything?

CH: Uh huh.

HJ: Where was that located?

CH: On Central.

HJ: On Central? And that was in what year, nineteen what?

CH: Back in the forties [1940s].

HJ: In the forties [1940s]. Okay. Also, Mr. Hudson, there's a thing I've heard about a—what you call it, the riot?—the Tampa riot that happened in the forties [1940s]. Do you remember anything about that?

CH: Yeah, I remember that's been on Central at the Greek Stand down there.

HJ: Do you know why—what caused that?

CH: No. I wouldn't say I know what caused it.

HJ: And you ain't heard. Nobody's said?

CH: Well, I hear 'em talking so many things but I didn't really know anything. Because nothin' happened—you know, nothin' went up or anything—they tear up everything down there.

HJ: Now, that was the one that was in 1940.

CH: Back in the forties [1940s].

HJ: Uh huh. Because there was another one in the late sixties [1960s] and early seventies

[1970s].

CH: Yeah.

HJ: Okay. But do you know of any police brutality that happened on other people rather than on yourself, you know, like other people were harassed by the police?

CH: Well, I heard about it, but see, when you don't be around those places you wouldn't know definitely. See, I never associate with those sort of people. I always was a church-goin' man.

HJ: Oh, then we need to get into that church, then. Okay. What church are you a member of?

CH: First Baptist right here on (inaudible).

HJ: Okay. Have you always been a member of that church or were you—

CH: Yeah. I joined that church—I've been there seventeen years. I've already been there seventeen—this is eighteen years.

HJ: Okay. What church were you in before you joined the First Baptist?

CH: Well, that's the first one I joined since I've been here in Tampa. See I was on the (inaudible). I followed the show for a length of time. There wasn't no work goin' on and I followed Royal American Show for about five years.

HJ: What show?

CH: Royal American.

HJ: Royal—

CH: American Show.

HJ: —American. And what was that?

CH: That's a midway show. That's the biggest shows in the world, Royal American. You heard of the Royal American Show, haven't you?

HJ: Umm mmm.

CH: You've heard this show open up here in—right down there on Boulevard?

HJ: No, I'm not from Tampa.

CH: Oh, I see. (laughs) Yeah, they open up there every year.

HJ: So was it a circus like thing?

CH: Yeah. Umm hmm.

HJ: They had— Did they employ a lot of blacks?

CH: Oh, yeah.

HJ: A lot of blacks? Oh, so how much would you be makin'?

CH: Fifty dollars a week.

HJ: What year was that?

CH: I started in forty-nine [1949] and I—until fifty-five [1955].

HJ: And so those fifty dollars a week, that was good money?

CH: Only then.

HJ: Okay. Do you know anything about the shipyards? The dock?

CH: I worked it.

HJ: You did work the shipyards?

CH: I worked the shipyards.

HJ: Okay, what were the working conditions there?

CH: It was fair.

HJ: It was really fair? Okay, how much were you all being paid? How much were you being paid when you first started working there?

CH: Well, they—I got forty cents an hour when I started out there.

HJ: And what year was that in?

CH: In late fifties [1950s] (inaudible) fifties [1950s]— Yeah, that was in the early forties [1940s] I worked in the shipyards.

HJ: Okay. Now, Mr. Hudson, do you know who—the name of the person that was the original—should I say president of the longshoremen's thing that was over on the docks,

who was that? Was it always Perry Harvey?

CH: Ever since I know anything about it. Umm hmm.

HJ: Okay. Were there any other organized unions? When did the union come in? Was the union there with the docks when you came?

CH: Umm hmm.

HJ: It was? Were there any other organized unions for blacks in Tampa at that time?

CH: Yeah, the shipyard.

HJ: The one at the shipyard and what other one?

CH: That's the onlyest two I know of.

HJ: What about the cigar industry here, do you remember anything about that?

CH: No. I didn't know anything about that.

HJ: You know if blacks were workin' there?

CH: Oh yeah, there used to be blacks workin' there. I hear a lot of 'em say they used to work— A fellow out there say he used to work in the shipyard—I mean, in the cigar industry.

HJ: Who was that?

CH: School— (inaudible) by the school.

HJ: Right out here?

CH: Umm hmm.

HJ: That's not Mr. (inaudible), is it?

CH: Mmm mmm.

HJ: Oh. Okay. Well, tell us—Tell me about the churches. Were they—During the time back in the—Well, when you joined the church or when you first came to Tampa, were they havin' all that fighting and stuff with the preachers and stuff with the preachers like they're having now?

CH: No. Umm hmm.



HJ: They weren't?

CH: (inaudible) lately when they start having the problem they're havin' with these preachers.

HJ: Did they have a lot of blacks go to church at that time or what? How did they handle that?

CH: Oh, yeah. Until they're—The (inaudible) raisin' sand and they get scattered and break up. Start it out new, you know. But I haven't had any problems I (inaudible). They're all gettin' along fine (inaudible).

HJ: Okay. Do you remember anything about the Clara Frye Hospital?

CH: Yes. I have been in that hospital.

HJ: Okay. How was the service there, as far as the—

CH: Well, it was pretty fair.

HJ: Do you remember Miss Clara Frye—

CH: I didn't know her in person.

HJ: —which the hospital's named after?

CH: Yeah. I didn't know her in person. I stayed out there nine days. I was in the hospital out there nine days. The time I was out there for overheat. I got too hot. And they rushed me to the hospital and I stayed out there nine days.

HJ: Were you at work when you got sick?

CH: Umm hmm. I was doing roofing work and got too hot. Like to cramp to death, and ever afterwards I can't take too much heat.

HJ: Who were you workin' for?

CH: I was working with a roofing construction company.

HJ: Okay, how much money were you makin'? What year was that, if I may ask?

CH: That was in forty-seven [1947].

HJ: Do you remember how much you were makin' an hour?

CH: A dollar thirty-five. Not bad.

HJ: Okay. For other people workin'—For other blacks in Tampa, was the Clara Frye the only place that blacks could go to get medical help at that time, when you first came here?

CH: Well, where you're not familiar with those sort of conditions, you know, I haven't never been in the hospital. And I couldn't say definitely whether they—I think you always could (inaudible) Tampa General (inaudible) but that's—

HJ: Okay. What about restaurants and things like that, did they have any black restaurants then, back in the forties [1940s], for people to go to?

CH: Yeah, they operated restaurants.

HJ: Do you remember the names of any of 'em?

CH: Well, no. At the time, see, I wasn't eatin' out no way. I had my ol' lady back home, and I wouldn't know, 'cause a lot of times go out and sometime (inaudible) those guys that were sellin' beer and wine. I buy that (inaudible) shrimps, crab and different things when I be out at night and like that, you know. But, other than that, I didn't do much eatin' out because I always had someone to cook for me.

HJ: So how many children—Do you have any children?

CH: Umm mmm.

HJ: No children.

CH: Don't claim none, but—(laughs)

HJ: (laughs) Okay now, can you tell me anything about World War II? Were you—You were in Tampa during World War II, right? How were the conditions of—you know, what were the living conditions during that time here in Tampa?

CH: It wasn't too hot.

HJ: Did you fight in World War II?

CH: No. I wanted to go but they turned me down—see, I hit thirty-five and see I was out.

HJ: Umm hmm.

CH: So I didn't make it.

HJ: So do you remember any black troops comin' to Tampa in 1940? Any army men—you know, any men comin' in Tampa?

CH: Well, they used to come in like, on furlough—what you call it—?

HJ: Umm hmm. Because that riot— Wasn't that riot in the forties [1940s]? Was that something dealing with the soldiers? The Tampa riots?

CH: I don't think that had anything do with the Army. It wasn't like in the (inaudible).

HJ: You don't think that had anything to do with that?

CH: It wasn't that (inaudible).

HJ: Okay. Do you know how the black soldiers were treated? When they came to town, could they go into the white places or they had to go into the black places like everybody else?

CH: Well, that'd be off my limit, because see, I wouldn't be out go them places when they come in here.

HJ: Umm hmm.

CH: The biggest majority of 'em was hangin' around down on Central.

HJ: Umm hmm.

CH: And I never did hang around on Central.

HJ: Okay. What was some social outlet—you know, like on Sunday evenings and stuff like that, aside from goin' to church, what did black folks do here in Tampa?

CH: Well, they didn't have anything but these beer joints and things. The bars was open. They went in the bars and the beer joints and—

HJ: No ballgames. No place like—

CH: Oh, yeah, on Sunday and used to go out to Port Tampa at that time and had the Pepsi Cola (inaudible) out to Port Tampa. We'd go out there on Sunday.

HJ: Did a lot of people go?

CH: Oh, yeah. I used to go out there quite a few days, you know, and set. They had a pretty good (inaudible).

HJ: How would the turnout be? Was it good? Were the people be in good spirits, or would they be out there fightin' and carryin' on?

CH: No, we didn't have no trouble with the fightin'; they all go out and have a nice time.

HJ: So how long have you been livin' in (inaudible)?

CH: I move up here in 1970.

HJ: The living conditions here are (inaudible)?

CH: Well, they used to be but it's gettin' worse everyday. They let anything come in here now. These wineheads and all that stuff, you know. It's awful. People in here blind and can't even do nothin' for theirself. They ain't got no business in here. (inaudible). It's gettin' worse every day. They don't have no cooperation. They supposed to have rules and regulations. Don't suppose to let bikes and things come in the building. The man say let 'em come in. Well, see here—the Housing Authority don't pay me, I'm on a different setup. I try to work with them, you understand. They see one can come in—I say all can come in, you aren't gonna stop 'em. But this man can take his bike up there, he got people—You can take it—But you can't. And that's wrong, if one of 'em can do it, all of 'em can do it.

HJ: Right.

CH: See? That's what I'm (inaudible). If one do it, you're not gonna stop none of 'em. Let 'em all get in. If you ain't gonna have no rule and regulation, forget it.

HJ: But do you have anybody here to talk to about those problems?

CH: Well, it don't do any good. The manager, I was supposed to let him know. I had to go over his head and go to see the headman, see, and I hate to do things like that. If me and you can't cooperate what the (inaudible)—just forget it.

HJ: No. Well, you know, once you've confronted the manager and if he doesn't seem to want to do it, then you can go over him. But, you know, give him the proper respect first. Tell him first.

CH: That's what I say. That's what I'm speakin' of.

HJ: And if he doesn't then, you know, go to someone else higher.

CH: I have to go to a higher authority, see, and I don't like to do things—and he's a (inaudible).

HJ: Right. That is—pretty bad. Okay. Do you remember the streetcars? Were there streetcars when you came?

CH: Yeah, they were here when I was—

HJ: And how were you all treated as far as they were concerned?

CH: I hardly had to ride streetcars.

HJ: Umm hmm.

CH: Very seldom. Sometime I—You know you had to get in the back, you know that's—

HJ: Did you have a car, then?

CH: No, I didn't have a car then, no.

HJ: Okay. Let's—Can you think of any other things that you would like to tell me about your living experiences in Tampa since you've been here? You know, any other thing that's happened that you know of in Tampa. Just some experiences?

CH: Well, let's see. I can't think of anything important enough (inaudible).

HJ: Do you remember any folklore? Is there any good tales that people used to tell? Any jokes that, you know, like y'all would just sit around and tell some jokes—?

CH: Oh, man, I used—

HJ: Can you think of any of those to tell me?

CH: I used to know more of them dang things than you could think of (laughs).

HJ: (laughs) You know, can you—You can't think of any now?

CH: Well, let's see now—I used to—That's all we used to do is sit around and—just havin' fun, you know. That's all I did. The biggest thing—I went out and be out with a bunch of people—men.

HJ: Umm hmmm.

CH: Sometimes these women be all out, you know, havin' fun around the parties.

HJ: Umm hmm.

CH: Just be havin' fun, tellin' tales. I used to know so many of them things it's pitiful.

HJ: Hmm.

CH: In fact—you ain't got this tapin'?

HJ: Hmm—Go ahead, it's okay.

CH: Oh, I think it's nasty.

HJ: Well, go ah—you know, it's a joke—as long it's a joke.

CH: Yes, umm hmm.

HJ: That's what we're—you know, looking for some folklore and just—

CH: (laughs)

HJ: —what blacks used to sit around and talk about.

CH: And this little boy—I was tellin' one time, this boy, he studies, you know. It's Sunday afternoon and he's goin' to church around. He met this girl and he said, "Uh— Can I t-t-take you home this afternoon?" You know, he stuttered like that.

There were three of them, the girls, and they decided they goin' have some fun, you know. And she said, "Beg pardon?"

He said, "I said, 'Can I t-t-take you home this afternoon?' Just laughin' (laughs).

She said, "Speak a little louder, I can't understand what you're sayin'?"

He repeated the word again. "Uh— Uh— I say, 'Can I t-t-take you home this afternoon?'" Well, after he found out they was makin' fun after 'im—you know, he got mad. And he said, "I—I— Kiss my ass." You understand?

HJ: (laughs)

CH: Now, she had a brother, he stutters the same way. And so she met her brother later an that afternoon and she told her brother what this guy said. And so her brother met him and he liked him. "What's t-t-this you t-t-told m-m-my sister?"

He [first boy] said, "I t-t-told your s-s-sister t-t-to kiss my a-a-ass, but I done made other a-a-arrangements now." (laughs)

HJ: (laughs)

CH: And he [second boy] said, "W-W-What k-k-kind of a-a-a-arrangements you made?"

He [first boy] said, "Y-Y-You can [word missing] her ass."<sup>1</sup> (laughs)

HJ: (laughs)

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<sup>1</sup> The original transcript is missing a word from the quote.

CH: (laughs) Oh, boy. And this lady, she had a cow in heat and her mother had a bull.

HJ: Uh huh.

CH: And the oldest boy, she told him to go and tell her mother "Layin' the beef." You know, talkin' about the bull goin' to mate with the cow. And the oldest one know what he was talkin' about. He went over and told his grandmother, "Grandmother, Mama said 'Now that your cow fuckin'.'" She wouldn't let him have it and sent him back, but she knew good and well he'd done nothin' (inaudible).

HJ: Uh huh.

CH: He said it to the baby boy. He said, "Grandmother, Mama said (inaudible) beef; you got to go over and take it on (inaudible)." Got to—he sent him back.

And Grandma said, "Son, what did he do?"

And now hear this, you know. [The boy] Say, "Grandmother, when he seed Mama Cow, you know, he just laughed."

She said, "What else he do, son?"

He said, "Grandmother, he put a—pulled out a long old pencil, about that long, he put it right in her ass." (laughs)

HJ: (laughs)

CH: Oh, man, we used to sit down and laugh all night long. Now that's where I had my fun—see, I don't never go anywhere else.

HJ: Where would you all gather to, you know, just had this—

CH: Just like we'd meet at different one's houses.

HJ: Umm hmm.

CH: And a lot of times we'd also go over get together, we'd be sellin' things, you know, for our church.

HJ: Umm hmm.

CH: And we'd get in there and get to lyin' and drinkin' beer and sellin', you know, pitchin'—different things like that.

HJ: Umm hmm.

CH: We'd sit in line, half—Women, the same way. (laughs) That's where I enjoyed myself; it wasn't at the bars. I never did fancy that when I was a young man.

HJ: Mr.—Can you think of another one, some other ones? Because we've been lookin' for things like this and, you know, we haven't been gettin' 'em.

CH: Yeah.

HJ: Because, we—you know, we need some things like people—these little tales and stuff.

CH: Oh, and this—There was a teacher and she had a class. She told these boys—There were three brothers, but they hadn't ever been to school. She come along and said, "What's your name son?"

"My name Johnny."

[Teacher:] "How old are you?"

[Johnny:] "Sixteen years old."

She called the second. "What's your name, son?"

"My name John."

[Teacher:] "How old are you?"

[John:] "Sixteen years old."

She said, "Are you all twins, then?"

"Yes'm."

She called to the third one. "What's your name, son?"

"My name's Jack."

She said, "How old are you?"

[Jack:] "Sixteen years."

She said, "Hmm, are all three of y'all twins?"

He said, "Yes 'm, Mama didn't have but two tits and I had to suck a bottle." (laughs)

HJ: (laughs)



CH: And got in class, she said—She told the one, she said, "Spell 'run.'"

The boy said, "R-U-N."

She said, "What's that pronounced?"

"I don't know."

She said, "You don't know what that pronounce?"

"No 'm."

She said, "If you was goin' through the woods and somethin' was to scare you, what you do?"

He said, "I don't know 'm."

She said, "You don't know what you'd—?"

He said, "Oh, yes 'm."

She said, "What you'd do?"

"I'd shit."

HJ: (laughs)

CH: He'd go on now—She said [to the next boy], "Spell 'crow.'"

He said, "C-R-O-W."

She said, "What's that pronounce?"

"I don't know, 'm."

[Teacher] Said, "You don't know what that pronounce?"

He said, "No 'm."

[Teacher] Said, "What's the first thing the rooster do when he get off the roost in the morning?"

"I don't know."

[Teacher] Say, "You don't know?"

"No." He said, "Oh, yes 'm."

[Teacher] Said, "What he do?"

"He fucks." (laughs)

HJ: (laughs)

CH: And I'm gonna tell you some—this little boy and she was a woman. And it was cold. And Johnny's hand done got cold. And the teacher told Johnny, said, "Come here, Johnny." Johnny went there and she said, "Take your hands and do 'em like that. Johnny put his two hands here like that and she opened her leg and put Johnny's hands down between her legs like that—and it must be about five minutes. Well, Johnny's hands got warm. So she said, "Johnny—"

He said, "Ma'am?"

[Teacher] Said, "How your hands feel?"

He said, "My hands warm, but my peter cold." (laughs)

HJ: (laughs)

CH: Johnny was warm then! (laughs)

HJ: Uh-huh. (laughs) So those are the type things that y'all would just around—

CH: Yeah. What the devil? What the hell?

HJ: (laughs)

CH: Man, I get a kick out of every one like that. Out there and just around them. Crazy—people be around them bars, drinking with them guys and get your own brains blown out out there, those crazy people. I ain't hangin' around no bars.

HJ: Okay, then—Can you think of anything else you want to share with me?

CH: Well, I think that's all there is.

HJ: Okay then.

CH: I'm fixin' to go and get me a bite to eat.

HJ: Okay.

CH: If you hadn't come up to the (inaudible) if it wasn't for that you wouldn't have caught me. I'd have been out and gone.

HJ: Okay. Thank you very much for that.

CH: You're perfectly welco—

*end of interview*