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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: A31-00070
Interviewee: Lydia Lopez Allen (LA)
Interviewer: Susan Greenbaum (SG)
Interview date: July 9, 1994
Interview location: Tampa, Florida
Transcribed by: Arlen Bensen
Transcription date: March 20, 2009
Audit Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson
Audit Edit date: April 22-23, 2009
Final Edit by: Christine Toth
Final Edit date: May 7, 2009

[Transcriber's note: Lydia Lopez Allen's brothers Frank Lopez (FL1) and Ferman Lopez (FL2) are present during part of the interview.]

Susan Greenbaum: This is an interview with Lydia Lopez Allen. It's July 9, 1994. Could you tell me a little bit about Chick's Lounge and El Chico and your uncle, and how the business got started?

Lydia Lopez Allen: When my uncle and his two brothers, Clemente and Frank, my uncle—I should say my uncle's name was Ferman Mirabel, but everybody knew him as Chick. And so, in the middle of the thirties [1930s] they went to work for Charles Vanderhorst, better known as Charlie Moon, and they went to work there at his place, The Moon, that was right there on Central Avenue and—what is that street? Where the—

SG: Where the Kid Mason Hall is?

LA: Uh huh.

SG: Is that Harrison [Street]?

LA: Harrison. The corner of Harrison and Central Avenue. And they worked for him until—let me see if that one has the correct year—to the late thirties [1930s], they worked for Charlie Moon. And then, in the late thirties, they bought Chick Lounge; that was on the corner of Scott—it was on Scott Street. 1007 Scott Street, almost to Central Avenue. And then the war started, World War II started, and he got drafted. And—

SG: So, Chick got drafted in World War II?

LA: In two. In two. Mm-hm.

SG: Do you know if they owned the building itself and the property? Or was it just—

LA: Yeah. They owned—

SG: —the business.

LA: No. He owned the building. See over here, this wonderful—let's see—yeah, (inaudible). Rogers was the owner of that—see, this Moses White wanted to take control of everything. But they didn't come here till the middle forties [1940s].

SG: The Whites didn't?

LA: Mm-hm. I didn't want him to get credit for everything, so that's why I wrote this article on my uncle. It's a very interesting letter (inaudible) it brought many memories, and he wanted to take credit for it. I put—when my uncle, he started the Tilt of the Maroon and Gold in 1939.¹ And, um—

SG: So this was before the war—

LA: And he was—

SG: —that he had started that.

LA: Yes. Uh-huh.

SG: So he was already—

LA: In business.

SG: —grown and in business and doing things when he got drafted.

LA: He bought the building. He bought the building, and—

SG: What happened when he went to war? How long was he gone?

LA: Well, he served overseas three and a half years in Okinawa and Saipan.

SG: Did his brother run the business for him—

LA: While he was gone. Yes.

SG: —while he was gone?

¹ The Tilt of the Maroon and Gold was an annual football game in Tampa, which was played by Bethune-Cookman and other black colleges.

LA: While he was gone, his brother was running the business. I said that in here, too.

SG: I—we are—we're working a little bit with the [*Florida*] *Sentinel Bulletin* and we have access to all of their back issues, so I don't need to—

pause in recording

SG: So I took the date, and—let me see what page it was on just to make it easier to find. Page eleven. So we can go, and we possibly can get that—did I say eleven? (laughs)

LA: Eleven. See, this paper was (inaudible) during that time.

SG: Oh, really?

LA: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Mm—

SG: But that's a nice photograph of him, especially in his uniform.

LA: I have a photo of that—of him.

SG: Better to be looked than overlooked. This is from the business card, Chick's Lounge: Beer wine and liquor at big savings, all kinds—

LA: (inaudible)

SG: —of sandwiches, short orders.

LA: He was the owner of that.

SG: And he bought the property from Charlie Moon.

LA: No! I don't know who he bought it off. I don't know. He was working for Charlie Moon, so then—

SG: I see. So he was working for Charlie Moon, but Charlie Moon didn't own that beforehand.

LA: No. I don't know who were the owners. My uncle can tell you.

SG: Did they—when did they stop working for Charlie Moon? Did they stop because he died, or—

LA: They started working Charlie Moon—they didn't work for him very long. See, they started working for Charlie Moon, I think about—maybe—I don't know, in the early thirties [1930s].

SG: The thirties [1930s].

LA: And then they bought the place in 1936. I think it's 1936 when they bought the place. I don't know. My uncle can tell you the exact dates.

SG: I'll save some of this for him.

LA: Mm-hm.

SG: Uh, who do you remember about it? Did you go there, ever, when you were young, or—

LA: No, we didn't. See, the Spanish people, they're very protective of their women, you know, and we weren't allowed to go in there.

SG: Did you ever see the inside of it, or—

LA: Just when he first bought it, but to go there and—uh-uh. We weren't even allowed—my father didn't even want me to pass on Central Avenue.

SG: (laughs) Oh, really?

LA: Everything was crowded and there were all kinds of people. Oh, no.

SG: Was it something that was more the Cuban families? Or was that a general thing where there were—

LA: (inaudible)

SG: —fewer women than men.

LA: The Cubans—it was Daddy who said anything. But we just went there to the movies, but we'd better make sure to come back home because—not to wait for the bus or anything on Central Avenue, cause I mean, it was roaring with people all the time.

SG: So, it's really crowded.

LA: And drinking. And cursing. And that's why we weren't allowed to go there.

SG: There were other businesses there, though. There was the drugstore—

LA: Oh, yes. Now, when we went to the movies—

SG: —the cleaners and—

LA: —we were allowed to go to the Palace Drugstore, my cousin and I and a lot of my friends. But no, I never been allowed in a place like—

SG: Never in the lounge.

LA: —that. No, no, never.

SG: When you got older, could you go there for the music that was there? Did you—could you go there with—

LA: Not ever. I wasn't allowed to. At least, my father didn't allow it.

SG: How about after you got married? (laughs)

LA: Well, after I got married—I remember that, in that dilapidated auditorium off Collier, Pole Auditorium. It was on top of The Moon. My husband, he liked Big Joe Turner; he was a big fan. So we went over there and we—I told him, “My father never allowed me to go there.” (inaudible) it's so dilapidated, and I'm pregnant, and everything.

And so, my father was working for Clarence Prevette at that time; he was the manager of the wholesale place that—Clarence Prevette was right there on the bottom of the hotel. So we went there to see my dad first. And we told him, and my father said, “I really don't like it. She's never been to the Pole Auditorium.”

My husband said, “She's with me; nothing's going happen.”

He said, “You better not let nothing happen to her!” And so we went to see Big Joe Turner.

(Door opens) I was telling him about (laughs)—I never go into that auditorium, the Pole Auditorium, cause Papa wouldn't allow it.

Frank Lopez: (inaudible)

LA: Yeah, you were boys, but him?

FL1: Yeah, more or less teenagers.

LA: (laughs)

FL1: I was just stepping over there. I'm sorry.

LA: I showed her this book about—

FL1: Cause she has a lot of history, you know, from my grandmother.

LA: Yes. And I'll never forget that time that Big Joe Turner came here and I was pregnant with Wayne, cause we went over there when Papa was working for Prevette at that time and we went—and I told him. I said, “[husband], we’d better not go.”

And he said, “What? You are married now. You don’t have to do what your father used to tell you.”

And so we went over there, and Papa said, “What are you all doing around here at this time?”

[Husband] said, “We’re going to go see Big Joe Turner.”

And he said, “Man, are you crazy? And she’s pregnant?” and everything. He said, “You think (inaudible) we’re just going to go over there—”

FL1: You know, when y’all was moving out of Ybor City, a guy was looking at the chest of drawers that I had. I had all those programs, Big Joe Turner, the Globetrotters, Elvis Presley—I even had Elvis Presley. And then Nat King Cole—

SG: Elvis Presley played on Central Avenue?

FL1: No, it was at the Armory on Howard and that was in fifty-four [1954] or fifty-five [1955], and I went to see him, and, uh, it was interesting.

SG: I’ll identify you on the tape. Frank Lopez has just joined the interview. So when they hear your voice they’ll know whose it is. (laughs) And we are on tape.

You were telling me about the Tilt and how that got started.

LA: Okay.

FL1: The Tilt of the Maroon and Gold.

LA: Okay. The first Tilt—

FL1: It was in thirty-nine [1939], wasn’t it?

LA: It “took place on November 25, 1939, starting with a gay parade and many social dances and parties. This first Tilt of the Maroon and Gold was made possible by many of our old-timers of our city, one being Tampa’s best known and oldest businessman of long standing, Mr. Ferman G. Mirabel, who is better known as Chick.” He was also the first mayor of Central Avenue in 1939.²

² Allen is reading from a letter she wrote to the *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*, which was printed on page 11 of that newspaper on July 24, 1971. In the letter, she discusses her uncle Chick and the Tilt of the Maroon and Gold.

SG: I saw that on one of the ads.

FL1: (inaudible)

LA: Mm-hm.

SG: What—how did he get to be mayor? What did that mean?

LA: They just started—the businessmen said that they wanted to start it.

FL1: Right. What I think it was—well, I don't know if it's in that book, but they had their own Chamber of Commerce and everything. I know at that time Hargrett's father was the president of the—

SG: So that was the organization that he started, or that he was—we had an interview with him—

FL1: It was a group of black businessmen that had their own Chamber of Commerce, and then, I guess they decided to say, Well, every two years we'll be mayor or we'll elect the mayor.

SG: I see. So it was within the organization. You told me that before, I think.

LA: Mm-hm.

FL1: Right. Cause I know Kid Mason was the mayor at one time, and—

SG: I think Watts Sanderson was, too.

FL1: Right. Watts Sanderson, right.

LA: But he was the first one.

FL1: Did you ever get to talk to Robert and his brother—

SG: We are. Cheryl Rodriguez has been in touch with—

FL1: I know the one that's the psychologist, he's very interested in that, cause he always mentioned that—somewhere, wherever he is, he mentioned that about the old Central Avenue. He feels, like I do, that it still should exist, but I still say we would still laugh (laughs).

SG: Well, that's one of the questions that I have, in terms of how the thing— What were the steps leading up to the destruction of Central Avenue, and how much opportunity did people have to object to that?

FL1: Yeah. See, I didn't—I wasn't here at the time, but—in fact we were talking about this about a week ago. I'll have to talk to you about that off—

SG: Okay. (laughs)

FL1: —off the tape.

SG: Okay. (laughs) Want me to turn it off?

pause in recording

SG: (inaudible) from what street? Jefferson [Street]?

FL1: The street behind Central which is—what, Jefferson or Morgan [Street]? I think it's Jefferson. The first street after Central, I've forgotten what it was.

LA: Jefferson.

FL1: Yeah, Jefferson.

LA: Jefferson. And across the street from the funeral home was a bungalow that was the first Clara Frye—the first Negro—

SG: That was across from Pughsley [Funeral Home]?

LA: Uh huh. It was a bungalow, and that was the first Negro hospital. They had taken him already over there, but you had to go over to Tampa General to go get the blood and the—what's that? The intravenous, you know? So my uncle took—he was passing by and he saw where he had been shot and everything, and he stopped, you know. He was going up the stairs to his new home.

So then they took him over there to that bungalow, which was Clara Frye's first hospital, and so then they said, "We need blood to save him, and we need the IV and everything." So my uncle took off in his car. And the policeman stopped him, and so he said what he was doing. So they led him on. And see, the people at Tampa General knew Mr. Pughsley, because he had gone there to pick up so many bodies.

So he said he just got shot, and he said, "Well, just follow us," and so my uncle just followed and that's what brought everything back to them, but they couldn't save him.

FL1: But I thought he was refused from there.

LA: No!

FL1: I always heard he was refused from there.

LA: No, no, no, no. He went over there to get the equipment that they needed over there at that bungalow where it was a hospital.

SG: Who shot Mr. Pughsley? Was that Pearl [McAden]?

FL1: That's Pearl. (laughs)

SG: Why did he do that? Do you know?

FL1: I don't know. I think it had something to do with power, you know—like when the power structure of Tampa wanted somebody eliminated, I guess. That's what it was.

SG: Was Pughsley being troublesome?

LA: No.

FL1: I don't know, cause I was too young, then, to realize, you know—

LA: That is one word.

SG: Do you remember Pearl? Did you ever see him?

LA: (laughs) No. I don't want no trouble with him.

FL1: I met him one time in my uncle's place, and I was too scared to look up.

SG: (laughs) Well, I've heard lots of stories about him.

FL1: Yeah. I'll never forget. He had a three piece suit, and he had that gun in his hat.

LA: I seen it.

FL1: Yeah. You're right. He was a—

LA: As far back as 19—

FL1: —good-looking man, too.

LA: I saw him.

SG: Was he large? Strong?

FL1: Well, you know, I was a kid then, so he looked big to me. But he had to be over, I guess, about six feet tall.

LA: (inaudible)

SG: But he killed Charlie Moon, also.

LA: Mm-hm.

FL1: Right.

LA: And the way he did it was really something in that (inaudible), cause everybody knows it. That's where you're getting mixed up about the blood and all of that. When he killed Charlie Moon, he got in the ambulance with Charlie. And when he went to the hospital, he dared—to Clara Frye Hospital—he dared those nurses to do anything for him.

SG: So, he prevented him from getting any treatment.

LA: He dared them. He wanted him to die. (laughs)

SG: Why did they shoot Charlie Moon?

LA: It was something about power, I think.

FL1: That had to do with power, too. You know, like the *bolita* thing.

SG: Well, and—when we were talking last time—I mean this is also something I'm interested to know about him.

LA: That is one person, in terms of—

SG: How black businesses got sort of squeezed out of the—

FL1: Well, see, Charlie Moon was responsible for a lot of black businessmen. He had his business on Central Avenue.

SG: Did he give loans to people or—

FL1: I don't know about that, but somehow he had the power to, you know, help people get in business.

LA: And he buried a lot of people, my uncle told me, cause people didn't have money to pay insurance, you know?

SG: Mm-hm. So Charlie Moon was a generous man, was that his reputation?

LA: Well, he helped a lot of the poor people, the black—I know that he would give them—when there wasn't any welfare or nothing like that, he would give them food and stuff. I mean, he would make the food at his place. And my uncle—my uncle Frank—he

told me that he would make a big pot of soup—you know, give them bowls, the whole thing—and he would give them—you know.

SG: Mm-hm.

LA: That's what my uncle would tell me.

SG: Do you know, or can you recall, any—how did the Cubans get along with the Americans on Central Avenue, your uncle being a Cuban businessman? Did that have any, uh—?

LA: Well, see, he was—by my uncle being born and reared here in Tampa, you know, and then he started working for Charlie Moon with three others; they worked for Charlie Moon. See, my uncle's stepfather was—he raped her. He was a white Spaniard and he was a banker. He was a *bolita* banker.

That's not being recorded, is it?

SG: Oh, it is. (laughs) If you don't want it to be, I'll stop—

pause in recording

LA: He bought it. He bought it. It was his. El Chico—uh, I mean—

FL1: (inaudible)

LA: No, Chick's Lounge. No, Chick's Lounge.

FL1: No, Chick's Lounge.

LA: Chick's Lounge. You (inaudible)?

FL1: See, Chick's Lounge was the one, you know, where—the beginning of the projects—

LA: Yeah, that's—

FL1: —and part of that land—yeah, I got one of those. And part of that land was taken for the projects, so he had to relocate onto Central Avenue. That's how he bought the El Chico. But the original was on Scott Street.

LA: Yeah. Mm-hm. He was selling right as they changed the name.

SG: But it is interesting because—I mean, my first thought, and it was wrong, was that it had started as El Chico's and it Americanized to Chick's, but it actually went the opposite direction.

FL1: And, you know, it was interesting, but, uh—you know Mr. Rodriguez was in the audience at the African Museum. But it shows you that you got to keep up with the history, because Blythe Andrews's daughter was thinking that that was Moses White's place. I said, "No, no. That was my uncle's place. Moses White was across the street."

SG: It was Palm Dinette.

FL1: Right. So I had to straighten that out right there.

LA: Mm-hm. That's right. And, you know, with the big riots that happened—

SG: Sixty-seven. [1967]

LA: —when Central got burned. Uh-huh. My two brothers were the ones that—they [the rioters] thought that my uncles were white, you know, that they weren't black and they were going to burn it. And we said, "Man, no! Don't you do that!" They said, "That's Frank and Ferman's uncles! No, no, man! Don't burn that place!"

SG: So, did they not burn it, then?

LA: No, they didn't.

SG: Oh, really?

LA: But we were (inaudible)—

SG: One of the things that I've heard—

LA: (inaudible)

SG: —was that there was a real avoidance of doing damage to black-owned businesses.

LA: Uh-huh. Yeah. Uh-huh.

SG: So some of the businesses that were damaged that people thought were black-owned were actually—

LA: The riots. That riot—that man that they called Mona Lisa. He died already, Mona. Mona Lisa was the one that was the head of everything.

FL1: Of the riot?

LA: Of the riot, mm-hm.

FL1: You see, I wasn't there. I was—I was in the other riot.

SG: (laughs) There were a lot of them to be found in that time period.

LA: They were—they had big, uh, horns, you know?

SG: Mm-hm.

FL1: Bullhorns.

LA: Bullhorns. And they would—they were saying on the bullhorns, “Don’t you all do that, man! That’s Ferman and Frank’s uncle’s!”

SG: Was that the White Hats that were doing that, or—

LA: Yeah, the White Hats. They the ones. See, they thought they were white.

SG: Well, that’s interesting.

LA: Mm-hm. They were (inaudible).

SG: After the riot was over, how much damage was actually done on Central Avenue? Do you recall?

LA: Oh, a lot, yes. Especially the Palace Drugstore; it was really bad. That’s the only place I was allowed to go. Spanish people would not—I never did go in Chick’s Lounge. My mother didn’t even—his two sisters didn’t even—they had a thing about the women do not go in. The first fella that took me out for—to go to the movies and anything—was Eugene White, who, when we first came to Tampa, he was a—he married a friend of mine. His brother married a friend of mine. So I went to the wedding and met the White family. That’s why they came here during the middle—

SG: This was Moses White?

LA: Yeah. One of them is married to my friend Carmen Valdez. And so, I met the whole family there. Eugene was the baby brother, and he went to Don Thompson and I was at Middleton.

FL1: You know, they used to live around the corner from us on Tenth Avenue.

LA: Yeah, but during that time, they didn’t.

FL1: Oh, really?

LA: That time when Eugene, he was—

FL1: What, they were living in West Tampa?

LA: No. They were living in the projects. They all were project people. All of them Whites were project people—from the projects. So then, my father had Mr. and Mrs. White to come to my house, because he said, “I want to know your parents before I’ll let my daughter go out with you,” and all that like the Spanish people used to do. (laughs)

SG: What did your father do? Where was he—

LA: He was a cigar maker.

SG: So he was still making cigars.

LA: Yeah. And then, later on, he started working for my uncle, you know, and that was—

SG: Is that after the cigar industry went down?

LA: No. It was coming down, you know. I had an aunt—she’s a little bit senile, but she worked for Perfecto Garcia since she was nineteen years old, until the embargo, and—

FL1: Papa didn’t want to learn how to make cigars, but he started making them.

LA: Yeah, his father made them when he was twelve years old—she’s been starting at the (inaudible). You know those two cigar factories?

FL1: On Twenty-Second [Street], as you’re going towards the bridge?

LA: No, he didn’t. And so, he always disliked the cigar factories, but that was a way of living then.

SG: Did he dislike it because he wanted to do something different from what—

LA: Yes. Yeah.

SG: —his parents had done, or—

FL1: I wish we had some of the things that he’d done, but (inaudible) messed all that up.

LA: Mm-hm.

FL1: But he was really—his thing was really—

LA: Making—making—

FL1: —wood, like, uh, carpentry.

LA: —but making furniture. Making furniture.

FL1: He was very—and furniture.

LA: Mostly furniture. And, uh—and so he—

FL1: We had that swing set that Papa made for (inaudible). He made—

LA: Yeah. Yeah. He made a swing set.

FL1: He made a swing set, you know, like the, the swing sets that he made 'em out of broomsticks.

LA: Uh huh. And he made his playpens out of—

FL1: And it had the platform and everything, the two seats, and then there was Lee—Lily—there was ours and there was my cousin's, so it went on down that same swing—

LA: And his playpen was made out of broomsticks, too.

SG: Was there a broom factory that he was able to get those from?

LA: No. He just collected 'em. Just kept asking different neighbors and everything to give him the brooms, and then he bought some himself, too, and cut them—(laughs)—and cut 'em up.

And so, finishing that story about Eugene White, which was Moses White's baby brother, my father told him, he said, "Listen. It's all right for her to go to the movies with you. You say it's going to be once a week. But I want to meet your parents before we go into this."

So that poor lady, she was, "I heard your papa." Moses White's mother was real fat and she went up those stairs, cause we lived on the upstairs house, since we had—

FL1: Two story.

LA: —two stories, she had to go up the stairs. And so then, he told him another thing: "Uh, okay, I met your parents. We've got an agreement, but if anything happens to you, you're responsible for her," and all that. He talked all (laughs) that kind of stuff. So then, he said, "And another thing, when you get out of the movies, I don't want no waiting for the bus in front of that Johnny Gray's. I want you to go to Cass [Street] and Central and wait for it." That's how they were about things, Spanish people; they didn't allow none of their people to be on Central Avenue, none of their ladies. Mm-mm [no].

SG: What about Ybor City, though? Could you do things on Ybor City that you would not be allowed to do on Central Avenue?

LA: The Cuban Patio was a beautiful place. Oh, the Cuban Patio—you should see how nice it was. We had dances there—

FL1: That should have been a landmark, now.

LA: Oh, it was so beautiful. My daddy used to get off of Central Avenue, once he was working for my uncle, and then he used to park over there and go upstairs and he was playing dominoes and things with them. He was a member of the Cuban Hall. Martí—

SG: Martí-Maceo³. One of the things that I wondered about—during the fifties [1950s] and forties [1940s], there was a lot of Cuban influence on American music. Dizzy Gillespie, Tito Fuentes had come over. Was that—did that show up on Central Avenue at all, or was that all in Martí-Maceo where the Cubans—

LA: No, it was Martí-Maceo. Only in the Cuban—

FL1: But not entirely, because Leon Claxton had a Cuban background, you know—

LA: Oh, no. But that was in the band.

FL1: —in his show, *Harlem in Havana*. This was a midway show Leon Claxton had, and I know in his show—you know, it was like a variety show—and some part in there he would always have the girls dressed like Spanish dancers. (inaudible)

SG: Did he have any Cuban musicians that worked for him?

FL1: I don't—I can't recall.

LA: One. But he wasn't altogether Cuban. His father was Cuban—Yolanda's brother, Frank (inaudible), and Conchita Pinon's brother, also.

FL1: Oh, okay. That's Yolanda, her stepsister—

LA: Um, not—but he wasn't really Cuban, you know—

FL1: —and Yolanda, her son (inaudible).

LA: —and then his—he married a Cuban girl, but she wasn't—

(Door opens)

FL1: Come in.

³ Sociedad la Unión Martí-Maceo, the club for the Afro-Cubans.

Ferman Lopez: Hello, everybody. How y'all doing today?

FL1: Careful when you step right there. It's a cord.

SG: I don't want to trip you.

FL2: Oh, I'm sorry. You all were recording.

SG: No, please join us. I'm just about to introduce you to the tape recorder. Uh, Ferman Lopez has just joined the interview.

FL1: Yeah, we were talking about different things—you know, Central, Martí-Maceo, Ybor City.

FL2: Y'all didn't go (inaudible)?

FL1: No. No. (laughs)

LA: But in this book it says something about Tampa, Florida, too.

SG: I'm going to look that book⁴ up. I will find a copy of it. If I can't find it, I'll come back and ask you to borrow it.

LA: I have tried to get a copy ever since my uncle let me read it. When my uncle—I tell you, he was so crazy about this book, because nobody has this book. And he told me, he says, "You have to read it in one weekend, and bring it back to me." And I did. (laughs) I gave it back to him.

SG: Well, we may have trouble tracking it down, but at the library they can put out a call to all the other libraries. So, if it's anywhere, we can find it and they'll send it to us.

FL1: You know, it's ironic that a book like that exists, because a story similar to that happened in Sarasota, Dr. Chestnut.

LA: But, see, the—I understand why he couldn't sell this story to the movies. It would do injustice to the (inaudible) of the doctor.

FL1: Oh, yeah. Back then, you know—

LA: No, now! They wanted to buy the story from him.

FL1: Oh, even now?

⁴ According to Greenbaum's notes from her interview with the Lopezes and their uncle Clemente Mirabel, which was also conducted on July 9, 1994, the book in question is *Ruby McCollum: Woman in the Suwannee Jail* by William Bradford Huie, which tells the story of a black woman who killed her white lover.

LA: Now. And he wouldn't—and he was all—almost to sell it—the son—and then he backed out. That's why.

FL2: Are there any of them still living?

LA: Yeah. Has to be. What about this little girl, she's already as old as Wade—Loretta⁵. No. She's older. She was born—

FL1: No. She's older than Wade.

LA: Yeah. She's older.

FL2: So, what else is going on?

FL1: You want go there and check 'em out first before we bring (laughs) Clemente.

FL2: Yeah. We could do that.

LA: Meet him.

FL2: Yeah. You know, if he's not up, we'll have to help him out of bed and carry him out.

SG: Would it be easier to go over there, or—

LA: He couldn't walk over here, no. We'll have to go over there.

FL2: So, if you'll just stand by, we'll go and get him up.

SG: Okay. Okay.

FL1: We're not taking too much of your time—?

SG: Oh, no. I have all afternoon. I tell you, I'm going to take more of your time (laughs) than you're going to take of my time, so don't worry.

FL2: All right.

LA: I can't find that, but it says something about (inaudible)—

FL2: Well, let me go ahead on and take this ice over there. I bought some ice at the store.

LA: —and it talks about the (inaudible).

⁵ Loretta was the daughter of Ruby McCollum and her lover C. Leroy Adams.

SG: Mm-hm. Now this is something—turn it—

pause in recording

LA: My grandfather came in 1905, by himself, and got the job, and he found a job at Corina Cigar Factory on Twenty-Second Street, and he bought a home on Marconi [Street], right close to the cigar factory, which was in Palmetto Beach. And so, when he brought his family—in 1906—here, he had already joined the Centro Asturiano as a founder of the Centro Asturiano Hospital and Club, and then he—because of the Jim Crow laws, his wife could not belong to the Centro Asturiano, but at least he had hospitalization. He was already an old man, so he was grateful that he had hospitalization. So then in 1926, Dr. (inaudible) came from Cuba and founded (inaudible), and she joined there with her children.

SG: Was she ever associated with Martí-Maceo at all?

LA: No. No, she was always—the Spanish ladies, they were just for the house; that's why she never learned how speak English, because she was always in the house. But her children learned how to speak English. They came here as children, but my aunt, who was just a year and a half, she knew how to speak English fluently, better than my father and my uncle. But they knew how to defend themselves pretty good without English. (laughs) And so, they worked—they all learned how to make cigars at Corina Cigar Factory, where their father worked—all three of the children, including our older aunt, also.

When my grandfather first encountered the Jim Crow laws was one day that my grandmother and him got on the trolley—the electric trolley that they used to have—and she was told that she—he was told that he was sitting in the wrong place, cause he was sitting in the back with his wife, and he didn't pay attention to the sign that says that whites sit from the front to the back and blacks sit from the back to the front.

So there was a lady in the trolley that knew how to speak English and Spanish, and she said what the trolley conductor was saying, that he couldn't sit back there.

He says, "Well, what, what is—" he answered in Spanish. "What is wrong with me sitting back here? I like to sit in the back, and this is my wife sitting next to me."

And she says, "Well, you're not supposed—she can sit back there but you have to come to the front."

So, he pulled the string that you pull to get off, and he says, "Let me off right here on this corner. I will never get on a trolley again." And he didn't.

SG: (laughs)

LA: So, when my father and his brother were teenagers, he bought them a Model T Ford, and that's how they traveled from Palmetto Beach to Ybor City. They liked the atmosphere in Ybor City very much. And then they were advised that, because they were a mixed couple and they didn't have that sort of thing here at that time, it would be best if they could move to Ybor City. So then they came to live in Ybor, Ybor Street—Ybor City—between Twenty-First [Street] and Nineteenth Avenue. And they left their home—that was theirs—to rent. And they lived in Ybor City, also.

SG: So, they could live in Ybor City without anybody bothering them—

LA: Bothering them.

SG: But if they were in other parts of Tampa they were running a risk.

LA: Because all the couples—it was all the couples like them, you know.

SG: In Ybor City.

LA: Mm-hm. There was mixed, you know, that they had come from Cuba—because in Cuba that's nothing, for a black man to marry, or a white man to marry a black woman and all that, you know. You would have seen couples like that, but not in Palmetto Beach. In fact, the KKKs [Ku Klux Klan] used to meet at Desota Park. That's where their meetings were.

SG: What—and Desota Park, is that in Palmetto Beach?

LA: Yes, in Palmetto Beach, right before you get to Twenty-Second—to the Causeway.

SG: Didn't they bother Cubans—white Cubans and cigar makers—too, though? KKK?

LA: Yes, they did bother them, but see—they stayed, like I said, here in Ybor City—

SG: They'd be okay.

LA: It would be okay for them. They went in a lot of the areas to live, but Sulphur Springs or places like that they, uh-uh. That was a no-no. Mm-hm [no].

SG: Was your family members of Martí-Maceo? Your father was?

LA: My father was. Uh-huh. My father was.

SG: So he had that hospitalization.

LA: Yes. He had that hospital—uh huh. The patients would go to Gonzales' home.

SG: One of the things that I've been interested in—and this is kind of off to the side—but Martí-Maceo had this insurance plan, basically, that was very beneficial for—if you got sick it would not only pay your medicine and hospital, but also give you some money to tide you over.

LA: Yes. It's most—it was drawn just like the (inaudible). I'm going to bring you the booklets from (inaudible).

pause in recording

LA: (inaudible)

pause in recording

LA: The father's name and the mother's (inaudible).

SG: Right. Francisco Lopez Garcia was your grandfather, and he was one of the founders of Centro Asturiano. There's a photograph of him here at—he's a (inaudible). That's very interesting. I didn't realize that they had done a history. I should see if I can find it.

LA: This is a picture of him. You see my grandmother and the two aunts. This is 1927, *Noche Bueno* [Christmas Eve]. That's before my mother and my father got married. They got married in 1930. This is my father, and there's my mother, and there's his sister, and there's her husband, and that's my two aunts that I tell you that—they went for white. And that's (inaudible).

SG: Was this just inside of your house in Ybor City?

LA: My grandmother's house. This grandmother, my grandmother on my mother's side. And that's her husband, the one that she married after she became a widow. And then, that's my uncle, my daddy's brother, and this—she is my grandmother's daughter from her first marriage. And that's my Uncle Chick. And that's a friend of theirs. And that's my Uncle Frank.

SG: It's not Frank that—which uncle have we interviewed?

LA: Uh, Clemente, and he's not here.

SG: So he's not in there.

LA: Somebody had to (inaudible), so he's not here.

SG: Let me go back, if I could—no, let me finish with this one thing before I forget it altogether. In the American community and the black American community, there were burial societies, or (inaudible). The Grand Union was one, I think, and the Lily White—

LA: The pallbearers union. Right.

SG: Do you remember, or did you know anything about them, and do you know how they compared to Martí-Maceo in a way—the family didn't belong to any of those?

LA: (inaudible) See, see how the integration works? Now this is Wholesome Bakery. Now, they—all of these are employees, and their wives, of the Wholesome Bakery. Okay, they had an affair for Christmas. This was Christmas of 1954. They had this big affair that the black employees couldn't go to.

SG: Could not go?

LA: Mm-mm [no]. To the thing.

SG: I thought maybe they were just sitting in a separate place—

LA: No. Uh-uh.

SG: —but they couldn't go at all?

LA: No. He rented this auditorium for this, which was at the YMCA or somewhere that's small—but, see, that's (inaudible) the employees. And that is a big thing.

SG: So who was the one who rented the hall for the separate one?

LA: The owner of Wholesome Bakeries. In 1954.

SG: Did somebody in your family work for Wholesome? Is that it?

LA: Yes. Uh-huh. Yeah. My godson's parents. And I have a lot of my friends here, this lady; she died already. Violet (inaudible)—her father (inaudible).

SG: (inaudible)

LA: (inaudible) daughter. Mm-hm.

SG: I interviewed her right before she died.

LA: Uh huh. (inaudible)'s daughter. And that's her husband, here. And this girl, I know her, too. And that's her husband. This girl—this lady, they just had her funeral two weeks ago, Ruby Reece. That's her husband; he worked there. See? This is how ridiculous (inaudible). Now, he had to spend money for this auditorium, and then for this one. That is so—

SG: Were there white people who came to Central Avenue? Were there white people who came to Chick's Lounge, do you know? Or was it—

LA: Well, you know, who would go to the—like when *Harlem in Havana* had a show at the movie theatre, they would go.

SG: So, they would go to those kinds of things. Did they go to see B.B. King down there? Or Ray Charles, or—

LA: Very few. Very few.

SG: So, it was mostly black people who went to the entertainment down there.

LA: Mm-hm.

SG: The, uh—tell me again about the Tilt. Would you describe what that was like, the day of the parade, and—

LA: Oh, it was a gala affair. It was really, really (inaudible). Uh, it started, you know, in the morning. It was an all-day affair. The football game with the—it ended with the football, at the Phillips Field, which was right there on Cass and North Boulevard where the Riverfront Park is now, on the corner—that corner was Phillips Field, and all the football games were held there. And then they would have dances right there on Central; some would be at the Cuban Patio, and that's the one I would (inaudible) I went a lot.

SG: So, the Cuban Patio also participated—

LA: Oh, yes. Uh-huh.

SG: Actually, the Cuban Patio then, wasn't that far away from Central.

LA: Oh, yes, it was far away.

SG: But it was—well, it was a few blocks away.

LA: All the black clubs and societies, they all participated.

SG: So, there were parades with floats and—

LA: Yes. Uh-huh.

SG: —and things like that? Was there a queen, or—

LA: Yes. They would have a queen. Yes. Uh-huh. Queen of the Tilt of the Maroon and Gold, and then there was the queen of the school. She would always come, too, and the queen from the opposite team. But they would always play black schools; always black schools that I recall.

SG: Do you remember the Greek Stand? Did you ever go to the Greek Stand, the place they called the Greek Stand?

LA: Yes, but I—

SG: Cause I haven't quite figured out why?

LA: Well, the owners, they were Greeks.

SG: They were Greek people. So that's why they called it the Greek Stand.

LA: The Greek Stand, and they were very famous for the sandwiches, especially their Greek salad.

SG: So the food was good there.

LA: Yeah. The black people couldn't go anywhere else (inaudible). There was no McDonald's or nothing like that.

SG: Or just a window in the back or something like that where they could get in, in other restaurants.

LA: In other restaurants, a little window. Like (inaudible) and the Columbia Restaurant.

SG: Were the Greeks who owned it—were they friendly people? Did they—were they liked by people on Central Avenue—

LA: Yeah. Yeah.

SG: —by people who worked there?

LA: Yes, they were very much liked. In fact there was two brothers, the Solomon brothers—his wife still lives; she lives not too far away from here. They worked for them. They were brothers and they (inaudible).

SG: What—tell me his name again, because—

LA: Solomon.

SG: Solomon. Okay.

LA: Maybe one of 'em is still living. I know one of 'em died already, the one named Johnny Solomon—and I don't know what the other one's first name was. But his wife—of Johnny—still lives around here, and she could tell you more about the Greek Stand than anybody, cause they worked there, those two brothers, the Solomon Brothers.

SG: That's a good suggestion. That's another one of the places we're going to show, and we don't know very much about it, so—

LA: Ruby is her name, and she lives—she don't live far from here. So she could probably tell you a lot about it.

SG: She's Ruby Solomon.

LA: Solomon, uh-huh.

SG: So, Johnny is dead, but Ruby is still alive.

LA: Alive. I know where she lives and everything.

SG: Think she's listed in the phone book?

LA: I believe so. Mm-hm.

SG: Oh, don't get up. I'll check it. If I can't find it I'll call you back about it for more information. (laughs)

LA: (laughs) That's okay.

SG: But, uh, I think we would like to contact her, because—

LA: See, this is another good book.

SG: Right. We have that, in fact. Otis Anthony is, uh—

LA: You see, this—not that one. (inaudible) This article that came in this book tells you more about the Greek Stand. See? That's exactly how it is.

SG: The Cubans and—have you seen the little book that I wrote on Martí-Maceo and Afro-Cubans here in Tampa?

LA: No.

SG: *Afro-Cubans in Ybor City*? I gave Frank one.

LA: Oh.

SG: I didn't bring one with me, but you might find it interesting. There are a lot of photographs and—

LA: That book tells exactly (inaudible).

SG: In fact, tomorrow morning on television, on Channel 13—do you ever watch the Denise White show?

LA: Oh, yes.

SG: I'm going to be on there tomorrow. Juan Majella—do you know Juan Majella?

LA: Juan Majella, yeah.

SG: He's on, too, and some other people, Chloe Cabrera and two other Cubans that I didn't know before. But it's all about Afro-Cubans, and uh—

LA: (inaudible) it's—the Hispanic people—see, this is the part that I like the most. See, Hispanics does have a strong African heritage, the experience of black Americans in the United States. Many Hispanics (inaudible) have not accepted who they are and who can pass for whites are ignored—um, ignorant. (laughs) Ignored, I wanted to say. They ignore the fact that they have African in them, of the fact—deny it, or aren't willing to accept it. That's the truth.

SG: That was not so necessary in Ybor City, though, was it, because of Martí-Maceo and because there were a lot of people here who were Afro-Cuban and who—

LA: You know what I have? I looked into—it was a time when things were—were better, you know, but as time passes the other generations came to be—you know, they thought different. Because I remember the Fuentes—Renee Fuentes, who used to have a band, his family lived next door to my grandmother—on my daddy's side—and we were just like a family, you know. They went for whites, but we were very close, you know.

SG: Then it got less so.

LA: Yes.

SG: That's—I mean, you think about things getting better rather than worse, but that's kind of the opposite direction. Do you think that as, uh—

LA: We used to be like a family, you know. Um, it looks like mostly—this neighborhood was mostly Italians, you know. Now, the Italian old people still treat me the same and everything, but you see, the grandchildren, when they come there to visit, they don't want to be bothered, you know. They don't—

SG: So, you think as they became more American, they became more prejudiced?

LA: Uh huh. I believe so. Something happened, because they don't treat me the same way as when I was a child, you know.

SG: Let me ask you just two more things about Central Avenue, and this may be hard because you didn't spend as much time there as Frank. Do you—there were not just Cubans and Americans, but there were also some Jamaicans and some Bahamians and some people from other parts of the Caribbean. Did you know any of those people, or—

LA: My grandmother's people, you know—my mother's side, they—my grandmother used to—that's my great-grandmother up there.

SG: She's very beautiful.

LA: She was from Nassau, her mother. So that's why—I have a lot of people in my family that are—they're from the islands and Nassau. And my grandmother, she didn't know how to speak Spanish when she married my grandfather. That was my grandmother on this side, and that was my mother's parents; that's my mother's parents. See, he died when he was just thirty-two, and my mother was just seven years old. So that's why my grandmother remarried this white Spaniard. But she used to say, "That's the only reason I married him, because he raised my children," cause there was no welfare, no nothing to help.

But you know what I find out, that this generation now—they're not like they were when I was a child; we were just like a family. I see a lot of the grandchildren—the mother still speaks to you and everything, but the grandchildren, they don't want to.

SG: I think I've asked you all the questions. (laughs) But let's talk a little more about Ybor City and about what it was like growing up there.

LA: You see, this is the thing that we gave my grandmother, Olivia (inaudible); she was my great-grandmother and she was the founder of St. James Episcopal Church—the black woman there, she was one of the founders.

SG: So she was an American.

LA: Yes. And she married—when she came from Nassau to Cuba, my great-grandmother, and there she had four girls, which were (inaudible) sisters of my grandmother. They were from the islands, mostly. And so, when she came from Key West, she met my grandfather, who was a Cuban Indian, and she married him and she had three more daughters and—which was my grandmother. But, Olivia, she never spoke Spanish. She was from—

SG: So she came here and she lived here—

LA: In Tampa.

SG: —but she didn't speak Spanish.

LA: No.

SG: So she was part of the black American community—

LA: Mm-hm. Yeah.

SG: —eventually.

LA: She went to St. James Episcopal, and the American people mingled with her, the black—

SG: Were there other West Indians in the St. James Episcopal Church?

LA: Oh, yes. Uh huh.

SG: Was that part of the reason she joined that church?

LA: Yes, but that church is mostly of that (inaudible). St. James Episcopal Church—it explains to you that it—the story of this church is that—that's another person that preaches (inaudible) Herman Monroe. He has a mostly—he's trying to get photos and everything of the first Episcopal church, but he hasn't been so successful to get it, because this church was started with a mixture of people from the islands and Cubans and everything. The Episcopal Church.

SG: Where was that located?

LA: Now it's located on North Boulevard but—I thought it was in the story here of when it started. And this is an interesting tidbit. This is the project (inaudible) how it was burnt and everything.

SG: They were, uh—they had their hundredth anniversary in either this year or ninety-three [1993], and they were writing a history. I don't know if it's been finished. Eighteen ninety-four was their—1893; late 1893 was when they began. But you know, there's very little that has ever been written about West Indians in the early part of Tampa. There's more knowledge about that now, but—

LA: Mm-hm. But Herman Monroe can give you a portion of it.

SG: Herman Monroe is the pastor at—

LA: No, he's the historian at the church. He gathers all the histories and things of the church. I have given him a lot of my family's pictures. My grandmother's niece married there in, um, 1913. It's the first Episcopal Church within West Tampa (inaudible) and that's where she married. And I was able to give him that, and he took all of that into consideration. He was a good friend with the history. But it was mostly people from the islands and people from Cuba that went to that church.

SG: So, Protestants who went were from Cuba.

LA: Uh-huh. Yeah. Of course, it's very—see, most of these—they were Cubans from Key West, you know, because that's where the problem comes in. Mostly all the Cubans are Catholic, but when they came to Key West, some of 'em—they couldn't find a Catholic church, so they joined the Episcopal church. Those are similar to the Catholic. But, my grandmother, she was from the islands and she always went from the—you know.

SG: There was—in some of the interviews that I've read, the guy who founded the longshoremen's union, originally, in Tampa, was Jamaican. This was before Perry Harvey—this is before your time, so you may not remember or know anything about that.

LA: But Herman is a good one for you to in with about people from the islands.

SG: I was wondering if maybe there were more West Indians who were longshoremen. That was something that was a connection, anyway.

LA: No.

SG: Cause the longshoremen—the longshoremen's union was down there on Central Avenue, and Perry Harvey became the president of the longshoremen's union. His son is still the president. And that was something else that we were trying to find something about.

LA: I don't know. But I know that Herman could probably give you a good thing about it.

SG: Herman—what was his last name again?

LA: Herman Monroe. His mother was Hispanic, and they've been all—they were very well versed on the history of the people that belonged to—St. James was a mixture of people from the islands and Cubans, you know.

SG: That's very interesting. Let me go back a little bit to Ybor City and to growing up in Ybor City and being a Cuban, and when you started—you've been out with Americans. You went out with Moses White's brother, and married an American, did you not?

LA: Yeah, I married one of the Allens (inaudible).

SG: How did your family feel about you going out with Americans?

LA: Well, they came to accept it better later on, but at the beginning, mm-mm [no].

SG: So, they did have some objections.

LA: Oh, yes.

SG: Most of the Cuban families that I've heard of—

LA: But they wasn't—but there weren't too many black Cubans, you know, that had funds available and all of that, so that's when we decided—we'd be, like, "Fine—"

SG: So, this was in the forties [1940s] that you're talking about. So—

LA: Uh-huh. Yeah. Like Carmen White—Carmen Valdez, the Valdez family—now that's a good family to talk to. Her father—her grandfather, Francisco Valdez, was a real founder of the Labor Temple in Ybor City, and they—when he died, they laid his body at the Labor Temple. And for the sake of it, have you ever met (inaudible)?

SG: Oh, yeah.

LA: He knows a lot, too.

SG: He's still down at the Labor Temple.

LA: Mm-hm. Yeah.

SG: There were—lots of Cubans left Ybor City in the thirties [1930s]—

LA: Oh, yeah. There were—

SG: The size of the population really dropped.

LA: That's where the problem came in. While we—the Spanish families accepted a lot of Americans fellows into the family and things like that—and vice-versa, the American girls—because a lot of these people had moved to New York, so—

SG: So, it's harder to find—

LA: New York and Chicago, because of the relief funds—you know, they were given relief funds cause things were really bad during the Depression, and they left.

SG: Do you remember Sylvia Griñán and Jose Griñán, when they had the Pan-American Club in the Martí-Maceo? Do you know them?

LA: Mm-hm. Yeah. I participated in one of those plays. I've got the thing here.

SG: You don't—oh, my.

LA: They were really good starting that club, because of that. We were getting away from our heritage, you know.

SG: So, this was a way, as Sylvia has explained it—I knew her very well, and she had talked about that. She was saying that it was a way to keep kids in the club, in the Martí-Maceo, but still to come to terms with the fact that there had to be interaction with Americans, because it would—otherwise they'd lose 'em altogether. Was that a sense that—and did you know that, or feel that, at the time?

LA: Yes, to keep us together, yes, mm-hm. We were losing out, both sides, to keep our heritage. I have some cousins, my aunt's daughters; they don't speak Spanish or anything. My two boys, they got the American name, Allen, and they speak Spanish fluently; but my brother's children, they speak English. They got the Lopez name.

SG: But they don't speak—they're Lopez and they don't speak Spanish, and yours are Allen and they do speak Spanish. (laughs)

LA: That's cause my mother kept my children, you know. I always worked. I'm still working. I'm trying to get out of the—stop working. I'm almost ready to retire, but that Medicare, you know—if you don't have good hospitalization, what am I gonna do?

SG: Yeah, I know. I hope they get this healthcare reform done in time to do some of us good.

LA: See, I don't—this year I'm going to be sixty-four, but you can't get Medicare until you're sixty-five.

SG: We have to keep working on it.

LA: I work for the Health Department, so they—but, uh, Sylvia was right. Sylvia really tried to keep us together.

SG: Were you aware of the conflict that she and Jose had with Juan Garcia? Did you know Juan Garcia?

LA: Yes. (inaudible)

SG: Cause that was what really killed it, eventually, was that they had an argument. He was the treasurer.

LA: Yes, uh-huh.

SG: Um, I often wondered, and you may not know this—

LA: It's too much (inaudible). You know, last time I—

pause in recording

LA: —at the clubs, he just paid his dues and he just kept himself home, because he said he don't like controversy and they have too much controversy over there.

SG: What was the controversy about?

LA: Mostly money.

SG: Was there any politics in it? That was getting to the time of the revolution in Cuba, and I know that there were some people in the club who were supporters of Batista and there were some people in the club who were supporters of Castro.

LA: (inaudible) but my father, he—you see, when they sold the building, a lot of 'em didn't want to, because that would've been a historical place. They could've built around it. They could've built around that place, but no, they wanted the money.

SG: Do you remember when that got torn down—the old Martí-Maceo?

LA: It was, um, a lot of—

SG: It was sixty-five [1965], was when it happened, but—

LA: That's when my father died, yeah. My father stopped going, cause my father did not agree with it. Cause they wanted to sell it.

SG: But they had—I mean, I know a little bit about that. They had gotten—

LA: Now, that they—look at that place they have. Do you think that, with the money that they got from this, that it compensates for that little building they burned?

SG: Nope. I'd say you're—

pause in recording

LA: —with Mr. M—the late Mr. Martinez is the only Martinez (inaudible) and he told him, he said, “I'm not going back. I don't like what they're doing, and so I'm going to let them do whatever they want to do.”

SG: (inaudible) was the one who wanted to close it down. And then there was—

LA: Mm -m. Mm-hm. Oh, yeah, cause he was so old and he didn't care. And Aurelio Fernandez had a very good idea, cause he met with us. He wanted to turn it—the old building, he wanted it to turn it into a nightclub, you know, where we could make money. “Oh, no, no. No, no, no. (inaudible) No, no, no.” Cause that would've been good, had a swanky nightclub in the bottom with dancing upstairs, the Patio; they talk about some. . .

end of interview