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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project
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Harold Reddick: I was born in Jacksonville, Florida. I got my education in the public school system in the same city. And I learned the cooper's trade at an early age. I stayed in Florida for—I was somewhere around my late teens. And after that I went to Chicago, Illinois, where I was—I followed the cooper's trade until I was in Florida at Pullman Company. I understand we were hired, about five hundred of us—Pullman told us that because the Pullman Company was unsure of whether they was gonna have a strike with the Brothers of Sleeping Car Porters or not, because they were negotiating a contract—the first contract after some thirteen years of struggle, trying to get recognition with the (inaudible) company.

I did not attend college, but I feel that my experience in Chicago and association with the BTU [Bible Translation and Utilization?] of Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church and other organizations served as a world-learning center for me that gave me—brought out or developed desires to be free, or to participate in the better things of life.

I left Chicago in 1939 and came to the city of Tampa. Somewhere along in the latter part of 1940, Mr. [Mathew] Gregory invited me to join the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP]. Shortly thereafter, about that time, I joined the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and became active in policing the contract that existed between Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the Pullman Company. Through my service in the Pullman Company, I had the opportunity to travel to forty-eight states, Canada, and Mexico. In that area, we were exposed to some of the most wealthiest and educated people in our community and country, because Pullman was the way of travel in that area.

Back to Tampa, we associated with the Brothers of Sleeping Car Porters and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. We had gross discrimination at that time, and we were constantly suing the City of Tampa or private industry for insulting or false search or pretence of shoplifting, things of that nature that have a tendency to

degrade or humiliate a segment of our people. We operated on the section of voters' leagues. In that, we raised our funds in order to pay our legal fees through individual contributions of our members' nickels and dimes so we could take our cases to court.

One case in particular was the Adams case that—he had an altercation with a motorman, and we became quite successful in winning that case. Also, we had another case wherein this individual was accused of killing an individual with a blunt instrument, but he never was placed beyond the threshold of the door, according to the prosecuting attorney. Fortunately, this case was won through the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Of those situations that happened, we think [one] that was of great importance to us was when the NAACP local branch joined the national NAACP when Thurgood Marshall made our case part of a case that proved that Democratic city election was tantamount to an election, because there was no opposition and there was no one part of that whole primary that was tantamount to an election. Therefore, general election was superfluous.

And when we—Mr. Henry Hudson was the plaintiff in that case in Hillsborough County. I can't say too much for this commoner. I'd like to call him that; he was not formally educated; he had no degree. He worked as a janitor, but he had the courage and conviction that he had to get into politics. And through the courage and efforts of Mr. Hudson, his family, and members of the NAACP, this is when we were given the opportunity to begin to vote in the white primaries, which it was called at that time, which was tantamount to the election.

I'm of the opinion that because I desire to exercise the rights at that time that I was drafted into the Army, because I appeared sometime around August of forty-three [1943], and somewhere before October, September of forty-three [1943], I was in the [U.S.] Army. I was alleged to be in the fence industry, which was transportation, but I was sent to the Army, which I have no basically regret, other than I had a lot of mixed emotions at that particular time.

And also at that particular time we had what was like ward politics. We voted by numbers and districts. I saw nothing basically wrong it, but now everybody seems to think it's a crime to have district voting. You won't be voting, the lodge we're in, I think it just—one day, you hope you live long enough where we will have an opportunity to elect individuals from our immediate district. Because any fair-minded citizen that's worthy of being a politician should realize—

Unknown Woman: (inaudible) let me use the keys, please, because (inaudible).

HR: —that if he don't look out for the whole community that he will in turn do his own community a disservice. But for some reason, because of lack of patronage, being able to have a vendor do business with units of government, whereby service contracts, painting contracts, and any type of business, whereby it would be to our advantage to contribute money, whereby through our business venture that we would get an investment for our

service and interest.

I feel that the black population of Tampa has been disenchanting, because they really haven't tasted any tangible benefits, personally, from participating in politics. And I feel that we should take a broader perspective and realize that good government will come by broader participation in demanding and requesting the services that units of government are designed to render to its citizens. As far as dates in history, at this time we have had a constant struggle, and we seem to have had unseen restraint on the cooperation among our people for various—for what reason I am not able to say, but the results of our accomplishments would indicate that something is amiss.

As far as label that you indicated before that—

Woman: Excuse me. (sound of footsteps)

HR: —the ballot box in the union part is the way to freedom—

Woman: Thank you. (sound of footsteps)

HR: —and I would strongly urge all members of minority groups that have an opportunity to participate in a collective bargaining agreement wherein the shop that they're working. The majority of the people said that the union is what they want, to participate in their union. They could make it a democratic process, because a union is no stronger than its weakest member. They do have democratic elections, but if you stay home and leave it somebody else, they will look out for their own interest. It's no substitute for unions. You have good, bad and indifferent in churches, business, as well as labor, when it's left up to the majority of the people to acquire the necessary information and have the courage to do the things that will bring about the results that they desire to have.

Pause in recording

HR: You were saying “walk through my life.” I came to Tampa in thirty-nine [1939]. I shortly started being involved, and I have been involved with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in one facet or another, from vice president to chairman of the membership committee, and other committees.

I served on the grievance committee of the Brothers of Sleeping Car Porters. And for those who might not be familiar with the grievance committee, when you have a collective bargaining agreement, you have certain rules and regulations that the company is bound to respect. By the same token, management has a book of regulations that you are supposed to be governed by. Therefore, if you fail to carry out those—respect those rules and regulations—you are subject to discipline. And if they accuse you of failing to do certain things that are paid to do, then they will give you a hearing. And in this hearing, you would have a grievance committee to try to vindicate your case, wherein you're not guilty if they have sufficient evidence. And we find that in many—in some

cases—that the accused fail to give the true picture. When you get to the grievance table, you are presented with facts that would belie the statement that had been previously given to you by the individual you are trying to represent.

That only served to motivate us. When I say us, I'm talking about the officers of the Brothers [Brotherhood] of Sleeping Car Porters. I'd also like to add that we served without pay in these capacities to police our contract, because we felt that the value of our contract in demanding the respect of management to respect our contract was something we paid for through blood, 'cause many porters were fired because they desired to establish the Brothers of Sleeping Car Porters. Therefore, those of us who had the opportunity of live and to enjoy the benefits of it, we were willing to make a sacrifice in order to serve, in order to perpetuate our organization, because we felt that it was the honest way to be a man, when you had someone speak for you as a collective group, not rather than a individual.

We also have a very high point in our life where I was fortunate enough [that] the city of Tampa sent me to Chicago to participate in the first pre-planned march on Washington movement, which was the prelude to President Roosevelt issuing Executive Order 8802¹, which did away with discrimination in the defense factory.

And also, I'd like to add, for the sake of my brothers of the Sleeping Car Association, we hear a lot about Dr. Martin Luther King. Edgar Nixon of Birmingham, Alabama, formed the Montgomery Improvement Association, and he was the one that had served Mrs. Parks, Rosa Parks, went to and asked for advice when she was supposed to get up out of the seat on that bus in Birmingham. Mr. Nixon went to Martin Luther King, which I say proudly, because Mr. Nixon was a part of the original of the movement of the Brothers of the Sleeping Car Porters. If it had not been for him, I'd say strongly that I doubt that Martin Luther King would have came to permanence at the time that he did come to permanence.

So this is, again, one of the fruits of what organized labor can do for a community. Because had it not been for the Brothers of the Sleeping Car Porters to give us independence to be men and to support our families and have the job security that comes from collective bargaining, Mr. Nixon would no doubt never have formed the Improvement Association of Montgomery, Alabama. That kind of a situation can be developed in any community, if we would do so.

We also have established in our community, in 1946—about that time, I think it was—A. Philip Randolph Institute, in order to bring about awareness among the black trade unions, whereby that he would participate in his union, and also unions would survive on their political clout. You cannot have political clout without being a registered voter and voting for your friends and defeating your enemies. In order to command respect, the individual will listen to you and give you bad justice about the collective—and legislative as well as in the courts, because in many cases in strikes or other disturbances, the law

¹ Also known as the Fair Employment Act, signed by Roosevelt in 1941, prohibiting government contractors from racial discrimination in hiring.

will intimidate you, but when you have a fair share and a fair law enforcement force that would respect you as an individual and not be biased to management, it would serve to perpetuate you, strengthen your union movement. These are facts that sometimes I feel the rank-and-file individuals in our community aren't aware of, because it's those kinds of things that will help you to have the economic stability that would enable you to develop a family that would be a credit to our community.

And that bring me to a point that I feel that I've learned through my association with the Brothers of Sleeping Car Porters under Mr. Randolph's² inspirational guidance from time to time. Political and social equality is so closely woven until they're inseparable. Therefore, we cannot have independence unless we have that economic independence that we can participate in, the other two aspects of social equality, as well as political equality.

I think this basically would bring to the point the area now wherein— I was here when the riots of June fifty-nine [1959], I think, or sixty [1960], sixty-four [1964]. I think it was just prior to the White Hats. I was also involved in the integration of Howard Johnson on Dale Mabry. And Ms. Glimps, I think she and I was a part of the team, and we went to theaters. And we was arrested that Sunday night when we went to the drive-in theater out on Hillsborough. And by the grace of God, I was—most of us was released on our own recognizance, because we was all stable citizens. We had committed no law; we only wanted to exercise our rights as American citizens and anybody else.

But the days in the streets are gone. Marching has served its purpose. It's left up to us now to realize that we have sudden discrimination, and we've got to be able to fight it in many ways. One of the basic ways to fight it is through developing a family structure, developing a fair justice system whereby that you will not be preyed upon by the law enforcement, that we increase a greater value on what we will be involved in instead of the point of pettiness that would tarnish our record or our name, and because we had made a mistake that we would be forced to recant on our militancy in the consistent manner that would give us the respect. Because nobody gives you nothing; you can only get what you can earn and demand from. And that demanding don't come from force, it comes from intelligence and consistency in participating in good government.

That basically brings us down to the point to wherein I advocate that integration is a high point. Some people say it's good or bad or indifferent. But salvation is personal, and until we consider the whole man, a job by itself is not the total answer. And see, if he would have a decent place to live in, an environment in order to give him an opportunity to talk with his child, to expose his child to the history of things that you're trying to reconstruct here. Somebody knows that somebody's always wanted to be somebody, somebody's always strived to keep the torch burning, and nobody never gave up. Those are the kind of things that I feel will give us the motivation in order to teach our children self-discipline. Without that, I mean, we are hopeless. We're in the game of competition, and we'll have to compete on the basis of merit, not on the basis of sympathy of color.

² A. Philip Randolph was the organizer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

And I strongly disagree with the crutches and handouts and tokenism. It comes only when (inaudible) opportunity to be exposed and to, if necessary, to create a birth control from the standpoint that parents would have children on a controlled basis. And therefore, that would give that them the freedom to use their resources in the way they can give their children an opportunity to be what they want to be and what they want. It wouldn't be a criteria—not a criteria, a deterrent from them spending time with their children in order to motivate them and let them know that they're somebody.

And this is one of the things that we're gonna have to do if we gonna be somebody and realize that we as blacks are all in the same boat together. We'll go up together and we'll all go down together. Let us see through the myth of tokenism, because it's only, in my opinion, a deterrent to the race progress. This is the thing. Because of the institutionalized system we live under, I think color will be a major factor in our progress for a long time to come. So let's not be deluded to the fact because I think I've made it. I haven't made it until we have given an opportunity to all black people, as well as white people, to have an opportunity to go as high as their innate ability will allow them to go.

Thank you for this opportunity. I hope these remarks will be of inspiration to the unborn generation.

Pause in recording

HR: Talking about Mr. Randolph. I once had the privilege of attending the ninth A. Philip Randolph National Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, May 19-21 1970. And I served as a resource person for the Human Resource and Development Institute³, which is the manpower arm of the AFL-CIO⁴. And that function is to get the community, government, and labor involved in federally funded programs for the disadvantaged. We have done a great deal in that instance in the city of Tampa. We've been operating in Tampa for the last nine and some few years, a little better than nine years.

But in this souvenir journal, one of the things that he cited as one of his favorite quotes: "Salvation for race, nation, or class must come from within. Freedom is never granted, it is won. Justice is never given, it is exacted. Freedom and justice must be struggled for by the oppressed of all lands, races, and the struggles must be continued, for freedom is never a found fact, but it continues the bargain process to bigger and bigger, higher levels—bigger and higher levels of human social, economic, political, and religious relationship." A. Philip Randolph. Thank you.

Otis R. Anthony: Mr. Reddick, (inaudible).

End of interview

³ HRDI is an African-American behavioral health care agency in the U.S.

⁴ The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.