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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project
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Jeanette Collins: —that says colored water, I said, "My mama told me not to drink colored, water. I'm gonna to have to drink clean water and I'm going to have to drink this clean water." She had to laugh. And I never did drink that colored water.

I had plenty of coverage. We went to New Orleans one time and we brought insurance and when I got to New Orleans I was buying insurance to come back, and the [person at the] ticket agency said, "I can't sell it to you." A colored man punched me in the side and said, "Don't say nothing else." He brought me on the other side and said, "I noticed you have a different tone of voice; you sound like you came from up North some place." Well, I said I came from Tampa, Florida. He said, "Well, they were going to get you, if you said anything else."

Always when I saw those Negro bus drivers, I was so glad. I lived on Platt Street and I bordered that bus and I waited for him to come back. And those White folks, the man, the superintendent, the White people wouldn't get on the bus and we would say, you just as well catch this one, cause the next one is going to be a Negro, too. And I was down there when they were integrating these places, when Dr. [Reverend A. Leon] Lowry—

Otis Anthony: Okay, was you a part of Dr. Lowry's integration?

JC: I was to see what was happening, that was my job, see, to go down and stand and look. The young people from Blake [High School] was the ones that were sittin' in prayer. But I would go and sit and see, and the White folk would ask me. I said, "I was standing off here just like you, I don't know a thing about it." And when they were integrating the theaters, I was right down there, too. Only this one time I went home when I saw some Negroes coming with bricks and bats and everything from Plant City, I turned the corner and went home. And my mama said to me, "I knew you would come home."

OA: Okay. Now, were you working directly with Reverend Lowry?

JC: No. No I wasn't working directly. I was on the Executive Board of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People].

OA: Oh, I see.

JC: See, I served on the Executive Board and then when I would go down and just take a part to see for myself. See, all Central girls—when they aided to Connors they sent Central girls down but I couldn't go, on account of I was on the switchboard. But the rest of them, Dr. Lowry gave them information to stand around like you're buying and don't go exactly to the lunch counter, you know, looking like you're buying. And then go up to the lunch counter and be served. And then I know when the first crew of ladies was hired to ride the elevator at O. Falk's [Department Store], there was some loud mouth Lucys, and I went and called Dr. Lowry. I said, "Dr. Lowry, you better get those loud mouth Lucys off them elevators," cause they picked those loud mouth Lucys where they couldn't use them, see.

But then after they got a new group, the bus driver were very fine men and then after then on, we didn't have any trouble. The only persons gave us some trouble were school teachers. They went out to Maas Brothers [Department Store] in that upstairs, and that wasn't supposed to be in a place to be integrated; it was the five and ten stores. And they went up there dressed with the big hats on, and pocketbooks and the people ran them from down there. But they weren't suppose to integrate. Dr. Lowry picked those school children, and they would come in there and bow and [carry] a Bible. It was done real nice. It wasn't no fighting. The ruffians came one day, that was all.

OA: Looking back, can you think of how you viewed politics?

JC: Politics?

OA: Yes, can you think of the first Black that ever ran for office in Tampa?

JC: Up there on 22nd street, what's his name?

OA: [Francisco Junior] Rodriguez?

JC: No.

OA: [G.V.] Stewart?

JC: No.

OA: Dawson?

JC: Dawson. Dawson had a good chance. Negroes didn't work for Dawson, the White folks did.

OA: Can you explain why we haven't elected a Black official until we elected Reverend Lowry in Tampa?

JC: Well, a lot of jealousy and they don't pull together. I could tell you a lot, cause when Dawson was running a certain man called me and said, "Let's kill that Nigger." Said when he came to Tampa he was going to buy a home out on Davis Island. And so I told him that I knew Dawson; Dawson's mother used to give my two nieces music. And, see, I knew Dawson and by the time—what struggles his mother had and they didn't know I knew Dawson as well. The Negroes killed Dawson. And what they would do, when one get in and they start running, they would put another one in. And see, won't stand together and help that one. And this Mrs.—a lady, oh she lives in West Tampa, built a beautiful home—

OA: Mary Ellen Dawson.

JC: Huh?

OA: Ms. Dawson.

JC: Yeah, she had a good time, too, and they killed her. She was going good. They paid somebody to run and that's why we can't make it, they won't stand together. And I'm watching this now, Tony Little is married to my cousin and they don't know it, and I'm listen to everything they are saying.

OA: So what you are saying is that other Blacks stopped the Blacks from running.

JC: Yeah. Each Black want to beat, but the other Black—see I've been in this—working for Central I get all that information. Another Black would put another Black in. Either—I think what's happened, somebody else pay them.

My father was a politician. I never worked right out there, but I know by what they were doing. The Ku Klux Klan passed by our house when Dr. White and father and those had a meeting down there. But if they get right behind one person and get together, but they won't do that, they'll laugh and tell you I'm with you, see, and then they fight you. I had that in the church, by being of Christian spirit and coming from—my mama thought I was going to be a religion fanatic. See, I'm able to see things, see, know that's what they do, that's [why] we can't get anywhere. They get out there and they had meetings for Tony Little and they didn't know I was related to him. I heard lots they were saying.

OA: What do you think the chances are of, say, Attorney Little or, say, Alton White in the coming election?

JC: They both should be elected. They both should be elected.

OA: Well, do you think that will happen? Just give me an idea—what do you think will happen?

JC: I think—but before we go into that, look at what's coming out in the paper. Dr. Lowry was the only person that was elected and look at that. That's killing Dr. Lowry. The White folks see two Negroes fighting each other. That's what they want to see. Now, how can we stop that? Huh?

How can we stop that?

OA: You are talking about Rudolph Harris.

JC: Uh huh, now that's not going to help us any. In Atlanta all the young people get out and work when they put one man in. Now what you think of that? Is there anything you can do to stop that?

OA: I don't think so.

JC: I talked with Dr. Lowry; he's my friend. When they were fighting me, he wrote the bishop and told the bishop don't pay a bit of attention to them. And he called names—cause they still raising hell, and said, “Don't believe that story.” He's a very fine Christian and nothing to them. He wrote that bishop on them and they didn't know it.

Reverend Bandfield—you are too young to know about Reverend Bandfield. He was a Seventh Day Advent minister. This was real funny today. Dr. Lowry was talking to me on the phone and Harris had just walked in the building and I said, "Man, you sure don't care nothing about your life." I said, "Somebody goin' to catch you just like they got Martin Luther King," and he laughed. He sure did, he sure did. He stayed there a long time and talked. Some of those things he say is the truth, some of those things about the school children. Our children are not learning anything under what's happen now, cause they are not trying to learn nothing. And those White teachers are not teaching them anything, and they go in there with resentment against those teachers, see, and teachers got resentment against them. So, that's just the way it is.

OA: So what you're saying is that some of the things that Harris say is true and some of it is not.

JC: No, I don't think he should put none of that in there, because it isn't helping any. Some of that stuff is true. But he and Mr. Harris—Howard Harris like to had a fight out there talking. Harris said—the other Harris is principal—he said our children don't have as good brains as the White children. That's what he told them and that's what they had the fight over. Said they don't have a background of culture and environment. Well, I know he's lying about that, cause some of us have plenty background and culture and environment. Way back then, on my mother's side, they were teachers and principals and all that kind of stuff, way back then in Starke, Florida. They were proud people.

OA: Well, Mrs. Collins, you say you been here all your life. Have you ever heard of anybody being lynched in Tampa?

JC: No, I surely haven't—killed, but I don't know anything about the lynching. That Mr. Gibson, the man who gave me the history, they could know about that. He gave me the history. I didn't have it, he gave it to me. He came from Wolf Brothers and gave it to me and I wrote it. It could have happen. My father worked for Martin Wall for thirty years.

OA: What is your view of the education system of today? What is your view on education?

JC: Huh?

OA: What is your view on education?

JC: I'll have to say that the education was good, because I got seven nieces and nephews all, and a sister, college graduates. I sent one of my nieces to Talladega and she was elected councilman in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Black girl too, pretty Black girl. And she was voted among *Who's Who* and she been going to all—when she was councilwoman, Mayor Greco—when they said, "I now present to you Alberta Dickson, Cheyenne, Wyoming and formerly of Tampa, Florida," and he was looking for a White gal, When this Black gal stood up, I got all kinds of write up about her.

OA: And, I mean, she was originally from Tampa?

JC: I sent her to Talladega from my house.

OA: Yeah?

JC: Uh huh. That one there was presented, and Alberta and I presented both of those girls. The (inaudible) by how they carried themselves and that's when she was presented. That Dolores, she works at O'Leo in Washington—not Washington, in Atlanta.

OA: Atlanta?

JC: Uh huh.

OA: You had a long and distinguish—

JC: I helped all of them, but I sent that one straight out to Talladega. Mrs. Florence say, "We used to wonder how in the hell you were able to do what you were doing with that little salary. We would sit down there and watch you and see how you would bring them out to the office and feed them," and they loved me.

OA: Okay. Let's get to Central Life Insurance Company, the business. Can you give me something about that, a brief history about Central Life, some of the pioneers of Central Life?

JC: Well Mr. Rogers—there were other presidents before Mr. Rogers, but I started there under Mr. G. D. Rogers. And the next president was Mr. E. Broughton, then Mrs. Bethune, Bethune.

OA: You mean Thelma Lewis Bethune?

JC: Uh Huh, she was free. They ran her away from there because she was a woman. And the next president was Mr. Davis, and that's all I served under. You see what position—I worked in the field, as you say, for three years and three weeks and they transferred me, and how I got up to the front. They took a test, and Mr. Rogers was the first president I served under, said the sweetest voice this side of heaven. They took me over there and then they transferred me to another department and then [I] took this test and I've been up there every since. And there has been

friction there, too, and most of them was when Mr. Rogers died. Before Mr. Rogers died they got rid of him and put him on chairman of the board. Mr. Martin—they voted him out, M.S. Martin—and Mr. Davis retired before they were going to do the same thing to him.

OA: Oh! He's retired now.

JC: Uh huh. He's retired. But, see, now I know who the creditors is, but that hasn't been announced yet. So that's the only one they didn't get rid of. The rest of them, something came up and they got rid of them.

OA: Well, what influence do Central Life Insurance Company have on Tampa, the Black community?

JC: Well, that's the only thing that Tampa really have, Central Life Insurance Company that is. The people, when you say Central Life, they open their eyes. See, downtown when you say Central Life, you go to the bank and you say Central Life, Central Life, they know Central Life. Central Life is about the most outstanding organization in the city of Tampa, Central Life is. It has its faults, but it still is—

Now, you take Mr. Solan there. Mr. Solan is on a lot of boards downtown. Mr. Solan is on the Governors Board and when they wrote the charter, Mr. Solan wrote that charter, he sure did. And Mr. Solan is well thought of among the Whites. And when Mr. Broughton was here and Mr. Davis was on everything, see downtown, Central Life is rated among any of the White folks in the City of Tampa. And if you say you work for Central Life, [people would say] "Oh yeah, I know Central Life." A man used to work there by the name of Broughton, and when Mr. Rogers died, there were so many Cadillacs in that funereal, Mr. Cadillac must have passed. We went from Tampa to Bradenton were they buried him.

Yeah, Central Life is—Mr. Solan is really somebody downtown, he's somebody.

OA: Can you name any other members of the staff?

JC: Huh?

OA: Can you name any other members of the staff that's there now?

JC: Yeah, Ms. Stone.

OA: Ms. Stone?

JC: Yeah, Ms. Fannie B. Stone.

OA: Is she still there?

JC: Yes, she is still there. She's a member of my church too. I had double things, she served on the trustee board and I served on the steward board. You see that was the only relations

delegated, was me and Dr. Williams.

OA: So, what capacity now does Ms. Stone serve now? What capacity?

JC: She's treasurer now. At one time she was secretary-treasurer, but now she is treasurer.

OA: Well, that's about—

side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

JC: —both the late Alberta and Alfred Collins and the granddaughter of Reverend and Mrs. John Allen.

OA: So how long have you been in Tampa?

JC: I was born here.

OA: You been in Tampa all your life?

JC: Uh huh.

OA: Okay, when did you first join—you're a member of St. Paul [African Methodist Episcopal Church], right?

JC: I don't know the month, but I was a member of Mt. Zion [A.M.E. Church] in Hyde Park, and then I went over to St. Paul in 1942.

OA: In 1942?

JC: Uh huh.

OA: Can you tell us briefly something about St. Paul?

JC: About St. Paul? Now you want to know the good things. St. Paul is known as the historic St. Paul, and from St. Paul, one Bishop was elected. He was our former pastor, Rev. G. N. Collins, he wasn't related to me. And when I joined St. Paul, I was made church clerk and then from there from that time, church secretary under the leadership of Rev. S. A. Cousins. He was our pastor at that time.

I have served as president of the league when I first joined St. Paul and then from that time they took us to state meeting, to attended the state meeting in Jacksonville. Then after being secretary of the church, being the only woman that was elected on the steward board, the first woman that was elected on the steward board to serve, and I'm still on the steward board. Now, this is St. Paul. Went to a general conference twice, two executive years. The first person, a lady could be elected from the church as secretary, not secretarial, as layman to the general conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and in Texas.

OA: So you have been getting around.

JC: That's from my church. I'm president of my layman's organization and I served as president of the missionary society, which I've very much enjoyed. 'Cause coming up I wanted to go to Africa to serve as a missionary, but I didn't get a chance to go to Africa. And so I was elected president of my missionary society, which I enjoyed very much, because that was my greatest aim, to go to Africa to serve our people. But I didn't get that chance but I still was elected missionary of my church.

I sing in the choir, number two. From there I was a member of the (inaudible). I have served throughout conference-wise and state-wise, and I was elected on the board of trustees at Edgewater College, for which I enjoyed serving on that. I was only there one year, but I was there. I want to go back, too, as a layman, the highest place you can be elected to, as a delegate to the general conference. I have my badge when I was elected, but I found it in my pocketbook today, a very pretty picture, too, it was. And I received many certificates, many certificates. I served as public relations for the district layman of the Tampa district. What else you want me to say?

OA: Can you name some of the members that was in St. Paul when you first joined?

JC: Yeah, Mrs. Bishop, L. B. Long, Mrs. G. L. Gardner, Mr. John Olive, Mr. Burney, J. R. Burney—he was superintendent of some school out yonder—Mr. Wade Perry, Mr. W. M. Caldwell, Dr. White, I think I forgot his initials, Dr. R. R. [Reche Reden] Williams, Mr. E.E. Broughton, all those were fine people.

OA: Was the church at that time—in other words, did the church have a greater influence on Blacks during, say the 1940s?

JC: Oh, yeah. We had some of the finest pastors serve St. Paul. My father was a member of St. Paul and we were members of Mt. Zion. And the same offices I held out here at Mt. Zion, when I was transferred, we went over there to join my father's church after he died. And it was—it has always has been outstanding, St. Paul's choir, number one, used to broadcast over the—

OA: Was this the first choir to broadcast?

JC: First choir that I remember to be broadcast. Cecil Mancin was the organist; he's dead.

OA: Well, St. Paul A.M.E., that was the first Black choir?

JC: First Black choir.

OA: In Tampa.

JC: Uh huh.

OA: Can you think of the year that happened?

JC: No.

OA: Can you give me the name of the choir again?

JC: The number? Choir Number One.

OA: Choir Number One.

JC: Uh huh, it was outstanding.

OA: Can you name some of the member of Choir Number One?

JC: Yeah, at that time, it was Mrs. Ray Williams—the undertaker, his wife, but I can't think of her first name. Mrs. Marzone—and there was another; she could go by her husband's name—Mrs. Ray Williams, and Floyd Bosman.

OA: Can you think of any other members of the choir?

JC: Huh?

OA: Can you think of any other members of the choir?

JC: Not right now. If I had known you wanted them, I could have. I got them all.

OA: Okay, Ms. Collins, were there any frictions within the church during that time?

JC: Huh?

OA: Any frictions?

JC: Frictions?

OA: Yes, were they ever any attempts to separate?

JC: They did before I was a member. Some of them left our church and went to Allen Temple [A.M.E. Church], and during my administration—you don't want to hear this, do you?

OA: I want to hear everything you—

JC: During my administration, 300 of them walked out of there one Sunday. But they came back in six months, and I carried the church for six months, under my leadership, because I was secretary of the church at that time, under Dr. Glover. He laughed, he came from Los Angeles, California and when I reorganized the church that Sunday—

OA: Do you know what you used this for?

JC: That hasn't been too long. That's how I got elected, considering Dr. Williams had been going all the time and he passed, and then, from then on, with my Christian leadership, and when I went to the layman's meeting I was elected. Three of us came out on the first ballot, 32 and then after three of us, we had to eliminate two people, I got the highest amount of votes. So that made me elected. Dr. Williams was running all the time because he was quite popular, by those three hundred people walking out of the church and leaving me in leadership. And I carried on the church, from calling the bishop and he told me what to do; that's how I got elected, see. My popularity from carrying on the church and paying—we weren't able to keep up anything but the local bills.

OA: Okay now, around about what year was this? You say it was a couple of years?

JC: No, it's been about eight or ten years.

OA: Okay, what—

JC: Dr. J.L. Glover was the pastor.

OA: Right, what did they walk out about?

JC: Because they liked the pastor—this is what actually—when he came here from California, well, he didn't come to stay anyway, see. And they gave him money at the parsonage, and it was suppose to be given inside of the church, and when they came inside and ask me to put it on the books I told them I couldn't do that, because that was a meeting they had over at the parsonage and not in the church. And then from one thing to another, the trustees walked out one Sunday, they resigned.

Mr. Broughton, who was president of Central Life Insurance Company, he was on the trustee board and I asked him not to [do] it. And when he found out they had resigned, he sent in his resignation that night and so they put him off, too. But I said, "Mr. Broughton, the preacher doesn't want you to join them; he's going to keep you." So Mr. Broughton got transferred to the steward board, but the rest of them stayed out there and fought for six months.

They stole the piano out of the church and the organ out of the church and every Sunday when they'd come back, I mean every Sunday, I would get up to make my announcements, I would say—I wouldn't say anything. I would say each Sunday that you see who loves the church and who loves the preacher. And when they came back, they took care of me. Actually they're not even—see they haven't paid any dues, and the bishop was telling me to make a active roll and inactive roll. I was getting all my information from the bishop and carrying on the church through the bishop, but they didn't know that. You wouldn't believe we had such people as that, some business people, too. I could name some of them.

OA: If you want to name some.

Ms. Collins's Nephew: How y'all doing?

JC: That's my nephew.

OA: Yeah, I know him from FAMU [Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University].

Nephew: Right, you were on the hill?

OA: Yeah.

Nephew: When?

OA: I was on the hill at A&M.

JC: That's my nephew.

OA: Tell me some of those distinguished people, if you would like to, you know?

JC: I don't [think] we should put their names in there. Do you think so? Some of them are living but most of them are dead. Some of these people that's living, was in that thing, they are still fighting it right now. 'Cause, see, I had them in St. Paul—see, I joined the church at age of eleven and I was elected secretary of my Sunday School at the age of eleven, and I have never been out of the church, see.

OA: Well, when you first joined it, how many were there. How many Black churches was in the community that you know of? Or what was the oldest Black church in Tampa, that you know of?

JC: St. Paul.

OA: St. Paul?

JC: Uh huh.

OA: And was there any other church, say, that came out of St. Paul?

JC: Didn't come out of St. Paul, but some of our members left and went to Allen Temple.

OA: Okay, was that the time—

JC: I didn't know anything about that, I just took what they told me. I knew—I was right in that, what I'm telling you about. 'Cause I reorganized that church that Sunday morning and Mr. Andrews wrote articles, St. Paul's members went on a strict. And one old lady said the best service they had wasn't a complete boycott, because all the devils had gone fishing. And we organized that church beautifully and carried it on.

And Mr. Griffin called me—no, I told you I wasn't going to call names because some of those

people are living. But they told me they called me—a certain principal, he works out to the University of South Florida now, called me twelve o'clock and said, "Ms. Collins, Ms. Collins, this is so and so and so, this is your last chance for you to follow us." I said, "Let me tell you one thing, if there are but six people there in the morning, I will be there. Me and my family will be right there." And a certain principal came—he's catching hell right now—came in to look around and my family and one or two more was sitting on the front seat and I look around and reorganized the choir, we organized everything that morning. We had a beautiful service and we carried on for six months and they did everything dirty they could do. I don't even like to talk about it and I've been real sick, as you know, and God brought me back. And I went back to the number two choir two Sundays ago, and they hugged and kissed me and said you living your second life.

Three months ago I had a heart attack. I went down to 117—I went down to 81 pounds, from 117 to 81 pounds. From one time to the other. God, one morning six o'clock this boy came and prayed for me. I woke up six o'clock saying, "Who can wash away my sins, who can make me whole again, nothing but the blood of Jesus," just singing that song. And after while I raised—I was supposed to have another operation—I raised up out of the bed, and sweat came over my body, just like that, and then the hot chills began to come and that was six o'clock in the morning. I started to call the nurse to stop those chills. I felt all right. That was on a Wednesday, and the doctor took me downstairs that Friday and he operated and said, "I will be back in thirty minutes."

And I have been doing pretty good ever since. God reconverted me, certainly did, and I told some of them, and they were quite mean to me, and I had my other nephew to tape a story of my life, and he took a story of my life from the hospital, he came in there and I told them different things I knew. I had my nephew tape record some things in there; he's a preacher. And I said, "If you want to play it any place, you are big enough to play it." I said they tried to murder me, that meant that I've had it.

OA: Okay, what were some of the events, some of the organizations that the church started. In other words, what I'm saying, the church was the socialization center in the whole community, right? Everybody came to the church to socialize. What programs did the church have for the kids?

JC: During the administration of Bishop Collins, we had a junior church. He wasn't the bishop then; he was our pastor. They would have the service downstairs from ten to eleven and then they would come upstairs. And then in the basement of the church, they had activities during his administration, during the week. Most of pastors we had would have similar to that. But Bishop Collins had the best junior church of any pastor we that we had there. Rev. Contee—his son is a bishop now; he's our pastor. He did a very fine job, and Rev. Peck [too]. Most of them—St. Paul has had some very fine pastors, some of the best pastors that an AME church have had, the pastors at St. Paul.

OA: Can you name the pastor that was there when you first joined? Can you name all of them that have been there?

JC: I can name—when we joined, when my father was there which was from the beginning—

OA: From the beginning?

JC: Uh huh. But when we went there, it was a preacher named R.L. McRail. In one of those book, I think they have those pastors, let's see.

OA: Did St. Paul ever carry on any activities with any other churches in the area?

JC: Uh huh.

OA: Can you name some of them?

JC: What you mean, go to services?

OA: Services.

JC: Uh huh, they carried on with Allen Temple. We've gone to Allen Temple; we've gone to St. Luke [A.M.E. Church]; we've gone to Mt. Olive [A.M.E. Church]; we've gone to—if I can remember, it's a church out on 34th, we've gone there; and Pleasant Chapel [A.M.E. Church]. They are the big shots; they don't go to small churches hardly.

OA: Mrs. Collins, I want to ask you something. What impact did the church have on the ordinary Black? What I mean by that, is did they have a great influence on the majority people in Tampa?

JC: They had a better influence on the professional people.

OA: On the professional people?

JC: Uh huh, cause we had doctors, we had a lawyer there, and at Reverend (inaudible), at his funeral, too, most professional people join there and that's where we had most of the trouble. We had about four doctors there, Dr. Hodges, Dr. White, Dr. Williams, and young Dr. Williams. That four that I can remember, and they were actively engaged there. And then we had—who else was a member of St. Paul? One time they had eighty-six teachers as members of St. Paul.

OA: Eighty-six teachers?

JC: Uh huh. They were mostly professional people. One time St. Paul was known as a church—if you wasn't what, didn't know somebody, you couldn't operate around there.

OA: Oh!

JC: But you had to be—see, by me coming up in the church and coming from a religious background, I had it on them there.

OA: So at the beginning, you said, St. Paul was a church with professional people.

JC: Uh huh.

OA: So it didn't have an impact on say, the common people?

JC: It stayed crowded though because the other people weren't allow to do—as that Number One choir, still—for teachers and professional people.

OA: A lot of people didn't get a chance to participate in the churches?

JC: The only time they got chance, people, when I joined there—and see I wasn't use to that. If you were a Christian, you pull in—let me tell you what happened one time. I had a young man as my missionary to ask me to let him speak one fifth Sunday and I did. And when I had him to speak, the common people enjoyed him. Mr. Broughton, who was president of Central Life, came out to the Central Life and said, "Mrs. Collins, why did you put that ignorant man up there to make that speech?" I said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Broughton, all the other people enjoyed him; they enjoyed that man and he made—maybe he couldn't put those verbs and things, but he made an impression on the people." This is what they told me when I first their—join Bible school class with a certain class of people, that I couldn't associate with them. I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I wasn't brought up that way."

OA: Well, is this the same thing—is it like this now or what?

JC: No, it's—not too much.

OA: Or it has changed?

JC: Well, see what the trouble, if you know what you are doing—if you know your church, I know my church. I had a preacher, Reverend Sanchez—he died not too long ago; you may have heard of Reverend Sanchez, M.C. Sanchez. One Sunday he put me on when I came back from [being] sick, he said, "Mrs. Collins, come up here." I didn't know what he was calling. [He said] "I want to tell you, you see this woman right here—" he made me stand up "—she knows more about the AME church than any of you."

See, what they don't know, the AME church—and I know the AME church, because I haven't been out there half of my life and in the church the other half. I've been in the church all my life, and I've served in every capacity in the church.

OA: Well, can you can just tell something—tell us as much about the AME church as you know?

JC: Much as I know? I don't tell you everything, I don't want to tell you, it's been some good and there's been some bad.

OA: Well, tell me the good, the bad; tell me as much as you can, Mrs. Collins, because it's important that we know.

JC: Well, it's not as stiff as it used to be. Let me tell you what the bishop said in Philadelphia, in this \$5,000 breakfast. See, people there from all over the world, tens of thousands of people from Africa and everywhere. "I'm now presenting to you Dr. Walter S. White, candidate for bishop, and he is from historic St. Paul, Tampa, one of the hardest churches in the AME church to pastor." And I was sitting with the Ohio [delegation], and they said, "Jeanette, that's your church." I said, "I don't know those people." (laughs) That's just what he said, at the general congress. Dr. Hatchet, Bishop Hatchet, said that, and I came back and told them.

OA: Now, the Walter White you talking about, [is he] the one that was a member of the NAACP?

JC: No, he's presiding elder now in Quincy or Tallahassee, somewhere up in there. He was a chaplain in the Army. But he was pastor. All those were well trained; we have had nothing but well trained ministers. And they mistreat most of them, and I have got along with every one of them.

OA: You can say as much as you want about the AME church, because we need the information.

JC: The first time I went to general congress and I saw so much carrying on, I was somewhat embarrassed. But the laymen of the churches had almost, kind of, straightened some of that out. The best thing that we have, the meetings that I have attended, was convectional layman meeting in Memphis, Tennessee. Now that was well organized. The mayor of the city came to our meeting and gave us a something—you know what I mean, with the city, where we wouldn't have to get no permit to go no other place to have our meeting, and said there was no liquor there and everybody acted orderly. That's the convectional layman meeting.

OA: What year was this?

JC: You know when Martin Luther King, they shot him? Right in that same year [1968], cause we went up to that place, that hotel—Lorraine Hotel—and see, it was during that time. 'Cause we went to tour the city; we went where they had put this man in jail. Wasn't nothing out there but a purple wreath on the outside of that Lorraine and this was what we paid a dollar to see, the room he slept in and the bathroom and that's all that was in there. They had all these picture made of Martin Luther King and souvenirs, that's all you could see in the store. So if you can figure out what year that was, in Memphis, Tennessee.

OA: Can you tell anything else about the AME church? Any other outing that you was a part of?

JC: Part of? Missionary meetings. I went to when I was—quit young, that was a very fine meeting, too. I attended the bishop council in Jacksonville on the beach; I was a hostess there on the beach. Bishop council and I was a part of that, I was hostess there. I attended all meetings—sometimes I was sick though—all conferences, everything. I would go to [them] on my own expense. The only thing I was paid to go to was the general conference.

OA: What was St. Paul's stand on integration?

JC: Well, I guess most of when they were integrated—we had all those principals, all those principals they retired, we had Mr. Griffin. The only person that we had was Mr. John Henry Evans. They have not discussed that because they worked with the NAACP, they worked with that, but the integration, I don't think—it didn't help those principals because they got rid of all of them.

OA: What was St. Paul's—you know, how did the members of St. Paul—how did St. Paul itself view integration?

JC: The members as a whole went for it, because they were able to go into these stores and pay this big money and go where they want to go, go and eat wherever they like to eat without any interference. 'Cause that what they—a group of people like that. So they went for that.

OA: Well, Mrs. Collins, were you ever confronted with any type of (inaudible)?

JC: In Tampa?

OA: In Tampa.

JC: Well, when I was coming up I was confronted with plenty of—

end of interview