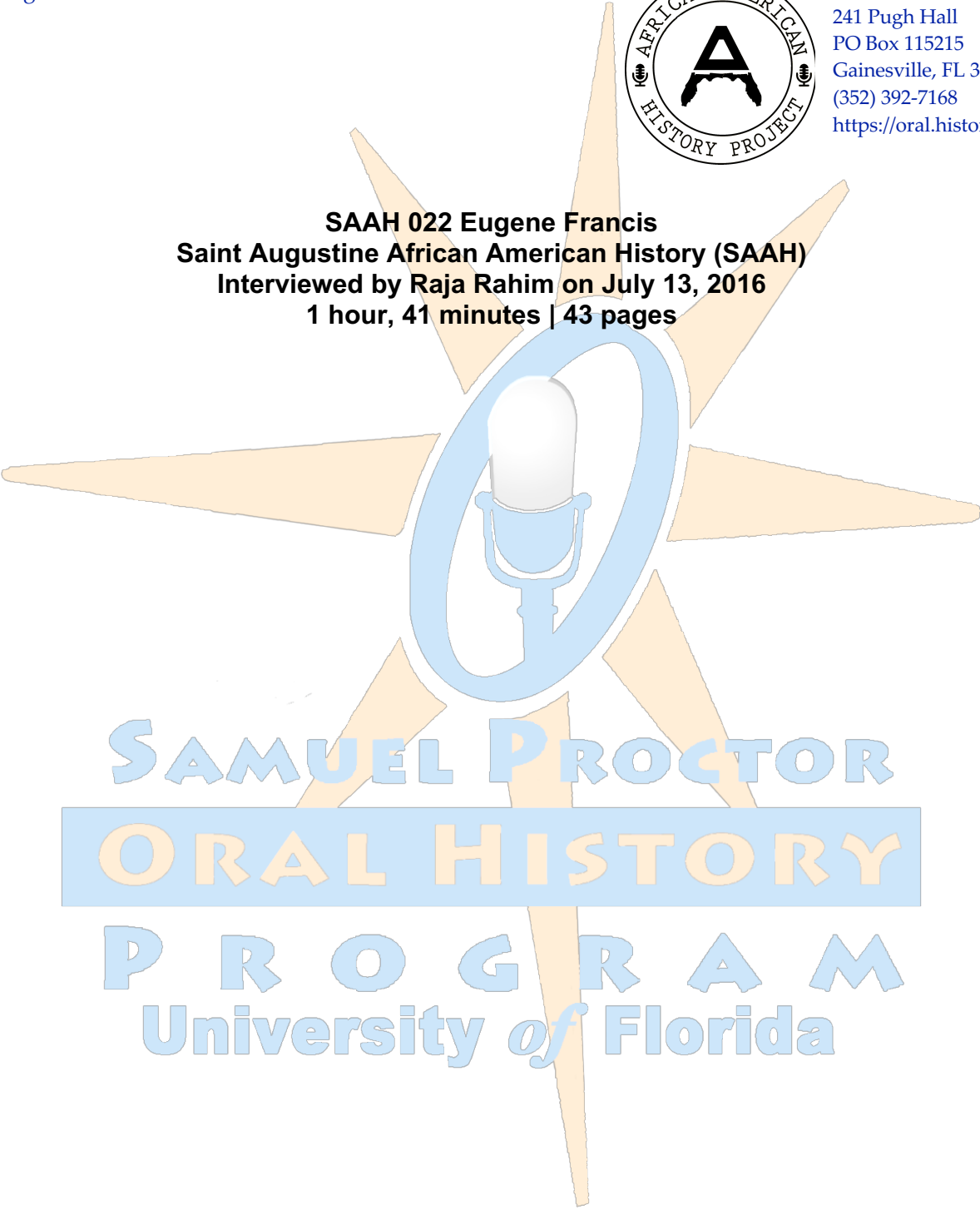


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SAAH 022 Eugene Francis
Saint Augustine African American History (SAAH)
Interviewed by Raja Rahim on July 13, 2016
1 hour, 41 minutes | 43 pages



SAMUEL PROCTOR
ORAL HISTORY
PROGRAM
University of Florida

SAAH 022

Interviewee: Eugene Francis

Interviewer: Raja Rahim

Date: July 13, 2016

R: Today is Wednesday July 13, 2016. The time is approximately 5:55 p.m. We're here at the Lincolnville Museum and Cultural Center. I am Raja Rahim and I'm sitting down with Mr. Eugene Francis. Can you please state your full name?

F: Oh boy, my full name. Eugene Lester Francis.

R: When were you born?

F: I was born December 24, 1954.

R: Where?

F: In Jacksonville, Florida.

R: Can you tell us a little bit what it was like growing up in Jacksonville, Florida at that time?

F: Well actually I'm from Green Cove Springs. At the time of my birth, the county hospital in Green Cove Springs did not take Black folk. So, on Christmas Eve my parents had to drive from Green Cove Springs, forty-eight miles north to Jacksonville to Brewster Hospital. And that's where I was born.

R: Also can you tell us a little bit about your mother and father?

F: My dad's name was Earl Lester Francis, that's where the Lester comes in. And my mom is **Caroline Claire Copeland**. Course, Francis. But that was her maiden name. Both of 'em were from Green Cove Springs, there's about twelve years' age difference between the two, that's a little family history there. 'Cause the way they met was after World War II and my mom was working with the war department at the General Electric plant up in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Along with some other young ladies from Florida. And one of the young ladies

happened to be an old girlfriend of my dad and she told my mom, when you get back to Florida, I want you to look up Earl Francis and let him know that I decided to stay up here in Connecticut. So let him know I'm up here. Well, she looked him up alright.

R: Are you the only child?

F: Nope, one of three. I'm the youngest. Three boys, **Ken, Wayne**, and me.

R: Tell us about growing up with your mother and father in the household. What was your childhood like?

F: Well it was the best. I didn't miss much. We were poor. But as kids, we didn't know it. My parents always made sure they exposed us to any and everything they could. And unlike a lot of people, I had both my mom, dad in the house. I didn't see my dad much, and my brother Wayne and I are two years apart. Growing up we used to kid ourselves that we knew he was there, but we just didn't see him. 'Cause he went to work early in the morning before we got up, when we were younger. And he came home from work late in the afternoon after we had gone to bed. So we would see him on Saturdays when he was working in his barber shop which was right next to the house, and that was it. The only other time that we saw him was when we messed up and mom had to summon him to make corrections. That wasn't good. [Laughter]

R: And what does your mother and father do for a living?

F: My dad worked for the school board. He was a bus driver, during the segregation. And he also was the procurement person for the school district. So all the supplies and whatever. And he continued that prior to segregation and

after it. And he also had a couple of gigs as the janitor at one of the elementaries up in Orange Park. And he had his own barber shop. And my mom was the janitor at the Clay County Health Department. And she eventually worked herself into a position as the dental assistant. But she started there when I was three months old. And that's the only job she ever had.

R: Speaking of your father, as a bus driver, and of course during segregation, has he told any stories about things that he shared during his time as a driver?

F: Oh, yeah. I used to ride with him during the days in the—if you go to Clay County, anybody in their sixties and seventies will always tell you that my dad was their bus driver. He was the original Black bus driver for all of Clay County. You had one Black high school in Green Gove Springs, which was Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School. And my dad essentially rode the circuit for the entire county, picking up kids in Orange Park, Maxville, Penney Farms, and Middleburg, and bringing them to Green Cove Springs. Eventually, later on, by the time I made it into school, that bus driving crew had expanded into three buses. And my dad handled the Orange Park or northeast Clay County, and Mr. **Hayman** handled Penney Farms, and that area, and Mr. **Curry** handled northwest Clay County, which consisted of Middleburg, and Maxville, and that area. Course, integration occurred in [19]67, and so, oddly enough, there were no more Black bus drivers. Or at least that crew had moved on.

R: Can you talk about maybe like some family history, as far as was your parents originally from Florida? Or did your family background, did they move to Florida?

F: Well, on my mother's side, we can trace our history back well over two hundred years, right here, in Florida. On my father's side, we can only go back roughly, about a hundred and seventy-five years. My family on my father's side originated in Sumter, South Carolina. That's where my grandfather who I'm named after was born. And he, along with his siblings, came down here to Florida, with the aid of two of his uncles, and settled in Green Cove Springs, and then Melrose, and half the population of Eatonville, Florida are my cousins. And also in Daytona. So we're all over the place. You can actually track my family coming out of South Carolina into Florida because while my grandfather was born in Sumter, he had a younger brother that was born in Campton, Georgia. So you can see the family making its way south. It was almost like it was in the DNA of the Francis family to get here to Florida. But that's our history. Now my mom's side, it's a totally different story. It's a wild story. I'm the great-great-great grandson of a Bahamian gun runner, who was actually born in Liverpool, England. His name was George Lycurgus. And he and his shipmates were out there running the blockade, prior to and during the Civil War--or leading up to the Civil War and he got caught. Off of the coast of Newport News, Virginia. And thrown in jail. And of course, with him being a Black man, the jailer actually thought he belonged to somebody, but he and his ship captain kept on, "look, I'm a free man." So eventually they were let out of jail. Some of his shipmates decided to go north, into Canada. He decided his best course was to come south. 'Cause he figure that's the best way he could get back to the West Indies. So travelling at night, hiding out in day, he made his way down here to St.

Augustine. And while he in St. Augustine, he witness a slave auction. And he said there was a lot of pretty girls. And one caught his eye. Her name was Julia **Grey**. And Julia Grey was the daughter of David and Barbara Grey, who were slaves of the Fleming family, of the Hibernia Plantation over in Clay County. He bought her and married her. And that's how my family on my mother's side got to be.

R: And how did y'all keep track of your family history? Was it more storytelling, or have you been able to research and find?

F: Combination of both. Part of the research and part of a lot of storytelling. I always knew about my great-grandfather who was Louis Lycurgus, who fought in the Civil War. And then a younger brother who was Theodore Lycurgus. They all settle right there in Green Cove Springs. And of course Louis, being my great-grandfather, my grandmother, Viola Lycurgus, was his fifth oldest daughter. And she would tell the history, and in addition, so we knew about all of that. But additionally, going through the slave narratives, from the WPA project. Back in 1937, the youngest boy, Edward Lycurgus was interviewed up at the Claire White Mission, in Jacksonville, and he told the story as his dad shared with him, of the Lycurgus family. Plus, I even have my military records. I have when another Lycurgus, John, was enlisted in the Army, leading up to the, well, during the Civil War. And then also Cyrus Lycurgus, also enlisted. John signed up in Jacksonville, and a week later he deserted. But Cyrus actually signed up in Palatka, Florida, and he stayed in for the duration of the war. And actually, you can go to the historic Black cemetery of Green Cove Springs, which is called Mount Olive, and in the back area

of the earlier sections of it, you can see headstones dedicated to the, I guess you could say the founding families of Green Cove Springs, which are the Redmonds, the Forresters, the Lycurgus and Greys. And then all of my relatives and cousins are buried around there. You can even see **Mary Jo**, or Mary Grey, Mary Barbara. She was born in 1825. That's part of that history of George, because even though George, when he bought Julia, his wife, he end up staying here, about three years, living with her family. But eventually they moved to the West Indies, and eventually back to England. And then all of a sudden they got a correspondence from the family, they had to get back here to Florida or something dire was gonna happen. And while it doesn't spell out within the narrative that Edward talks about, I do know that there was a major catastrophe within the family, because one of Julia's sister, Mary Barbara, who was actually married to another guy by the name of Forrester, which was a free Black family in Clay County, that when she was a girl, she was kidnapped, or captured by slave runners trying to introduce her back into slavery. And it was like all hands on deck, the family had to come together to get her back. And they did. Exactly how, not sure. But they did.

R: Wow, good family history. Can we talk a little bit about your time growing up, I guess what you can remember of segregation? What can you remember, I guess starting maybe with elementary and middle school, were your schools segregated?

F: Yes. I went to R.C. Bannerman Elementary. R.C. Bannerman was the principal that actually named Dunbar High School, Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School. That occurred in 1931. Actually I've written a history on Dunbar High School.

Believe it or not, the Black high school, Dunbar, is actually older than the White high school, Clay County High School, by a couple of years. The Colored normal school of Clay County actually started in the old Shriner's hall, across the street from the Lockett house in Green Cove Springs. And it stayed in that fashion for years, until Borden, Gail Borden, you familiar with Borden's milk?

R: Um-hm.

F: Well Gail Borden was this millionaire magnate, who used to summer in Green Cove Springs. And he donated the land at the corner of Cypress and Walberg, for the building of a Black school. I always thought that that school was gonna be part of like a Rosenwald School, but it didn't occur that way. Gail Borden donated the land and the Black community came together and built the building. And there was about five other principals, long before R.C. Bannerman, but R.C. Bannerman, after taking the school from just up to the eighth grade, in 1931 brought out a full-fledge high school to the twelfth grade, and oddly enough, the first graduate of Dunbar High School was his wife. And his daughter eventually became a member of the faculty at Dunbar and R.C. Bannerman. Her name is Mildred Jean Bannerman. And a very interesting lady. Matter of fact, one of my prized possession was—she was my third grade teacher, and back in the early [19]90s when we were putting on the Augusta Savage Festival, she asked me to come to her home, and there on the TV was a replica of the statue called The Voice, that was actually purchased at the 1939 New York World's Fair. And she gave it to me.

R: [inaudible 17:00]

F: Yeah, and a third grade teacher, yeah.

R: So talk a little bit more about elementary school and middle school, and during those times.

F: Well there wasn't any middle school. And you had elementary school, which was R.C. Bannerman, and then went on to Dunbar. And I went to Dunbar for two years, seventh and eighth grade, leading into my ninth grade year, that's when the school district, the last phase of integration. My freshman year--not freshman year--my seventh grade year at Dunbar, everything in there kinda was still segregated. My eighth grade year, you had a choice. You could go to the White high school, or you could stay at Dunbar. My parents decided that me and my brothers we would stay at Dunbar until it close. So what occurred my eighth grade year was that the senior class of Dunbar was actually moved to Clay County High School. So we had no senior class my eighth grade year. It only went from seventh through eleventh. And no extracurricular activities, no band, no choir, no nothing. 'Cause everything was just moved. And then my ninth grade year, they shut Dunbar down, and you had to go to the Clay High School. I just recently gave a talk out at the Penney Farms Retirement Community on educational experience at that time and I made mention that my four years of high school was a total waste. The conditions in which we went to high school was--for instance, when they shut Dunbar down, going to Clay High--Clay High did not have the capacity to handle all of us. So we had to go to school in double sessions. So if you in ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, you went to school early in the morning, like 7:00, 7:15, and then the seventh, eighth, well, they went to

school in the afternoons. And we did that until my junior year. They had greater capacity and then my senior year, they finally built the present-day Clay High School, but it wasn't ready until January, so we started the school year out at old Clay High, which is now Green Cove Springs Junior High. And we moved over the course of the Christmas holidays to the new high school. And I was part of that first graduating class left from there. And, oddly enough, the old Clay High became a junior high and eventually, my oldest brother became the principal of that school. But he had never gone there. He was a Dunbar grad, 1965.

R: Can you talk about, a little bit about the closing of Dunbar? If you can remember what kind of impact that had?

F: Oh, it was a huge impact. It was just like someone taking the lifeblood out of a community. And you can actually trace the—you can look at the deterioration of the community back to that day. You know, and how people kept their yards, and homes, and whatever. When Dunbar was, in fact, it was really the heart of school. I mean, the community. Your teachers. You went to church with 'em, you knew 'em, they were your cousin, they were your family. With the integration of the schools, a lot of the teachers moved on, or they were given smaller roles. Matter of fact, our guidance counselor, one of my cousins, part of that Redmond family: Teresa Redmond Marie. She had been guidance counselor and actually was temporary principal of Dunbar when it burned down. The original one burned down. But yet at Clay High, she became the assistant guidance counselor. Now this is the lady who, master's in guidance and whatever, back in the days that we didn't have master's degrees. She's a Tuskegee grad, born and raised in Green

Cove Springs, prominent family from that whole Redmond, Lycurgus, Forresters group. And basically she's just given her lifeblood to education in Clay County. And to see her role being diminished, the principal of Dunbar High School at the time, name was Galvin Brown. We used to call him Professor Brown. Professor Brown was given a certain commitment from the school district, if he upgraded his educational credentials, he would come in at least as a vice principal. And he did that. He went back to graduate school again up at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Got additional certification. Alright, but that was an empty promise. The position, never quite so. He didn't come back. Actually I was in the band with his daughter and son, so eventually they had to move to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania where their father was because he no longer had employment here in Clay County.

R: And talk a little more personally about your transition from segregation to integration. How did you take to it, how did it affect you once you got to Clay High?

F: Well, no different than anybody else. Basically I was, I had a certain reputation. Let's say I marched to the beat of my own drum. So I wasn't necessarily a follower. But I wasn't a leader, either. And at the time, my brother graduated from Edward Waters College, in 1969, so he was right there as part of the faculty at Clay High School. And my Aunt Vera was also a member of the faculty. So basically, I had to **tow a certain row**, you know, when you have a older brother, and an aunt, and oh, man, cousins, and they all members of the faculty. They were all Dunbar grads and former teachers at Dunbar, but now they at Clay High. You walked the straight and narrow. But at the same time, certain events, like

science fairs, and whatever, I had no choice. I had to participate. If my Aunt Vera said, you will do this, you will do this. That was that. No I don't want to; you didn't have that choice. And believe it or not, my oldest brother was actually one of my history teachers. We had an event my senior year where the student body walked out and we asked that African American Studies be taught at Clay High School. And for twenty years, African American history was an elective at Clay High School in Green Cove Springs. Nowhere else will you find that in the state of Florida. And I guess maybe because we were a small, rural county, we could pull it off. And I remember the administration "oh, we can't find a teacher." "No, we'll find one for you." And my brother was the first teacher. And when my brother moved on to work for the county, my Aunt Vera became the teacher. And she taught it for five years. And then we eventually had other people. And like I said, twenty years, it was an elective. And sad part, it phased out because of lack of interest. And that's our fault.

R: Speaking of this time period, we're talking about the 1960s, late 1960s in to the [19]70s, was there still much other protests from African Americans? You mentioned wanting Black history at your high school, was any other things going on in your community during that time?

F: Well, you have to understand, when desegregation, that was [19]67, [19]68. You also have to remember some events happened. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King was killed that year. And that was a strange experience, that was the first year of full integration, and watching the reaction of people. There were some cheers, there were some discussions that was made. Also, part of student life

was, you had territories within schools. The Black population, we occupied certain bathrooms, at least one in particular. And if you had used another restroom and your numbers were not in your favor while you were in there, you had problems. Vice versa for others if they were caught in the wrong bathroom. But that was my four years of high school. Also, with those first couple years, and one of the things, I said my four years was a waste, with the integration of the schools, the faculty or whatever or whoever did the plan did not know what to do with all these Black students. And they didn't quite look at us as being intellectually equal. So they came up with these special classes. I remember my freshman year, taking a whole quarter of decimals, followed by another quarter of fractions. You talk about a waste. And then also they came up with vocational education. And that was another way of getting all the Black males from the campus. 'Cause they would come in the morning, and if you wanted to take automotives, or trial trading, whatever. You come to homeroom and then you got on the bus and then you went out to the old Navy base, and you took your classes out there, and then they bus you back to the school so you can catch your bus home. So the Black male population of the school decreased by two-thirds. And those of us that were left, we had to deal with the regular things that goes on when two groups meet. Oddly enough, initially, everything was alright because that was the first year that Clay High School won the state championship in football, and the only time. If you recall the movie *Remember the Titans*, that was my freshman year. With the combination of the football players from Dunbar High School and football players from Clay High, and no

other counties within their district or region had integrated. And Clay High walked dog on everybody. We had this White quarterback, **Don Bolles**, 6' 10", quarterback, high school. Then you had the **Coleman** brothers from Penney Farms, as fast as grease lightning. You had this fullback, White boy name was—**Cooney**, whatever. Short, stocky, run over everybody. You had the best players from Dunbar and the best players from Clay High, and they ran “ramshot” over the rest of the state. So everything was fine. After football season, script flipped.

R: Can you talk a little bit more I guess about the solidarity that football brought during that time? How did the community, both Black and White, respond to the season and the success that was happening?

F: Oh, man, it was wild, everybody was into it. 'Cause Green Cove Springs being a small town, Clay High had never won anything. There had only been one other state championship team in Green Cove Springs, and that was the girls' basketball team from Dunbar High School, that won state championship in the early [19]60s, like [19]61, [19]62. Other than that, there's never been any championship out of Clay County, period. Everybody was celebrating. And like I said, after football season, then you had realization hit. 'Cause one of the realization was the band. The fight song for Clay High before we got there was Dixie, and as soon as we got there, said, oh, no, we got to change this. And I was one of two Blacks in the band. Me and a guy by the name of Larry Richardson. And we were classmates, and we stayed together our full four years at Clay High. And to show you how things worked, Larry was like 6'6", played trombone, great. The tradition at Clay High was always to send the upcoming

drum major to drum major camp at FSU, leading into the school year. Now senior year, everybody knew Larry was gonna be the drum major. He was head and shoulders better than anybody else. All of a sudden that tradition of sending the drum major to FSU for drum major camp changed. And then our band, our senior year, went from about seventy people, down to about forty-eight. I remember a classmate, I guess I shouldn't throw his name out there, but he came up to me and Larry, crying. And said that his mother and father did not want him to march behind a nigger. But he was a friend of ours. And the thing is, they took the one thing he did in school away. And he was a pretty good trumpet player, that's what he did. That was his thing. And it was taken away from him.

R: Can you speak a little bit more about your time with the band, and when did you get introduced to music, and how did you get introduced to music?

F: Well I started at Dunbar, Dunbar High School, in the summer leading up to my seventh grade year. It's a family tradition within the Francis clan. All of my cousins were in the band at Dunbar. Both of my brothers played drums. I wanted to play saxophone. My dad said, "nope, I'm not buying another instrument" and my brother Wayne was on the drum he had inherited from my older brother, and somehow the band parent association of Dunbar had purchased these two brand new Besson baritones, so me and Galvin Brown, the son of the principal, he was in eighth grade, we grabbed the baritones and that's what we played. And as you know, a baritone is nothing but a mini tuba. Part of the bass horn family. And so the eighth grade year, no extracurricular activity, no band, and I picked it back up in ninth grade. And that was what I did in high school, in addition to playing

baseball. But I had always had this dream of going off to college and being part of a musical unit at FAMU. 'Cause when we were growing up, when FAM would come to town, or Cookman would come to town, normally you played baseball, or football, or whatever in the streets with your partners. But when FAMU come to town, at least for three or four weeks after The 100 came through, you played band. And then you went back to playing football. That's just the way it was. And so it was something else. And it meant something, and for four years I was a member of The 100. And oddly enough, it meant something to people I didn't even know it meant something to. I had an incident going into my sophomore year at FAM. It was a local company, Johns Manville. They produce pipes, concrete culvert pipes and all that sort of thing. And they had made the commitment that all of young men who graduated from Clay High, who were going off to college, then when you come home during the summer you had a job, at Johns Manville. And there was about eight of us. Course I was the only Black. And fine, I got a job, with someone. That second year I'm working out there, the labor force went on strike. And I don't know if you know about folk going on strike, but that is no joke. People take jobs seriously; it will kill you. And one morning, when the strike hit, I reported to work, and I'm nervous about, should I try to walk in this building past this line? Or, whatever. 'Cause you don't cross picket lines. So I was just standing up there, and one of the guys in the crowd, big, White dude, said, let that boy pass, he going to college—[long pause, crying]. And I made double time for the rest of that summer. And another guy said, yeah, and he in that band too. I didn't even know they knew I was in college

or I was in the band but it was especially then that I was their homeboy—And I was going to college—I'm sorry.

R: It's okay, take your time, please.

F: You think about that stuff, 'cause you know they could've taken a different tact. And believe me, I needed that money.

R: And these gentlemen were White or Black?

F: They were White.

R: You had grown up with them, or they knew you, or knew of you?

F: Didn't know 'em. They were just part of the work force. But apparently they knew me. And they knew I wasn't a threat to them. And some had made some comments, I remember that voice coming over all the—scab and all that, and it was big dude, said, leave that boy alone, he going to college.

R: What year did you graduate high school?

F: [19]72.

R: And did you enroll at Florida A&M the following fall?

F: Yep. Seventeen years old.

R: And talk about that experience of how did you get to Florida A&M?

F: Well, I always wanted to go to FAM. And I was the first in my family, because both of my brothers went to Edward Waters. But my family, my cousins, we do have history. My oldest cousin, Pat, she's a FAMU grad. My cousin **Glen**, also went to FAMU. My cousin Purcell, FAMU. And me, and also my Aunt Vera, Purcell's mother. She's a FAMU grad. See it's a strange thing within my family. My father and his brothers, only the baby boy graduated from high school. All the

other brothers dropped out of high school. And then they got caught up in World War II. All of 'em fought in World War II, and when they got out, they sent their sisters to college. My oldest aunt, Mary, decided she did not wanna go, but my Aunt **Moselle** did. My Aunt **Ever** did. And my youngest aunt, Vera, did. And they were all teachers at R.C. Bannerman and Dunbar. And the little two-room school out in Middleburg, which they call Hunter Douglas. Well the Douglasses, **Etta** Douglas, my aunt. So that's named after her. But like I said, my dad and his brothers put their sisters through college, and those sisters taught me and all my cousins. And that was just the way it was.

R: Can you talk about what Florida A&M was like when you arrived in [19]72?

F: Ah, it was different than what it is now. But just still the same, it's just still a family. Aw, man, it was like dying and going to Heaven. 'Cause I auditioned my senior year in high school, and I wasn't going to major in music. But I remember when I got the invitation to come up and audition, my brother took me up and Professor Bing, Charles Sampson Bing. He was brass section. Most people don't know, FAMU at the time had nine band directors. Each section had a -- [Laughter]--so you didn't necessarily have to deal with Dr. Foster. But I was there under Dr. Foster, but Charles Bing was the low brass section leader. So that's who I auditioned with. And at the end of the audition, he said, well, we cannot offer you a scholarship, but you perfectly welcome to come and try us. So I got the invitation to come to what is called pre-drill. And the music program at FAMU is special. Most people think it's just a band, but it's a whole lot of tradition. That program comes out of a whole lot of work, by a lot of people. Especially in the

state of Florida. We can trace our history back, the band started as a musical unit that was part of the ROTC. We started as a military band, to supplement. And see all the 1890 land grant schools, participation in ROTC was mandatory. That's why I got a lot of fraternity brothers and whatever they all retired colonels and whatever. They got introduced into the military that way. And a lot of our professors, all of 'em are former United States Army officers. But the band started that way, and at FAMU, the early, I remember Doc Foster was recruited from Tuskegee by Rev. Moses Miles and President Gray. And Doc Foster laid out a plan to start the music department. And the school committed to that plan. Because if you were really a Black musician and that sort of thing, and you really wanted to go to a decent music program, you went to Tuskegee. Tuskegee was the—matter of fact, what's the guy that wrote *Invisible Man*? Richard Wright.

R: Richard Wright, yeah.

F: Richard Wright was a music major at Tuskegee. That was his thing, coming from Oklahoma to go to Tuskegee. That whole tradition. But the deal is, the music program at FAM, most people actually learned their instrument when they got to college, 'cause you didn't have music programs within the high schools, not Black high schools in the state of Florida. And a plan was hatched. Matter of fact there's a book, you can buy it at Amazon, called *A Band in Every School*, where the Black music teachers here in the state of Florida hatched a band to actually create the band programs in all the Black schools to serve as feeder programs for FAMU. And eventually Cookman, Edward Waters, and others. And that's how that program start. So you actually recruited and nurtured from day one, first time

you put your—as a student here in Florida, as a Black male, you put your hand on the instrument, the whole dream was to go to FAMU. And then when you get there, they take you through the orientation and you look at all the folk who have come through the music program. And you're not even looking at musicians. You're looking at folk like Judge Hatcher, who was the first Supreme Court judge in the state of Florida, played trombone. Then you got the Adderley brothers, Cannonball Adderley, Nat Adderley. Their grandfather, Nat Adderley, Jr., was one of the band directors long before Doc Foster. You got all these, these guys, that doing stuff. Your professors who FAMU grad, but they were also in the band. And then you just—there was a lot of tradition. One of the best traditions I remember is the spontaneous standing ovation that you give to the arranger the first time you run through a piece of new music. 'Cause coming out of high school, everything is printed and whatever. You get to FAMU, well there's no printed music. No, they give you a **memo** [inaudible 47:13] sheet of paper that was written by hand, musical bars and whatever. And you're going through this with the director up front, and the arranger, and the composer. You've got your pencil, they got their pencil and we walking this thing bar by bar. And you up there making changes on your sheet music, based on 'cause if something not working out, he's not gonna take this back and work on it all night, he's gonna tell you to make those changes right then and there. And so you worked on this thing. And that first time you run through it. And of course, you're playing stuff that you wanna play, coming out of Clay High, and remember the ninth grade playing "Dixie", now all of a sudden, I remember the first piece I played at FAMU

was "If You Really Love Me", by Stevie Wonder. Aw, man, you couldn't tell me nothing. To go from that genre to this genre, and the show from our freshman year, "**Theme From the Mac**", "**Eyes of Cades**", and "Hey Big Brother" from Rare Earth. "I'll Take You There" by The Staple Singers, "(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don't Wanna be Right" by Luther Ingram. That's what I was learning at FAM. In addition, that's the show music, but you still had that tradition where you had to play the standards. 'Cause back then Doc Foster didn't play. In parades, there was no such thing as showtime in parade, we played strictly standards. "Purple Carnival", Barnum and B, Ringling Brothers. That was it. You played your standard marches. And the people loved it. Now everything is showtime, drop your instrument and whatever. I remember when I was in school, wasn't no such thing as dropping your instrument and dancing and flare. Doc Foster once told us, you can do anything you can do, as long as you can play while doing it. If you can't play while doing it, then shut up. And then we also had these other traditions and such, and anyone that ever come through The 100 will always say this one thing. When you in a road trip, this whole thing about, we didn't play CP time. There was no such thing as Colored folk time with Doc Foster. I don't care where you were, anywhere in the United States we traveled, he had this thing, and he would always said, we're gonna leave at such and such time, and if you not there, I take it you made other arrangements. And he held to it. We have left a plenty folk on the road, if you were not at your appointed place at the appointed time. And guys look at that right now, you don't have to worry about somebody who come through The 100 about them being on time. To this day.

R: Well, I'm kind of interested and could you speak a little bit more about the influence that the band had on the entire school, in the sense?

F: Well, you have to understand, the band was the major attraction and fundraiser. Especially since the football team was no longer winning under Jake Gaither. But during the time of Jake Gaither and Doc Foster they had a saying that FAMU was the greatest show on earth, combination of football and the band. And of course, the band was my job. That was my work studies. Most folk don't know that. They don't do it anymore but that was my job. Every two weeks, picked up my work studies check. Now if you wasn't in the number, in other words actually marching—you could not be an alternate and still get paid. You had to be actually on the field. And see, every year we had this tradition at the end of pre-drill, it's called the shaking of the tree. And the shaking of the tree is when the director stands up in the little observation post, and he call every individual by name to their post. And see, during my time, my freshman year, we were marching about 225 people, and yet there was a little bit about 400 people in the band. So you had to make that number. And the way the phrase go, when the tree shake, only the strong survive and the weak should fade by the wayside. So if you made the shaking of the tree, you were doing something. And see, my freshman year I made it, and that was one of the proudest moments—when you hear your name called and you run out to your spot. And about three weeks into the year, 'cause I was playing baritone at that time, one of the seniors who had come back to school late, **Larry Ossen**, came back and took my position. So now I'm on the sideline, I'm an alternate. And Prof. Bing came to me and said, Francis, you

know I think if you switch to tuba, I think you could march. I said, no problem. So I'm a history major. So Prof. Bing was tutoring me on the side, and made the transition from baritone to tuba. The section leader, **Leevee Giggard**, was tutoring me. And my roommate, **Ricky Lumpkin**, who played tuba, was tutoring me. I played treble clef baritone. I didn't read bass clef. So I had to transpose all the music. Kinda good, because by the time you transpose all the music from bass clef to treble, you basically have the thing memorized. But it's a whole different registry. And in order to get the slot, you have to challenge the person who has that slot. And it was a guy who was a senior, tuba player, who, you know, when you get to be a senior, I could take this or leave it. And he wasn't kinda holding up to his bargain. And Prof. Bing wanted me to take his slot. And the tradition at FAM, and I don't know if they still do it, but at the end of practice, you point out the person you want to challenge. And then all eyes go on you, the whole 100. Everybody take a knee to the sideline. And the requirement is that you put a snare drummer right there on the fifty and the two of you do the entire show by yourselves. And then the section gets to vote as to who did it the best. And you talking about something nerve-wracking. And you've got the entire band watching you perform, you're doing the entire show from rattling in, and the thing is, not even playing cadence, all they doing is [banging on the table, as a metronome] keeping a beat on the sideline. You do the dance routine, you do the downfield march, you play the concert piece. Just the two of you. And at the end, and I won. And at least for two weeks I was a legend within the freshman class 'cause I took out a senior. [Laughter]

R: And can you briefly talk a little bit more about the band director, Mr. Foster? And I guess your interactions with him that you had, that you can remember?

F: Actually, not much. Doc Foster was head of the music program; he ran the show. His nickname was The Law. L-A-W. And that's --[Laughter]--so what he said, went. And if he put down an edit. But he had all these directors, Charles Bing, which was the cousins of Nat Adderley and Cannonball, this is their cousin. He was in the band with them, played trombone. And **Leonard Buoy**, who was assistant band director. Leonard Buoy come out of east Texas, but Leonard Buoy went to graduate school and has his master's degree in music from Yale. And actually played first chair at Yale, and the guy who was playing second chair to Leonard Buoy, out of FAMU, was Doc Severinsen, who did the tonight show band for Johnny Carson. [Laughter] So those are the guys I'm dealing with. Doc Foster run the show but these are guys who also—they instructors at FAM, but they also FAMU grads. And that's where it sits today. One of my classmates is a brass instructor, Dr. Longineu Parsons. And they didn't know we were trying to do this big band jazz festival over here so I contacted Longineu about, okay, who I need to talk to with the jazz ensemble at FAM, see if we can recruit 'em. And he gave me this name, well, golly, got somebody new. And then Longineu said, nah, man, that's **Gate Man**. We don't remember names, everybody had a nickname, and so Gate Man runs the jazz program now. [Laughter] And it's funny, and another classmate and frat brother of mine is chairman of the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California, Dr. Ron McCurdy, from Belle Glade. He did this piece, "12 Moods for Jazz", Langston Hughes was at the

University of North Florida, so I met him up there earlier and went in the back, in the dressing room, and first thing he do is call out my old nickname and I call out his old nickname, which was Black Cheese, Muckman. [Laughter] And all of his fellow musicians, **everybody's going**, "Dr. McCurdy?" Well you home, now.

[Laughter]

F: And I guess you talked about, how did you get the opportunity to be recruited? 'Cause you talked about being able to try out your, before getting to FAM for the band.

F: I applied. And just like everybody else, and the thing is, I really never thought I could make it. However, one of the things that had happened earlier in high school, you know, you go to district competitions and whatever. And we would also see the directors at FAM. And they were always checking you out from the time you in the ninth grade on up. They knew who could play and from where. But my junior year, I thought I would just go ahead and quit the band and play football. But my mom participated in the band parent association and she kinda encouraged me to stay with it because there was a FAM grad by the name of Dr. Berry, and Dr. Berry was the band director at Bethune-Cookman. And he had inquired through my band director about who's this young man playing baritone, and that there's a possibility he may be interested in me. And the band director shared that with my mom. And so it was no quitting then. And of course that's where my dad and both my mom wanted me to go, Bethune-Cookman. He did not want me to go to that heathen school that didn't have chapel on Sunday.

[Laughter]

R: So, you kind of mentioned it, but how did the band, The Marching 100, complement football during that time period that you were there, or that you can speak on, even prior to you?

F: Well it was, of course the halftime show, once nobody leaves their seats during the halftime. But we were a totally different operation. Sometime the football team would go somewhere and we would go elsewhere. We did a lot of pro games, and that sort of thing. We did TV commercials, I participated in the Coca-Cola commercial. Oddly enough, they had to pay us all union wages because a third of the band was part of the musician's union, and they couldn't get around it, so they couldn't pay them and not pay the rest of us. That was a good day [Laughter], that was a real good day. And like I said, well, for instance, you at University of Florida, back then we did the Gator Growl every year. We were one of the featured entertainers at Gator Growl. And we would do the parade, football team would be somewhere and we would be in Gainesville. And then also, you know different other functions. Matter of fact one of the things that we did, and I can't remember what country, but there was some country that had just come out of the colonial period and they were a new nation, and we did the official recording of their anthem. Most people think it's that country playing, and it's actually us at FAMU. Did the official recording.

R: And just to clear up for people that might have a misconception, The Marching 100 is always 100 people marching?

F: No, it had 100 back in, maybe the [19]40s, but in my time it was 225, 250. Some years back we had gotten as high as 400, and now we're back to around the 250,

and I think we've been given this latest experience with the—well, not experience—we lost our way. And a young man lost his life through foolishness. And the rules are changed. And I don't think The 100 will ever get up to be a 400 people, I think we're gonna cap it out at roughly around 250 to 275, 'cause actually at 400 it was unmanageable.

R: And does all 250, 275, do all members take the field, or--

F: Yeah. But see when it was four hundred and some odd people on the field, transitioning from one position to another, all of it was slow to me, probably it took--and that style, it's supposed to be showtime. It's not military, or whatever, or drum and bugle. And the thing is, if you really want to entertain people, you can't just be trans--it can't take you three or four minutes to transition from one position to another. And given our way of doing a show, you basically within the HBCU bands, you basically have three different styles. FAMU we have our signature piece. And the other signature program is Southern. And then a way, well back in my time there was Tennessee State. Now it's more like Jackson State and others. But if you look at what FAMU does, that's one single way. Southern has their program with the rock, the head thing. And then all the other HBCUs tend to be more of a standard showtime. 'Cause if you see Jackson State, Alabama A&M, Tuskegee, that's basically the same show. Oddly enough, and Prairie View A&M, and oddly enough, a lot of those band directors at those institutions are FAMU grads. But they know better to take our traditions and take 'em elsewhere. So they tend to do a standard HBCU program. But you do not do the point and drive. Matter of fact we just issued a movie called *Point and Drive*.

R: What year did you graduate from Florida A&M?

F: [19]76. And that's when I was commissioned.

R: And what was your major at Florida A&M?

F: It changed to political science, public administration.

R: And what was your life briefly once you got out of Florida A&M?

F: Well I was commissioned lieutenant, United States Army. I was in ROTC in college. And I served that **duty** with the Second Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas. I had a Chaparral unit, which is a Navy Sidewinder, low-altitude missile system, on a track vehicle. My claim to fame is I killed a herd of cows.

R: [Laughter] Okay, interesting. And I guess moving into your involvement here with the Lincolnville Museum and Cultural Center, how did you get to St. Augustine? And your sense of working here and being a part of the community here.

F: Well I'm from Green Cove Springs, and a year ago I was participating here at the Lincolnville Festival. I have a company called Lycurgus, after my family name on my mother's side. And what I do is supplement the teaching of African American Florida history, for school kids. And I was approached by **Gail** and **Floyd**, who are member of the board here. And of course, I knew Otis Mason, former chair, since the time I could walk. And what they were doing here. And they asked me if I would get involved and I actually came over and did a couple of workshops, tried to put some policies in place, procedures and that sort of thing. And kinda got hooked.

R: And what year did you start with the board here?

F: Roughly around December of last year. And actually I'm not a member of the board, I'm just a volunteer. They asked me to be the interim director, but I'm just, really just a staffer. And I'm trying to kinda serve that role as a staffer. 'Cause my background is, like I said, in administration. I've worked for twenty-some-odd years with the Florida Department of Labor. Matter of fact my last job with the state I was the Senior Policy Analyst for Welfare Reform for the state of Florida. Going back to Clintons and Balanced Budget Amendment. The Personal Responsibility and Reconciliation Act of 1996. It's one of those strange things, people don't know that welfare reform, and the budget that was balanced, was balanced on the backs of poor people. Maybe it's not so much of a secret, but that was a different time.

R: Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

F: Yeah, you can tell I'm still kinda angry about it, right? Well I, yeah. Because with the Florida Department of Labor, we had to mix some things. For instance, welfare reform, or welfare, at the time used to be AFDC, Aid to Families with Dependent Children. All of a sudden, now we go into work investment. So, welfare and public assistance was run through the Department of Children and Family, or **HRS**. Work requirement and job training, that's through the Department of Labor. The Department of Labor no longer exists. But that time, we had to fuse, at the state level, the two different approaches because one of the requirements in the welfare reform was the work requirement. The persons who receiving assistance. AFDC was, it wasn't good. Let me explain why. Because you had the Reagan administration at the time talking about welfare

cheats and that sort of thing. Believe me, no one wants to be on welfare, no one. And the problem was is that with these distance centers in place, it did not encourage people to come off of welfare. If you were on welfare and you needed assistance you had the ability to go out and get yourself a part-time job to supplement your income, whatever you made from that part-time job, or that supplemental job was reduced from your AFDC check. So how does that encourage you to go out and do better? If whatever you're doing better is gonna take from what you already had. It didn't make sense. One of the best things we did in the welfare reform was that we allowed people to have the opportunity to do better, and we did not punish them for trying to do better. Because if you can increase your income and eventually you do no longer qualify for welfare and we can take you off that roll. Another thing we did was, under the new rules, and we surveyed the population to find out, okay, what can we really do where you will not need this assistance. And those folk told us, well if you can take care of my kids, and their medical needs. I see Hilary Clinton advertising that she worked on this child insurance and whatever. It happened under her husband administration and she wasn't there. That's what the folk who are receiving public assistance told us. If you can take care of my kids and their medical needs. So we set up this insurance program. And people dropped off the rolls. We also gave them the opportunity, especially in the state of Florida, if you really need this, take it. If you don't, because there's now a five-year limitation that you can receive it, so bank it. We'll put it in the bank for you. So if you absolutely need it, it'll be there when you need it. And people did that. We dropped the welfare rolls within three

months, about sixty thousand people. On that one promise alone. And see, I did the planning grant for the state of Florida. And also when we did the application to the feds, unlike any other state. A lot of states took about two or three years to get their act together. Here in the state of Florida, we took a different tact. The feds said, we want you to do this, this, this, this, and this. In our application back to 'em, we regurgitated what they wanted. We said, we will do this, this, this, and this. Whether it was the fact that we had the infrastructure in place or not.

Therefore, we received our planning dollars at least a year before any other state in the nation. We had forty million, right off the bat. We used that forty million to actually plan and put our infrastructure, while the other states around was arguing with the feds as to how they were gonna do it. And we took twenty of that million, and put it on the street, mimicking the local private **industry** councils and work-force boards, to put their plans in place, at the local level. And we mimic the districts of the local community colleges. And that's how we pulled it off. Now believe me, when **the fall of** [19]98 roll around, everybody had their fingers crossed because that was the deadline date when all of this was gonna kick in, and making sure that that system actually worked, and making sure that folk not kicked off the road that shouldn't be, and you don't know if there may be riots in the street. I mean, we were pretty confident that we had our act together, and October one roll around. Move quickly, no problem. The infrastructure held, and it was scary because the infrastructure, especially knowing the numbers, the biggest problem I ever had, the state of Florida had this old mainframe system that they maintained out at the Norwood Center, which was an old mall in

Tallahassee. And we wanted to move to a PCA-based system, so that we can make sure we added the data and be able to track and maneuver the information. This old mainframe system was dealing with cobalt, and all that. And you only had a few people that knew how to manipulate that stuff. But if you can't control your numbers and own your data, you can't manage a thing. And that system was in the way. I along with some other workers **with a specialist** said okay, well let's evaluate this thing. And we made the recommendation for the PC-based system. Up and down the line everybody approved. Except when it hit the politicians, especially those in Tallahassee who had juice with the governor's office, our recommendations were rejected because we would put too many old Cobalt programmers in the clerical staff that worked at that center in Tallahassee out of jobs. It cost us six million to maintain that facility. It was gonna cost us four million to do the transition to a PC-based system, which would then cost us three million. I mean, do the math. The decision was made to maintain our old six-million-dollar operation simply because a local legislator in Tallahassee who had certain connections blocked 'cause we were going to take certain jobs away from his constituency. I mean, that's the way the state government run, and it's frustrating, because that's not the best use of money. We're supposed to be doing the best that we can do with public funds. But state and federal government never work that way.

R: I guess that's kind of getting to and circling around back to your involvement in joining as a staffer with Lincolnville Museum and Cultural Center. Can you speak

a little bit about the history of Lincolnville, and kind of how that influenced you into joining, maybe?

F: Well, I'm from Green Cove Springs, and St. Augustine has been central to all of us here in Florida. I mean, it's the nation's oldest city, but coming over here from the time that I was a kid, to Butler Beach and whatever, that's the only place that we can go. Plus, I have relatives here, and that sort of thing. So you always visit St. Augustine. And as far as the African-American community, this was always the hub. This is where you can come and get entertained, this is where you have, you know, you don't have anything going on over in Clay County. In Clay County, back in the day when I was a little boy, was a dry county. We had this thing called going across the river. This is the only place you can buy liquor [Laughter] on the weekend. So everybody came over here to St. John's County. So when I ran into the Floyds at the Lincolnville Festival, just was like, well, we need help to maintain this museum. Fine. I'm not into the cultural thing. My thing is writing grants or dealing with roads and sewer systems and that sort of thing. But let's give it a shot, because basically structure, and policies, and procedures, was all the same. The bottom line is you have to put in the methods and just follow the rules. And that's where we're at. We want to build up the process of how they're operating. That it's backed up with sound, standard, best practices with an accounting program and that sort of thing. That way, when you tell the story of Lincolnville Museum, especially to feds and state, you can make yourself a little bit more attractive for public funding. And plus the fact I love history. So that's the other end of it. And let me put it this way, when I was with the Regional Planning

Council, and they were having the issues up there at American Beach, and some other projects up in Jacksonville. And I remember a coworker of mine, a guy by the name of Calvin Burning. He eventually became the exec director of the Metropolitan Planning Group under Mayor Hazouri for Jacksonville. Calvin and I are fraternity brothers. We go all the way back to my junior year in college, when I was at FAM and he was at Fayetteville State. And we were going through the summer program at Fort Bragg, and he was one of the ones that come on to Fort Bragg and pick us up. Now he's here in Jacksonville with the Regional Planning Council and I was with the Urban League, and eventually, it was he the one that recruited me and got me at the Regional Planning Council. While he come out of Fayetteville State, Calvin has a master's degree in urban planning from Georgia Tech. And Calvin say, "Gene, we beat 'em with the rules." And we had this issue of Jacksonville routing these high tension wires through the Black neighborhood. Okay, and there were much more logical routes that they could've taken that didn't affect people. It may have cost a little bit of money but the impact on neighborhoods, 'cause it's something to have a high tension electrical wire running behind your house, and on a foggy day all you hear is that crackle and pop. And you don't know what the effect of that type radiation or whatever, on kids playing around that stuff. In Jacksonville, they wanted to run this stuff straight through somebody's neighborhood. And while Calvin and I working for the Regional Planning Council, we were able to make the noise in the right places. I guess you can say behind the scenes or whatever, and got to the right ears. You need to rise up and get some opposition to this. And we still got to

some of the right ears and got it re-routed. The only problem that we had was, I remember we were doing one of the hearings, somebody asked one of the members of the neighborhood association, "well, how did y'all find out about this?" And one of the people said, "well, Gene and Calvin told us." [laughter] And oh, man. Oh, boy. But still, it got done.

R: And I guess, have a couple more questions in regards to the museum, how can the community, or I guess I should say, how can the public support the museum?

F: By visiting. And supporting the activities. But first of all the museum has a position itself where it's attractive to the community. Lincolnville is an old, Black neighborhood that's now in transition. Lincolnville will not look this way ten years from now. Well, it was a Black community when I was growing up; Lincolnville is no longer a Black community. So we have to maintain that history. Part of it is that you have to tell the full story and make it attractive, not only for the residents of Lincolnville and St. John's County to come visit, but anyone from any part of the United States who is concerned about African-American history to come here. So we have to tell that full 450-year history. And we've got the material here. It's just presenting it right, displaying it right, and making sure that the public know that we exist. So that's where we're at. First of all, to take this facility away from just being this little local community history, and it's only a three-part process, at least what we advocating. You come in, and we gonna tell you about Lincolnville, and that rich history. But then we expand that history of Lincolnville to all of St. Augustine, West Aug., the western part of St. John's County, Switzerland, Hastings, Spuds, Armstrong, all of that. And then we take you to,

say, east Florida, of course historically east Florida is St. John's County. Florida only had two counties, Escambia and St. John's. And we keep it to that subject matter, now we have told the whole history about east Florida. From the Suwannee River all the way to Key West. That is the St. John's County story. And the population of folk and their families, they want to know that history. So it's not just talking about foremostly in the Civil Rights Movement. What we gonna talk about—first and second Seminole War, want to talk about World War I, World War II. We'll talk about Reconstruction, we talk about education, and the religious background. You got the book about Sitiki, who grew up right here, one of the early slaves of the—what's the nursing home down here?

R: Buckingham Smith.

F: Buckingham Smith. I mean, come on, how many communities can look at their history that way, and have that documentation?

R: And so speak a little bit about the history that people can find when they walk into the doors.

F: Well, first thing you're gonna see is some artifacts from some of the renovations of houses, plates and that sort of thing that was found in some location. You're also gonna see one of our prized possession, which is the piano that young Ray Charles used to bang on when he was here as a student at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind. And then the major prize, that I think is our greatest asset is that arrest card, from the city of St. Augustine when Martin Luther King was arrested. No one else, you can't even find a photograph of that. But we have the card, we have the actual fingerprints. And we can tell that story. And then we can

link it, [coughs] because just right outside these doors, we can take you to spots. This is what happened here, this is what happened here. So you can see all that. And then all of it kinda comes together here. And if you wanna know about the Spanish buried in the early—you got Fort Mose to the north; no other community has that civil rights history. You've got the Fortieth Accord, in Dr. Hayling's old office. Nobody has that. The conflict between the French, and the Spanish, and we take 'em down to Fort Matanzas, nobody has—all this is within a twenty-mile radius. That is New World history, within a twenty-mile radius. And this could be the edifice where we tell that story.

R: What's in store for the future of the museum here?

F: Well, we're gonna work on the infrastructure of the building 'cause this building was built back in 1927. The museum itself, the building is a museum, and we will work on the redesign. The first floor will be used more for a gallery and community spacing. Upstairs, we'll also make space and renovation, to house the permanent exhibit of Journey: 450 Years of African-American Experience, which is now housed in warehouses. We also want to put in a two-hundred seat theater, upstairs. So we will bring the heating and air condition of the museum quality. And this will be a place where we will say the Lincolnville Museum and Cultural Center will be the preeminent institution for the preservation of African-American history for Florida's historic coast. Period. That tells the whole story right there.

R: And lastly, closing out, and you mentioned as a child visiting Lincolnville and St. Augustine and Butler Beach. Can you kind of reflect on that time period and what

you remember about Lincolnville, St. Augustine, during your time visiting as a child?

F: Well, I played ball over here in little league since the second grade. This was always the place to come . Mr. Vick is an Otis Mason. During the time of segregation, they were the referees for all the Black high schools here in northeast Florida. Well when you're talking about Crescent City, Palatka, Daytona, Green Cove Springs. They were it. These were St. John's County residents. Football coach at Dunbar, which was Coach Fisher, from right here in St. Augustine, we got him off the staff over here at Murray. So those Murray grads kinda spread out all over the territory. And then you had that relationship between all of the African-American teachers from those districts that goes back forever. Another thing that we don't talk about is Harry T. Moore. And a lot of the meetings of those teachers and educators, guess where they were held? They were held right here in this same building. Well we know about **Meg Everts**, but we don't know about Harry Moore, and how he and his wife Harriette was blown to smithereens down there in Mims, working trying to get equal pay for Black educators. So that's part of that rich history. And we have it housed here. And if someone wants to know about it, this is where they can come. And then this other thing, I'm sitting in this room and I'm looking at these pictures of the residents of American Beach. And also, I've done some work with the Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor. And you think about these relationships with the community. And part of the discussion we have with the folk at American Beach, you one of our sister neighborhoods. Franklinton, which most people had never

heard of. Butler Beach in St. Augustine, Bethune Beach down there south of Daytona, New Smyrna. Putnam County, with Palatka. Two months ago, I did a little thing over at the Putnam County Historical Society. And I reminded them that Palatka was founded by a Black man. Course, well, we've never heard of that. Okay, well, no, you won't find it in the book but you look at your comprehensive plan. I remember seeing this back in the [19]80s when we were working on the year 2000 plan, that Palatka was founded at the Indian Crossing, the St. John's River by mulatto Indian trader by the name of Josiah Gray. Hence, one drop of Black blood, this was a mixed guy. Palatka was founded by a Black man. You need to know that. And think about a Black kid growing up in Palatka, knowing that. If I knew half the stuff I know now when I was growing up, I'd be a whole different man. And you feel like you missed out on something, you've been denied something. And the family history I was telling you about, the Lycurgus. Well I knew part of it, but think out how certain things would not have affected me as much as they did in high school, and college. If I had known my full family's history. That's what it's all about, it's just about building up someone's pride. But that's what we can teach kids here. And it's not just the Black kids no more, it's everybody. If you know the real history, you treat people differently.

R: You talked about playing ball growing up at the Links, can you speak about what that was like growing up, and maybe a little bit about Mr. Vickers, and those individuals that you mentioned?

F: [Laughter] Well it was fun. This was back in the day before risk management. You didn't worry about insurance. Every little town had a team. Far as

integration, they had a little league in Green Cove, for Whites only. They had about four or five teams. And they played each other, they had their own specific ballfield. We played in this place called The Hole, which was a old brickyard, but it was hollowed out and almost made a natural amphitheater, so it looked like a ballfield. But that's where we played. And matter of fact that's where Augusta Savage used to dig up her clay when she was a girl to make her sculpture, in that same location where I grew up playing little league ball. But you had people like Oliver Coleman and Deacon Bull Westbrook put us in the back of their truck and we would go from Green Cove to Palatka, to St. Augustine. We played anywhere between way cross Georgia in Hawthorne, little town—I tell one of my friends, I don't know if you know him, Curtis Richardson, he's a member of the city council, up in Tallahassee, former member of the legislature up in Gadsden County. We got a picture of me, Curtis, all of us from Green Cove, Westbrook. The Green Cove Phillies. And Tony Battle, all those, that little league team. And now you look at us now, we all grown men, we all over the place. But when we get together it's like, hey, man, I don't remember losing a game. We played everywhere, but we didn't lose. But having that group, and knowing guys and watching how they've grown, in their careers, and their families, and the fact that we've known each other since we were five and six years old, and think about how much we benefitted from the Deacon Westbrooks and the Oliver Colemans. And them guys didn't have to take that time with us, but they did. And it wasn't a whole lot of money like they do now, 'cause Black kids played baseball then. They don't do it anymore, because everything now is corporate, you got the

travelling teams and whatever. And that whole concept, what you mean travelling teams? Well we going down to Orlando. Aw, we did that. [Laughter] That was natural, that wasn't something special. We didn't have to stand on the road begging for dollars [Laughter] to be a part of a travelling team. We were a team; we were the only one. And that was it, you travelled. Now, kids only play within their town and then they do the all-star team and they got the little travelling team, and then you look around and if your parents don't have the time or the money to shell out so you could make that trip down to Sanford or Orlando to play, you don't—or, it's just funny how much things cost now, or how we structure stuff. It's no longer fun. It's almost like work. And I was talking to one of the parents the other day—well, we need to raise some money so our kids can go travelling. Okay, where you going? Well we just got this game up in Jacksonville. That was a regular place when we played in Mixon Town, and Northside. And Mandarin down the orange picker road. That's who we played every week. Now it's a special event. Don't understand it.

R: Well, we're coming up on an hour forty, and I guess I just want to end up with a last question, is anything that you would like to share that we might not have covered, about Lincolntonville and your connection here to the museum?

F: No, no, we kinda talked about more than I anticipated. And I apologize earlier, I kinda—

R: No, you're fine.

F: I think I do want to say something about my parents though.

R: Yes, please share.

F: Because, you know, lucky, fortunate. My dad didn't have much, my mom didn't have much. But everything there was to see, we saw. I remember going to up north with my daddy on vacation in ninth grade. 'Cause he lived up there when he was a kid and I'm sitting up in Club Harlem, in Atlantic City, and Sammy Davis Jr. is on the stage. And I'm sitting there drinking my Shirley Temple with my dad, and I'm thinking that's a long way from Green Cove Springs. And oddly enough, that family tradition started when my brother Ken was in high school and his junior class was supposed to take a trip from Green Cove to Washington, D.C. And apparently everybody didn't get their act together so the trip was cancelled. And my dad put my brother in the car and said, let's go. And they went to D.C., Philly, Atlantic City, New York, come back. And then when my brother Wayne time came [bangs on table repeatedly], and then when my time came [bangs on table repeatedly]. That was my dad. And my mom, same thing. We sent her to the New York World's Fair in [19]64. And I remember when she retired, this is the saying. My mom worked for the health department for thirty-three years. And when she retired, we had a function for her at the Holiday Inn in Orange Park. And all the dignitaries from the health department was talking about how she came to work there with a three-month-old baby. And she worked there for thirty-three years. And that three-month-old baby was me. And she started work there as a janitor making fifty cents an hour. Sad part is, my background is workforce development and education, employment and training. And I just happened to know at the time of my birth that the minimum wage was seventy-five cents an hour. You cheated my mom out of a quarter, a third of her salary. So I'm sitting

there on the desk, and I told my older brother, hey Ken, you know, they took a third of mom's salary. And my brother said, leave it alone Gene, leave it alone. [Laughter] 'Cause frankly I wanted to tell 'em about themselves, since we sitting up here bragging. So I modified my comments. Well we sent my mom, along with her cousin, Margaret, out to California out to visit another cousin. And this was the best thing that ever happened because we sent her out there and she had a good time. And the day my dad was supposed to pick her up from the airport, we got a call, and it was my mom, and she said, "I'm in Las Vegas and everything look like Christmas. I'll see y'all in a couple of more days." [Laughter] And my dad started cussing. It was the first time I ever heard him cuss. [Laughter] But that was my parents, and **you take all**, my mom was gonna go. And she deserved that trip, too. But that's one our favorite family quotes. And everything look like Christmas. [Laughter]

R: And that's where it came from.

F: Yep.

R: Well thank you for sitting down with us, well with me, I'm sorry, and anything else before we hit stop?

F: No, that's it.

R: Okay, thank you.

F: Thanks.

[End of interview]

Audit edited by: Heather Gonyeau, February 21, 2019

Final edit by: Ryan Morini, March 2, 2019