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Fred Beaton: (inaudible) 2006 E. Emma [Street]. Mr. Hargrett.

James Hargrett, Senior: All right. I'd like to say first here about the Frontiers of America. It was organized in the early fifties [1950s], and I happen to have been one charter member of the organization, which was headed and organized by C. Blythe Andrews, Senior. And it was part of a national (inaudible). It was headed by and founded by one Nimrod. I just remember the name—his first time. And it progressed through and through the years doing public service and bringing businessmen together in order that we might have people to come in from various walks of life and talk with us, in order that we would be able to see what things were happening in the neighborhood in order that we might be able to venture into some of these things for ourselves.

And the next thing that I might say is that I happened to have been on the advisory board for black affairs under the supervision of and appointed by Nick Nuccio, who was in the mayor's seat in 1957. And the next thing that I have to say would be that I was president of the Tampa Negro Business Leaders.

FB: Now, was this a combination of a fraternal and business organization, or a business organization?

JH: No, this was strictly a business organization. It was an outgrowth of the Negro Chamber of Commerce. And I was president of that from 1947 through 1952.

FB: Mr. Hargrett, can you name some of the things that this organization—some of the functions of the this organization?

JH: The functions of this organization was to have meetings and work with the mayor, advising him along the lines of what would be beneficial for the blacks in Tampa. There was a—

(Phone rings)

pause in recording

JH: —1957 was when this Frontier—

FB: Frontier was started in 1957?

JH: —started in 1957.

FB: At what location was it?

JH: At the Rogers Dining Room.

FB: Okay. Was it the Rogers—?

JH: Rogers Hotel.

FB: Rogers Hotel.

JH: Yeah, later known as Pyramid Hotel.

FB: Oh, okay.

JH: Do you want me to say that?

FB: Yes, sir, you can say it. It's [tape recorder is] on.

JH: It's on? Well, the Frontiers of America was organized in the year of 1957 at the Rogers Hotel, later known as Pyramid Hotel. And it had its functions throughout the years up until the present time. The names have been changed to Frontiers International.

Oh, I was sayin' about the advisory group of people. For any type of infractions of the law that we thought of—for the betterment of the protection of the blacks in the neighborhood, and so forth—we would go and have our meetings with the mayor to talk about and help him to solve these various problems.

We had one problem that I can recall, and that was about the [Clara Frye] hospital. It was a city-owned hospital and there were complaints and disturbances and so forth throughout the years so far as that hospital was concerned and we served as a liaison, more or less, between the hospital and the mayor.

FB: Can you name some of the members that was on this advisory board?

JH: Some of the members on the advisory board was C. Blythe Andrews, Aurelio

Fernandez, C.R. Gibbs—he's a hospital administrator—Perry Harvey [Senior], and myself.

FB: Okay, now, what affect did this have on Mayor Nick Nuccio?

JH: Mayor Nick Nuccio would be more or less guided to a certain degree from our suggestions. Now, there can't—

There did come a time when there was a controversy concerning the firing of a nurse who was doing, definitely, her duty. And there was another part of the story that they were tryin'—this committee was attempting to save the administrator, the hospital administrator. And by so doing they would have to show that the nurse was supposed to be—her job was supposed to be abolished in order to save the administrator. At that time, I terminated my services to the committee because I didn't think anything at all about discontinuing the service of somebody who was in the right. And I knew that. And I just refused to be a part of the board and resigned because of that. The committee moved on until the expiration of the mayor's term.

All right, now—I told you that I was president of the Negro Business Leaders.

FB: Yes. And you named some of the functions of it, and—was this a group particularly interested in, say, black business and—?

JH: In black business. It was the same—would be the same—and we had membership throughout the black community—

FB: Okay.

JH: —bein' members of this Negro Chamber of Commerce. And of course, we had our monthly meetings and would attempt to bring into to the town any type of convention. We would solicit conventions to come into the town and we would work with the football games that would be comin' into town. And we had speakers to go around to any type of convention that was held and welcome the people into the city. And we would ask them to patronize the black businesses in the neighborhood. We'd name the people who were responsible for the organization. And we found that it was doin' a tremendous service, so far as black business was concerned in Tampa.

FB: Okay. Did the group attempt to bring in certain people who were skilled in, say, advertisement to better your advertisement—any type services like that?

JH: Did they do—?

FB: Yeah. Okay, in other words, did you bring in any of—experts on, say, advertisement—or how did you advertise?

JH: So far as bringin' in experts to advertise, I would say no. We advertised in all of the

various programs as for our Negro business leaders. That's how we did our advertisement. And, also, anybody who wanted to come into the town and if they—those advance men who wanted to come into the town would come in, and we would have a meeting and give them the opportunity to speak to our group and who—and, by so going, we would be advertising ourselves and doing good for the community.

FB: Well, what were the conditions of blacks during this time when the committee was established, the economic conditions of blacks in Tampa?

JH: The economic conditions of blacks in Tampa was very poor 'cause I think in the—with the schools—the people—the blacks in the schools were considered as the top people. But their salaries were very mediocre. Their salaries were half of that of the white teachers, and so forth. And we had several people who were running small businesses on Central Avenue and other sparsely acquired spaces within the city who belonged to the Business Leaders. And we even went so far as to entertain the National Negro Business Leaders. We had the National Negro Business Leaders to come into Tampa, and we'd entertain them and had meetings with and workshops—

FB: Okay, now, this is still in the fifties [1950s]?

JH: Yeah.

FB: Okay.

JH: And from that we gained a lot of information. And, also, it was inspirational to all of the black people to have these people to come in from all around the nation to converge on Tampa and, then, to ask ideas of how to better create atmosphere for the black community.

FB: Okay.

JH: I wanted to say something else, and that had to do with the Frontiers of America. We met at various schools every week at noontime. And there were suggestions that were made. And once instance—I know when I made the suggestion that we establish a black bank in the community. And the Frontiers decided that that would be a worthwhile thing. And we voted to send to Atlanta and bring in those people—two people from Atlanta who had had broad experiences in banks—into Tampa at one of our meetings. And they showed us all of the various types of investment companies that we could probably utilize in our effort to establish some monetary assistance in the community.

There was one person in particular that I happened to have known who was in the Atlanta. His name was J.B. Blake, who headed the bank—Citizen's Bank and Trust Company in Atlanta. He was one of those who came in to speak to us and advise us as to how to go about affecting a bank here in town. And that was—actually, the Savings and Loan Association is an outgrowth of that information which was given to us at that time.

FB: Okay. Mr. Hargrett, down through the years, what has inspired you to go into business? What have been your motivation factor?

JH: Well, I would say that so far as my efforts towards being a better—more—how to—let me see now, how would I put it? If I came from a town where people were—progress—this town that I came from sent various people, (inaudible) people, who came from this little town of Apalachicola, Blythe Andrews, Varvel Kiss, Minnie Hawkins, Dewey Richardson, James Austin, and an aunt of mine, and several other people, and all of them were gainfully employed.

When we mention about Blythe Andrews, you know that he was a politician. We know that Blythe Andrews was—you know about his—what he accomplished. We know that James Austin was an undertaker. We know that Miss Kiss was a school teacher. We know that Minnie Hawkins was a school teacher. We know that Addie Walton, my aunt, was a school teacher. And these people had a certain amount of inspiration because in our little town—it was enterprising—people more or less owned all of their homes. They were fishermen and so forth. They owned their boats. They owned factories, and so forth, on the waters. And they made a decent living with a small place.

It was too small for us to live there, so we moved out, ventured out into the bigger parts of the country. And within me was the idea that I had been to school and was—and my mother had died, my father had died and I had to more or less work my way through school from ninth grade through college at A & M College¹. When I got out from there, I just happened to have been somebody who was lookin' for an opportunity. And the schools weren't giving me the type of opportunities that I felt that I deserved. My field was the field of industrial arts education. In the black schools, they were not given—allowing the schools to have industrial arts education for black students.

So I thought that I would move out of the school work, after having tried for several places to get this type of training into the schools. As a matter of fact, I started off in Booker Washington [Junior High School], and I didn't have any type of that type of trade work in Booker Washington. So I left Booker Washington and I went to Key West, which did have a semblance of industrial arts in that particular place. But Key West was so far and remote from the mainland, and it was a very, very small place at that time. It was only four miles wide. And I thought that I would I would be better to come back on the mainland.

I came back to Middleton High School, and stayed there for one year. I left Middleton High School and went to the housing projects. And there I was able to do the things that I was taught in school to do. I had on my certificate—I had a brick mason. I had mechanical drawing. I had painting. I had carpentry. I had glazing. And all of those things fitted in with what needed to be done and supervised about the housing projects. So that gave me something that I would be able to do, and it also gave me a little bit of more finance.

¹ Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University.

And then after working at the housing projects looked across the street, over there on Main Street, up and down Main Street, and I would see the Latinos who were operatin' the businesses across the street at that time. And it was a regular stream of children and grown-ups goin' across the street from this housing project to patronize those people, and they were doing a flourishin' business. So I got the idea—I said, "Those people can do a flourishing business; I think I ought to be able to do a flourishing business also." But where?

And then when this—there was a project proposed to be built in Belmont Heights. And I knew where it was supposed to be, because of the fact that Atlanta sent their men down to Tampa, because it was a federal project. And they had maps of where this project was supposed to be located. So I immediately came out into the Belmont Heights area and saw certain properties that were supposed to be immediately across from the housing projects, and I said, "I'll buy"—that property was on sale by the city—"so I'll buy that property, and wait for the opportunity of building the same as those Latinos where building over there in West Tampa and I can do business." And so that was my means of getting started into business.

After having done that—gone into business—I was able to see that we needed to join ourselves together in the town. There was a time that I decided that I thought that becoming interested in Negro business leaders, it would mean an event—any type of event came in town I would sell more. Every other black business would sell more if we brought various conventions and so forth into the city. And that was the reason for my moving into the chamber of commerce, because they had a Ybor City Chamber of Commerce and they encouraged their business people. We had a Tampa Chamber of Commerce downtown. So I said we needed a chamber of commerce among our people. And that was my means of working along with it.

So I also—a bit earlier than that—established a Tampa Men's Recreational Club.

FB: Now this was—this is still in the fifties [1950s]?

JH: This was probably in the forties [1940s]—in the early forties [1940s]. I was the instigator of a Tampa Men's Recreation Club. And my thoughts were that if we are able to learn to play together, we'd be able to do business together. And that lasted until the war—the war took most of our men, and it went with the time.

I don't know whether I mentioned to you about Progress Village or not.

FB: Yes. You went through that about Progress Village, but what we wanted to know why'd they choose—why did they pick a site? Who picked the site? Or, who was in charge of pickin' the site?

JH: Let me see—

pause in recording

JH: —for a planned development prepared for Progress Village, Incorporated. Now, the officers that had to do with the development of Progress Village in its entirety—the officers was Cody Fowler—

Side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

JH: —was a president of the Freedom Federal Savings and Loan Association. He's the president of the National Bar Association. And Robert Thomas is an industrialist. He is down at the chemical company. He was an industrialist. And M.H. Mott, as you know, was vice-president of this—was the president of Central Life Insurance Company. Aurelio Fernandez was a black instructor. R. Bob Smith was the president of a bank here in Tampa. And the board of trustees also—these were the various officers, the president, vice-president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer.

All right, the board of trustees consisted of Cody Fowler, M.H. Mott, Robert Thompson, James A. Griffin, Jr., Ollie Smith, Jr., Ben D. Griffin, Harold Wolfe, James Harvey, Fred Billings, Romeo Gibbs, Joseph Benetiz, Perry Harvey, Sr., R.M. Le (inaudible), M.R. Sauers, A.J. Grimaldi, Ray Williams, C. Blythe Andrews and Aurelio Fernandez. And those were the ones of us who made all of the decisions as to the buying of the site, keeping it quiet and keeping it—and these people such as Fred Billings, who's also one of the bankers in town, and Cody Fowler and Robert Thomas, who was an industrialist, and James Griffin, Jr., who's one of the bankers and leaders in the town, Harold Wolfe, who was another leader in our town, and a stalwart in our town, who controlled the press and everything else in the town.

We (inaudible) the fact that we were in such (inaudible) for our place to be (inaudible) for our black community. And there were people who rose up overnight to talk about where the new course ought to be put and where they shouldn't be put and so forth. So we closed ranks together and decided to own this space, this (inaudible) place out here at Progress Village, where Progress Village is now established. And these men kept it out of the press, out of the papers, and so forth, until we got ourselves together and made our down pay—made the down construction, finance company and so forth, corporation and so forth, in order that we would be able to purchase this property.

And that we did. And after that, then it was thrown open to the press and everybody else in order that we could do a good job. And all the various contractors had accepted that fact that they would come in and do a certain number of houses and so forth, and charge a minimum amount of money for the building of these houses. And we got Cone Brothers [Construction Company] to come in and landscape and cut roads and so forth, payment on this property and worked along with us to be able to have—and that's the method by which we got Progress Village started.

FB: Okay. Mr. Hargrett, what was the mood of the white population, of the white forces?

JH: White population didn't want negroes to have anything in particular. They wanted

negroes to just move about in the confines of the areas that were already established for them.

FB: All right, go on back a couple—I heard a lot of "black pride" during the fifties [1950s]. What bound y'all together? What made y'all more distinct, let's say, than the rest of the blacks during this time? It was a common bond, you know. You talk to other businessmen—in the fifties [1950s], they's always talkin' about there was a "pride", there was a "common bond" between—and a—

JH: Well, I'd tell you that I feel that there was a common binding between the various people in the community, among certain people who were in the leadership capacity. And you would find that those of us who were in business, we all consulted one with the other. And it was—we had some dynamic leaders in the town such as G.D. Rogers, [he] was one of 'em.

And there was a Drew Davis—Drew S. Davis—who was secretary to Central Life Insurance Company. And he was a powerhouse so far as gettin' people together. And he did that under the leadership of Rogers. Rogers would give him the rope in order that he would be able to carry out his mission in the kind of—and corral people together. And that he did. And, I must say that he did a masterful job in bringin' together most of the business people in the town. And he was an educated man, also.

FB: Okay, Mr. Hargrett, was there any problem in, say, gettin' other blacks outside of business or just a common laborer—was there any attempt to get them in a particular group for a particular purpose or anything by the businessmen?

JH: Well, the common people looked up to the people who were in business because we seemed to have been bound together for a common cause. And as a matter of fact, we worked along with the idea of Recreation Incorporated in (inaudible) town when we didn't have any recreation so far as blacks were concerned. We didn't have the golf course. We didn't have the (inaudible) parks. We didn't have the various other places of recreation. We had no swimming pools and so forth.

So the blacks joined themselves together to have what is known as Recreation Incorporated. And, of course, that was headed by Drew Davis. And he was able to corral various people into this and we started on—attempted to develop that type of thing. But confusion hit from somewhere and people started talking about the fact that the city should make provisions for these things that we were attempting to do. And so much so, until the people lost the will to work. And we, as a group, went into bankruptcy.

FB: Okay, Mr. Hargrett, what was the position of the church leadership at this time?

JH: The church leadership did not play too much of a part in the business, as such. Neither did they fight the business. They stayed, more or less, aloof from anything other than the spiritual side of things in the community.

Would there be some other things so far as the business questions that you would like to ask?

FB: Well—

JH: Well, now, I have some other things. I'm a charter member, also, of Omega Psi Phi fraternity². It was organized in the early forties [1940s], here in town.

FB: In Tampa?

JH: Yes.

FB: Did they play a major—did they have an impact on the community during that time?

JH: They did and they still do. We organized in the early forties [1940s], as I say. And we worked as a unit—fraternal unit—in the community. It's a graduate chapter. Those people who went to college and who had come out of college joined themselves together and formed a graduate chapter.

And we did have various activities all during the year. We had what was known as talent hunt shows—now that's one thing that we feel that we did something real good. We would have every year talent to come from all of the various schools in our district and we would have displays of talent from piano, voice, instrumentation and other things (inaudible). And we developed quite a number of people who gained scholarships by the activities that they were engaged in.

I might say here that one person that we always applaud that won in our district, won in the southeastern district of the country; that was Tampa—won in Tampa, won when they went to Mobile, who carried them to Mobile, Alabama and from Mobile—not Mobile, but Biloxi, Mississippi—and then to the national (inaudible). And when they were being exposed each time to various institutions, or people, you know, and when—after these people won all of these concerts and so forth, they were given scholarships. There was one person in particular that was given a scholarship at Indiana University. In order to be able to get that person, they gave the sister a workin' scholarship, they gave the mama a job in order that they would be able to hold this particular person.

And various other things like that that we would do in the community. We'd have Men's Day program, several throughout the week out of each year. And we're still in existence. And now we have [people] workin' with the children of the families that belonged to this organization. We attempt to have—we had one just last week in St. Petersburg, where all of the people in the area came together and carried their children, and they could give 'em a place in the hotel for their headquarters and the grown-ups had their headquarters. And they had the pool and so forth. And we are actually in business.

All right, now, I just happen to have received for my services which was known

² The Tampa graduate chapter, not the national fraternity.

through—by some methods, I received the highest award that the university imparts, because of my business management and community development. That was the Meritorious Award. That's it, up on the wall in there. That was back in 1959. And we attempted several corporations, also, as time moved on.

We invested in community service station. We attempted to incorporate the store after I had worked in the business for a length of time, but there was some lack of knowledge so far as bein' able to, in absentee—operation of a business. I attempted to move out and give the business a chance to hire its manager—hire help and so forth—but that was premature. We weren't able to last at that because of the fact that we didn't have trained people in order turn these kind of things over to. So I had to buy back into the business and come back to operate it again, to succession—to success (inaudible).

In 1953, I was trying to figure out just what could be done so far as with the biggest industry (inaudible) in the world today are automobiles, to see whether or not that I could bring some people into Tampa who had finished school. I proposed to several institutions that I would give to the people, if they have someone who had finished auto mechanics, and A & M University and Tuskegee [University] and Hampton [University] or Virginia State—I wrote and tried and called—and Bethune-Cookman.

And I called all of these schools and wrote to these schools and tried to get auto mechanics. I'd say, "If you will provide me with the knowledge—provide these people with the knowledge of wanting to come into—in the (inaudible), I'll provide the space," which was at 4005 on Thirty-Fourth Street. That was a half a block of property, that I would build a first class mechanic shop. And too, if we could get those people to come in because we have nice cars and you need a nice place for them to operate—and there weren't—it was, of course, a failure, because I wasn't able to find anybody who had completed the course of auto mechanics who would come to Tampa to do business. And so that was one of the failures.

But now, I did attempt to start (inaudible) business too. I started—well, I told you—I mentioned about Robert Coleman, I believe, that I started him off in—

FB: Yeah, you mentioned that last year.

JH: And also, there were two girls that were training in sewing—very adept in sewing—and their names happen to have been Eleanor Mallon and Katherine Williams. I gave to them a business space so that they could come in and gather themselves together and develop a business being seamstresses. And, of course, they did for a certain length of time, and they figured that their needs were greater than the amount of money that they could—the time and so forth that they'd be able to wait on the business—so they left from there. And I couldn't—

There was some more things that I wanted to do, and so far as givin'—there's a barbershop that I had, that I built. I built a business on (inaudible) and Thirty-Fourth Street, and I had three units in it. And I had one unit for a sundry store. I had another unit

in there for a billiard parlor. I had another unit in there for a barber shop. And, of course, there was nothin' but sandy streets out in Belmont Heights at that time. And I was tryin' to visualize these certain things happening.

I went to Tallahassee and got a man, because there weren't barbers in town who weren't already situated. They just wasn't any more developing themselves. And I went to Tallahassee and I got a young man and brought him and put his barber shop there, put his table and his tools, his chairs and everything, and said, "Now, after you have operated for six months in this place, then you'll start payin' me a certain amount—a small amount of money—and we'll keep that up for the year—end of the year, and you can increase on that." But it lasted for a while and—

Again, I put another fellow in the business in the billiard parlor. And he operated that for a time. I put the table in, I put everything in and asked him for twenty percent of the income. And, of course, I would try to pay it off from there. And he did that and he—eventually he died. And after I—I had incorporated the store business at that time, and I took that sundry store out there and operated that myself. And so it was—after he died and the barber left, then I turned this building over to a group of people and they had a club in there. And they operated that for a while, and then I sold it to Dr. (inaudible).

So— and with this—the project that I thought in terms of building things, in building this auto shop—after I wasn't able to find anybody who I could get for that, then I built eight apartments (inaudible). I was doing pretty well then. And a—

FB: I mean, you was managin' all your businesses?

JH: Yes.

FB: And workin'?

JH: Well, and you say and workin'—yes, I was doin' all of that. And I went into real estate. And I worked real estate, and I did quite a bit of "block bustin'," buyin' and selling. And out of the expressway I bought a number of lots. And where the good houses were on the expressway you could get them for very cheap amounts of money, and I took those houses and brought them and put them on my lot and sold them to the people, because our people definitely need—and I had to give them practically no down payment in order that they would be able to get into a house. And that's how we got it. It wasn't the money; we raised it that time.

And we did have one corporation to be living as of today, and that corporation—its members were James Crawford Senior, James Crawford Junior, Wayne Greco and Helen Griffin—at that time. She was Helen Griffin at that time. And that was Mr. Griffin's daughter. (inaudible) and my son. And we have a small corporation which is (inaudible). Now, I'm retired.

FB: Okay.

JH: Maybe that'll be in—

end of interview