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Herbert Jones: Mrs. White, what were the conditions—how were things in Tampa when first moved here, if you can remember?

Etta White: Tampa was a very small place, even Central Avenue. Because when I first came here I went to West Tampa, and lived in West Tampa. And we lived over there quite a few years before we moved over into Tampa, and then when we moved here to Tampa, we moved on Harrison Street. And they had a little street light across from Harrison, see, and that's when we moved over on that street, but it wasn't far from Harrison. I think it was Gladstone Alley—that's what it was Gladstone Alley; we lived there probably a year or so. Then we moved further up on Harrison way up by Beulah [Baptist] Church; it was a place up there we had that—I always will remember the number of the houses, 611 Harrison Street.

HJ: So how old were you ?

EW: How old was I then?

HJ: Uh huh.

EW: That's hard to tell. I don't know how old I was.

HJ: Were you of school age, were you attending school?

EW: No, I was married and had my kids—yeah, I was married and had my kids with me.

HJ: How many children do you have?

EW: Two, Everett and Olivett, boy and a girl.

HJ: Are they both living?

EW: No, they all dead, mother and father all dead. My mother-in-law just had a heart attack. I have aunts and cousins; that's all I have.

HJ: So, what were the conditions in Tampa, things like Jim Crow? How did the Jim Crow era affect you and other blacks in the Tampa area?

EW: Well, everything was all right you know, but way back then I was ever to anybody white—see when haven't been long Miss So and So, just Etta, just plain Etta. My name then long years ago was Etta Lake. Then I got married, then it was Etta Kendrick—Etta Kendrick. Now it's Etta White; see, I been married twice. And we moved from somewhere on the street now is called Constance Street. How long you been in Tampa?

HJ: I been here about six years. I went to school here, the University of South Florida.

EW: Oh, you went to the university, oh yeah. Harlem [Academy School] was down there then, was you here when Harlem? Well, they tore Harlem down, you was there when Harlem, I was there. I didn't go to school here, I went to school in Bartow, Florida. My uncle he was a pastor over there, Reverend J. B. Lake, he was a pastor in Bartow, and went over there and spent a while with my uncle and aunt, and so they told me I better go to school while I was over there, I say, "Well, I ain't going to be here that long." He say, "Well, if you don't be here but a month, you can go to school." I told him, "Okay," so I went to school in Bartow while I was there.

HJ: Was Harlem one the first black schools in Tampa?

EW: Yeah, to my knowings—yeah, that was the first black school.

HJ: And what were the conditions, and how—did they just have one classroom or separate classrooms, and how do you know?

EW: Well, see now, I didn't go to Harlem. I don't know. I've been in that place in Harlem, but you see it's all tore down now. I was in there, but I don't know. I wasn't in there when they had it as a school; they had all moved out then. I don't know I went there for something—it had some kind of reception, I think, and I went in there. They had turned everything around, so I just don't know about that, cause as I say, I didn't go to school in Tampa. I went to school in Bartow.

Fred Beaton: Miss White, what can you tell me about the 1920s, around the Depression era?

EW: Twenties [1920s]?

FB: Yes, how was your life during then and what was it like here in Tampa during the Depression era?

EW: Well, I tell you, I always have—you know, those days they claims way everything was cheap. You could send to the store and get a quarter worth of bacon—that [would] do you a whole week, quarter worth of bacon. And you know, get flour, eggs, you get ten or fifteen cents worth of flour and things like that. That was when I was here. That was when I was a young lady—see, I was very young then. I've got so old now I don't remember very back way far back.

But I do remember 1908; we left Tampa and went to Port Tampa City. And we moved back here in 1908, the same year the soldiers were here. See, the soldiers, they were here, and they use to come to my house and they come around there to see me. I was a young girl then; the boys— yeah, I was a young girl, and there in 1908 they would come around there to see me. They were generally fine men too, you know. I told them, "Y'all do anything nasty around there, my daddy"—that was my step-daddy—"my daddy will scroll shoot you. He ain't going to kill you, but gonna shoot you somewhere." Well, then I was telling the truth, you know. I was telling them the truth, cause if they did anything to mistreat me he would shoot them.

But they were very generally fine boys, and so they came around. They come around so regular I would go out to church with them. They say, "Can I take you out, can I take you to the dance?" I say, "No, I don't go to dances." He say, "Where can I take you?" I say, "To church." He say, "Well, I know the church. I don't even have to have on a coat"—soldiers you know, they was soldiers, so he said, "You excuse me, I'll take you to church, but it's all right for us to go without in our uniform." So I would go to church with them. I didn't live far from the church in Port Tampa City.

And I remember we came back to Tampa, we moved back to Tampa. I think that was in 1908, about the latter part, last of it, and it snowed here—no, it didn't snow; they had icicles on Henderson [Boulevard]. They had a big tank up there, it's not there now though, but they did have it, cause on Henderson in front of that school—you know where the school is up there on Henderson and Jefferson [Street], I think. Well, they had a school there and opposite of that school right on Henderson—Henderson run like this, I think—and they had a great big tank. The water ran over, you know, and it was cold and we could look and see the icicles hanging down from the tank. It was so cold you see when the water run out it would freeze, and it would run down. You could go up there, but you couldn't get in that place; they had it barred out, you couldn't get in there.

So I just stayed home and looked up there, because we were living on Governor—not Governor [Street], we were living on—what street was that? I forget what the name of that street. Laurel [Street], we were living—it's Laurel now, but it wasn't Laurel before. It go right on across the bridge, you know to West Tampa, you know where Laurel is.

HJ: You talking about Fortune [Street]?

EW: Yeah, Fortune, that's what it was. It was Fortune Street before, then they changed it to Laurel. So we was living up there over the bar, over Gordon's Bar. He had a bar down

there, Mr. Gordon, old Gordon—not this Gordon, the daddy of this Gordon boy. His daddy use to run a bar room down there, and we were living up there. I don't know what happen—I don't hardly remember. I don't remember to much now in my old age. I'm so forgetful—yeah, I put things down sometimes and I can't go back and get them. I have to set down and study. That's what make me think I'm old; otherwise I don't think I'm old.

Shirley Smith: Are you saying things during the Depression era were cheap here in Tampa?

EW: During Depression—well, no, they wasn't so cheap, but during Depression I had a job. Then a good while after that, you know, after the soldiers left and everything, I had a husband too. See, I had a husband and he was working in Sarasota, and he would send me money back every week, and I was working myself. I was getting four dollars a week, so that was good, four dollars and all my tips. So sometimes I have some good dudes on my floor. I did maid work, and I had good dudes on my floor and when they get ready to go, sometimes they would give me ten dollars. And I wouldn't have to bother my little four dollars. I just carry that home and give it to my mother and tell her to buy some groceries, and she would get a dollar fifty worth of groceries, that last us a whole week. That was way back in them times, things was cheap; everything was cheap.

HJ: So what kind of work was most black folks doing, during the time before World War I? What was the main source of work for black people?

EW: Well, I tell you, I really couldn't say because you see, I was just looking out for Etta. And I had a job and I would go to my job, and then my husband, he would send me money every week, so we got along just like millionaires, you may say. Because you say rent was a dollar fifty a week, groceries a dollar fifty a week, and that would do us good a whole week. I couldn't do it now. We'd get a quarter worth of bacon and have that bacon, fry some of that bacon and eat it all the week and when Saturday come, we'll have more of it. You could get a nickel worth of grits, cause that would be enough; a nickel worth of grits would be plenty for us.

HJ: Okay, I know you said that you didn't go to dances or anything like that, but do you know what type of things that were going on, what other black people were doing for weekend, or for excitement or something like that?

EW: Well, I went to dances, but I didn't never dance. I can't dance now. I would go to dances—now I'll tell you, when I'll go to dances they have a prize, either two fifty in gold or—well, that was most all the time that I would go. I would go to the dances and girls would say, "Miss Etta, what you doing here at this dance?" I say, "I come to win the money." And I would win it, too, every time. Every time they would have that they say, "Lord, I hope Miss White don't come, Miss Etta won't come to this dance"—I wasn't a White then—"I hope Miss Etta don't come to the dance, cause she wins it every time, I don't see why."

So I would go to the dances and sit around in there, and they'll have good dances, and

nice places to dance and everything. They had the hall there and different places. They had a hall on Jefferson Street and they had one on Central Avenue—they had two on Central Avenue, two places to go—and then they had a place called Sunlight. I never did go there, cause they never did give away nothing. I always go get something and would get it, be lucky enough to get it every time. Every time they give away anything I'll go. I would receive it—even at the show, they would give away prizes at the show, and if I go I would be lucky enough to win it.

FB: Miss White, are you familiar with the ship building that took place here in Tampa?

EW: No, but I had people living in my home there on Central when they was building the ships around here. But see, I didn't talk with them about the ship building or nothing. I had men living there, living to my house that worked down there, but I don't know where they are now.

HJ: Miss Etta, can you give us the conditions of business on Central, like your restaurants or some of your bars or something like this, some information on the business back there in that era?

EW: Well, there on Central Avenue was the Little Savoy and Jonus Place, they stayed there a long time; they say when Lawton Jonus and Little Savoy, they stayed there until I left, and then after I left then they had to leave. Little Savoy was the last one, I think, to move out of Central Avenue, but I have gone in both of those bars there. I've gone in there, but they be so dark in there, I'll hurry up and get out. I used to sell pies in there, and I go in there and sell the pie, and as I go in there I'll stand to the door, because they don't have no light in there. I have to stand to the door till my eyes get use to the darkness, and then I would walk in and sell my pies and come out. Otherwise, I don't know about the bars and things.

HJ: At the restaurant and your—

EW: The restaurants—well, let me see. There was Little Boys on the corner there of Central and Scott [Street]—Scott and Central, was that right? Yeah, Scott and Central there, that was—he's out here on Twenty-Second Street now, what's his name?

HJ: Solomon.

EW: Yeah, Solomon and his brother. Yeah, they had—I use to go in there and buy chicken from them, they buy stuff like that wholesale, and where he knew me if I wanted one sometime and I couldn't get to go up town to get one, he let me have it. He let me have one, in plenty of time so he could get it out the freezer, cause they buy them wholesale and sell me one for so much and so much.

HJ: During World War I, were there a lot of blacks from Tampa, men that went into the service to fight World War I? Were there a lot of them?

EW: Well, now, I really don't know about that. I couldn't tell you about that, but I did hear some of them leaving Tampa. I couldn't give you the names of them, but some of them went in service.

HJ: What about like when they were in service? What type of things did the women have to do? Were you directly affected by this? Maybe times were harder for women during the time of World War I.

EW: Never was hard for me though, no. I was really blessed, me and my mother—yeah, we were really blessed, me and my mother and my two kids. My husband, he went to Sarasota and he worked, and he sent me money back. And so my mother take care of the kids, and so she say, "You ain't got nothing to do, so you can get you a little job." Well, I'm going down there and see Mr. Park and them and see can they give me anything. So I went on down there, and his wife was fixing to have a baby, and he say, "Yeah, Etta, come on down here. My wife going to have a baby next week, and I would like you to nurse her"—nurse it, he didn't know; he say nurse her or him; he didn't know what the baby was going to be.

So sure enough, I went on down there and I hope around in the kitchen there, till—no, I didn't. He told me, "I'll tell you what you do. You go up stairs and help this girl, Maude"—I think her name was name was Maude—"You go upstairs and help her to clean up this week. Next week my wife going to have that baby." I say, "I can't nurse a little bitty baby." He say, "I'll have a trained nurse for the baby until it just so many years old, then I'll get you to come on in." Sure enough, I did.

And then after that, then I went to work in—that's my old age showing up on me, see; make me forget. The Lord has blessed me though; he has blessed me. And so after that, I taken care of the boy and I wouldn't work around there with them, you see, and they gave me four dollars for that. The nurse was getting more than that, but I mean the maid was only getting four dollars, and so all I got was four dollars, too.

HJ: All right, Miss Etta, mainly what we are concerned with—now, we want a little information about the business aspect, like Solomon Place, like Rogers Dining Room?

EW: I think I went up to Rogers Place twice; it was someone gave a party, a reception or something like that and I was invited up there, and I went up there twice. But you know, just sit around, and we went up there and sit around and listen at the conversation and everything, but I didn't have anything to do up there. All I did was just go up there and enjoy myself. It was very nice up there.

HJ: How about Johnnie Gray's place ?

EW: Well, I don't know. I went down to Johnnie Gray's place, but I never did go in. See, that was a restaurant they had down there. I never did go in. Because I see Johnnie on the outside and I would just talk to him, and then I go on back home, cause I didn't have any business around there. Cause you see, my mother cook plenty and I wouldn't have to go

down none of those places for restaurant to get anything.

Sometime I go and get a little cool drink, some place there on corner of Scott and Central. I go in that—it was a drugstore, you know, the Palace Drugstore. Yeah, I would go in there before they burn that down; that was a good place there before they burn it down. And we use to go down practically every Sunday afternoon; people be going, walking out and going somewhere for recreation or something like that, and we would go in there. A bunch of us girls get together and go in there and sit down and order something, cold drinks or ice cream or something like that. But into this restaurant place there, what his name?

HJ: How about Johnnie Gray's place?

EW: No not Johnnie Gray, on the corner up there.

HJ: Solomon.

EW: Solomon—yeah, Solomon. I'll go down there sometime and get something, but I didn't get nothing much down there, cause I always have plenty to eat home. If I get anything, it would be raw, and take it home and cook it.

HJ: Okay can you think of any other businesses that was in that area down there, any other business like barber shops, hairdressers?

EW: On Central? Yeah, my hairdresser lived on Central; her name is Miss York. You don't know her, do you? She belongs to Bethel Church and—what is her first name? I forget her first name, but I don't think she was a York then. I think she married just a little before she moved from off of Central. I just don't remember. I just can't remember people's names.

HJ: Okay, I have one more question. Can you describe say the riots that happen in Tampa? Were you staying in that little block there?

EW: No, I don't remember that. I can't go into that, cause I don't remember that.

HJ: I'm talking about the one that burn down the Palace Drugstore.

EW: Those boys that—cause I didn't know the leader of it, you know. I don't know the leader of that. I don't know. With—what this barber name down there?

HJ: Bennie Schulman.

EW: Bennie Schulman, yeah. I don't know, but I know Bennie Schulman had said something to some of them boys and they stopped, cause you know I was near my house. I was just knowing my house was going to catch a fire every minute, but it didn't. And I think Bennie Schulman could control those boys—I'm not sure was it controlled then, but

it was somebody told them they stopped that burning, you know. And all at once they had a whole lot of stuff they had stole way down Central; they stole that there. I had a boy staying in the back room there, and he filled that room full of stuff there. And we was trying to get out—he was moving in.

Well, the fire was so near us, and it did burn the corner down—it didn't burn it down, but it burn it so bad they even fix it up anymore. Yes, sir, it was awful, but we was packing it up to get out. And the funny thing about me, everybody was packing up and I wasn't getting nothing but dresses. I was just getting all my dresses and no shoes, no underwear, no sheets, pillow cases, nothing. I was just getting my dresses. And my cousin came over there and I was just throwing them in there. I was so nervous he just got them down, and just throwed them in the truck, throwed them in the truck. And my roomers, they was moving out, moving across the street, and some of them say they going to get the house here and get across there to. So they was just—I was just sitting down there and telling them, "Get that dress, get that dress, get that dress."

And so it just—finally, somebody said they done stopped and say the fire department is coming down. So the fire department came on down, the boys let them have it, you know—I mean, the boys left after the fire was gone there and they let the fire department come in. The fire department couldn't come down there; them boys shot them, they would—they didn't come down there to put the fire out. And we was just calling up, calling up—I didn't call, but I just had other people call for me. I was so nervous I didn't call or anything, but that was awful.

And them boys was there running in there packing all that stuff in there. I say, "You better be getting some out. You bring it here, y'all bring all this stuff here," and me trying to get out. That boy had his room full of everything—they done got out the store way down there, you know. It was a pawn shop way down there in front of Rogers Place, and they been down there and done stole everything they wanted and brought it up there. Had more stocking than a little—that boy give me stocking, I don't know from what; ain't got some of them stocking. These stocking they got out of different stores and they brought up there and give them to me. "Miss White, you can have these stockings." I say, "Well, thank you."

HJ: So Mrs. White, do you remember the last lynching of a black person in Tampa?

EW: Yeah, but I don't know his name.

HJ: Do you remember what year, date, or what time it was?

EW: No, I don't know. He was living on—I know where he lived, he was living on the corner right behind the school house. What's that street? Morgan Street; he was living on the corner of Morgan and Constance [Avenue], I believe. He was living in that house, because I went there several times and I use to go there a lady after he—after she moved out.

Side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

EW: Good from where I was the Desoto Hotel. I couldn't see from there—I don't know where it was—but anyway, after they hung him I didn't even go by there going home.

HJ: What had he done? What crime had he committed?

EW: Well, during that time it was a lot of sporting women—see, there's lots of sporting women round, living around there where I lived. These women here, they were all mostly brown skin women, and they wouldn't entertain nobody but white men. He went there, they pay the girls and they told me she said, "We don't go with colored men." He say, "You goin' to go with me, or else you'll die." And she said, "No, I'll die then first. I don't know how our Missy let you in and how she let you get in here, because we don't mess with nothing but white men," and so. I think he shot one of the girls, but she didn't die, I'm not positive.

But anyway, they arrested him and put him in jail and kept him in there a good while. And there use to be a lady use to go down there and prayed for prisoners. She went down there, prayed for him, and he told her, "They going to lynch me at such and such a time." She say, "I can't do you no good. All I can do is talk with you and tell you to put your trust in God. That's all. If they going to kill you, they'll going to kill you. You didn't take this lady life, but you shot her, and they going to lynch you for that." And so they did; they hung him. Now what his name I don't know—and I did have a clipping of the paper, but now moving around I don't know whether I brought it or what, I don't know. Lots of things that I had when I moved off of Central.

I moved to this man's place what use to run that drugstore—what's his name? The drugstore there on Central, you know him. Well, I moved to his house; he lived on North A, and in the back he had a garage, and over the garage he had a rooming house all furnished. So he told me I could stay there until I got my apartment. See, she told me I could stay there, and I stayed there about three or four months before I moved over here. I had put in for this apartment, but it wasn't vacant yet, and she told me the first one she got vacant she would let me have it. So that's where I stayed there with him and we called him Doc. I sorry, I do the best I can because y'all wait until I got so old. Oh, thank God I can. I remember every once and a while; some time it come back to me and some time it go, but I just got like that last year. But every year—see, I get older and older every year, so I thank God that he let me live this long. I lived longer than my mother and father and all that.

FB: Do you remember the first church here in Tampa?

EW: Well, yes. Beulah and St. Paul [African Methodist Episcopal], they was the two. Beulah Baptist and St. Paul church, cause I belong to Beulah and I use to go to St. Paul; still go there some time now. St. Paul is right where it is, Beulah is right behind the where the Co-cola planet—did you know about that? You don't know about that, do you? Well, Beulah was right behind that co-cola plant there; that's on the corner of Pierce [Street]

and Constance—not Constance, Laurel now. It was Constance then. That's where Beulah use to sit. Then Beulah round there where the Longshoremen Hall there, that was the—they bought Beulah and then they built back over there on Pierce Street. The Longshoreman bought old Beulah and then they built a new Beulah. Now they got another new Beulah over in West Tampa, that only—that's St. Paul and Beulah and Borman. It's Tyer Temple [United Methodist Church] now; they use call it Borman church, and it was located on—I forget where Borman was located at. But Beulah, Tyer Temple, and another church, Bethel. Bethel is right where it's at now; that's where Bethel is.

HJ: Wasn't Tyer Temple on Jefferson? Was it on Jefferson, on the corner of Jefferson and Scott?

EW: Uh huh. I believe it was on Jefferson, somewhere down there by the jailhouse is now—yeah that's where it was. Yeah, those are the three leading churches there I know, Tyer Temple, Beulah, and Borman and Bethel.

HJ: Were there big turnouts for churches during those days?

EW: Oh, yeah. Yes, yes, they had good turn out; they had better services than they do now, mostly. People now, they are not studying about religion now; they get it all on the radio, the television.

HJ: Do you remember when first television came to Tampa?

EW: Yeah, I remember. I didn't have none, we didn't—you know I been here a long time. Yeah, I been in Tampa—I came to Tampa I think in 1908, and I came from Ocala from my home, and went to Port Tampa City and stayed down there a good bit of years and we moved to Tampa. And I remember, cause we couldn't buy television and a radio; we thought we could—I say it wasn't no men folks around, but my husband, he was in Sarasota working down there, and he had him a little radio in his place and batteries. So after my son got a good size boy, he went to work, and he bought him a radio.

We wasn't able to get the television; then [the price] wasn't so high as they is now, but still we didn't have that kind of money. Cause everything then was cheap and everybody was trying to work and get something to eat. As I say, I never was in the bread line. I use to wish I've get it. I wanted some of that black flour. I don't know why I wanted the black flour when we could buy the white flour, and cook and have nice white biscuits, but them black biscuits look so good, so I use to go to my cousin house and eat some of that flour they got was dark flour.

HJ: So would you say that after World War II or before World War II the conditions of blacks were better or worse?

EW: No, it was better. After that it was better during my time, because the people could work. Men could work to the shipyard if they wanna—good pay there, lots of the men.

Well, now, I think the last time I work, and that was up here, I wasn't getting but—ah, what did I get, fifteen dollars. I was working at a hotel, and my hotel was a cheap hotel, but it was a pretty hotel. The Desoto Hotel, they tore it completely down now; that's where you go down there and get your Social Security card now, the Desoto Hotel was right in there.

I was sitting up in the window one day when they were building the telephone building; it must have been along this time in March, cause the wind was going blowing and a storm was predicted and everything. They had—I don't know whether it was rope or cable, but they had it on all four sides of that building, that telephone building, and storms came. A strong wind come, and those men got out there; lots of men were holding. I was sitting there in the window and that place was leaning over just like that, and I was sitting there in the window and I said to myself, "I better get myself out here; that thing falls over there they would never find me, until they get all these bricks from over me."

Well, if I go anywhere else I can't see, so I went back to the window and sit up there in the window, and that place was going just like that. And a bunch of men was over there kind of holding it back so it wouldn't come over this side; it was a frame, it wasn't a building, just the frame was going up there. They don't build them like that now, because now they build place most of concrete or something like that, bricks or something like that, but this here was just a steel building. It's the same place as it is down there where I go to pay my light bill; now it's that same building right over that side.

HJ: Okay, thank you, Mrs. White. We don't want to tire you out, cause it's a possibility that we may come back and talk to you some more, so we end for today.

end of interview