

DTB 008 Philip Stiell
Down the Bay Oral History Project (DTB), Acc. 757
Interviewed by Kern Jackson on February 25, 2022
1 hour, 1 minute audio recording • 30 page transcript

Abstract: In this interview, Philip Stiell is interviewed by Kern Jackson about his memories and reflections on the Down the Bay neighborhood of Mobile. He relates some of his family history in relation to the neighborhood and wider Mobile, and reflects on the values that were central to his upbringing Down the Bay. Mr. Stiell attended St. Peter Claver for elementary school, and shares some memories of that experience. He discusses the ways that Catholic members of the Black community in Mobile fought for integration in the church, and also offers some reflections on the impact that urban renewal had on the Down the Bay community. Mr. Stiell also discusses the boundaries of Down the Bay, and considers some of the possible debates involved. He shares memories of some of the businesses that were in the neighborhood when he was growing up, and also shares some thoughts on Creole history and the relationship between the Creole community and the Down the Bay community.

The Down the Bay Oral History Project focuses on the historic Down the Bay neighborhood on the south side of Mobile, Alabama. Led by Drs. Philip Carr and Kern Jackson of the University of South Alabama, in collaboration with the McCall Library, the project took shape in conjunction with archaeological mitigation work for the I-10 bridge expansion. Down the Bay is a historically Black and Creole neighborhood, and a central focus of the project has been to document the constant threat of gentrification and the legacy of urban renewal.

Preface: This is a transcript of an oral history recording archived at the McCall Library of the University of South Alabama. Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word which has been minimally edited for readability.



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DTB 008 Philip Stiel
Interviewed February 25, 2022

This is a verbatim transcript of an oral history interview recording, composed and formatted in accordance with the McCall Library transcription style guide.

Verbatim transcription is a style of representing as closely as possible the exact wording and phrasing of the speakers on the recording, though false starts, repetitious phrases, and other minor edits have been made as needed only for the sake of clarity and readability. Readers of this transcript are strongly encouraged to listen to the recording.

Please note that if any text is **bolded** in the transcript, this indicates uncertainty of either spelling or accuracy of transcription regarding what was said. Italics indicate emphasis, or are applied to titles and similar proper nouns.

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DTB 008

Narrator: Philip Stiell

Interviewer: Kern Jackson

Date: February 25, 2022

J: But Philip, I did want to thank you for taking time; I know this isn't your regular day to be here and all.

S: No, it's my pleasure. My pleasure.

J: And, if you would, for the purposes of the tape, just tell us, you know, your full name.

S: Sure, it's Philip, with one L, Broadus, B-R-O-A-D-U-S, Stiell, S-T-I-E-L-L. Philip Broadus Stiell.

J: Who was a Broadus? Where did the Broadus come from?

S: Yeah, my mother is a Broadus. So, you may know, or you may remember—well, I don't think you were from here—but there was a Broadus Barbershop on Washington Avenue. That's my grandfather.

J: What was the address of the barbershop?

S: Now, that I can't tell you. But it was right on the corner of Washington Avenue and Savannah Street, so we can figure it out. It's—the big church is there now. Bethel?

J: Bethel AME?

S: Mmhm.

J: There was a barbershop there.

S: Mmhm.

J: And so, in your lifetime, when was it there?

S: Well, up until—I guess my grandfather passed when I was 16. So up until—well, I was 16 in [19]72, so probably late [19]60s. Broadus Barbershop.

J: And one of the reasons—what was his name?

S: Alfred. Alfred Broadus.

J: So, did the barbershop face Washington Avenue, or did it face Savannah?

S: It faced Washington Avenue, mmhm. And so it was his house, and then he built the shop on next to his house. And before it was a barbershop, it was actually a—I think he sold barbeque. Yeah, they used to call him “Tough.” I don’t know if that was a reflection of his barbeque or—[Laughter]—or what, but they called him Tough.

J: Now, was you mamma’s daddy, Mr. Broadus—what was Mr. Broadus’ first name?

S: Alfred.

J: Alfred. Mr. Alfred Broadus, was he originally from Mobile, in that area?

S: Mhm. Yeah, yeah. His dad’s name was Rezmus. R-E-Z-M-U-S or R-A-S-M-U-S. And they lived on South Carolina Street in Mobile. So, yeah. Yeah, he’s a native Mobilian. Married a lady, Felicia La Lande from Mon Louis Island.

J: Same—like, Old Man La Lande used to live on Washington Avenue across from where this church is? You know, on that corner where Sheila White’ brother live now?

S: Yeah. Same family. Same family.

J: Same family.

S: He would’ve been my mother’s cousin. Yeah.

J: And Mr. Alfred. Your grandmother’s name, his wife’s name, was what?

S: My grandfather’s wife’s—Felicia, Felicia La Lande.

J: That was Alfred’s wife?

S: Mhm. His first wife, she died when my mother was young. And he remarried Thelma Johnson. Do you know Jimmy Johnson? James Johnson, from Birmingham? Yeah, that was—.

J: Yeah, Jimmy Johnson. Didn’t he have a son named Jimmy Johnson?

S: Well, there is a Jimmy Johnson, but this one is different. So, he moved to Birmingham. He married—

J: This would be James Leslie's friend.

S: Yeah, yeah! Yeah, that's right. That's right. Yeah. Him and Red, big friends. Him and Red, my daddy; all them were good friends.

J: And your father and mom's name is?

S: George Tatum Stiell and Blanche Broadus Stiell.

J: I've been meaning to talk to one of you, or your brothers, for years because I've always felt like the cadre of y'all, from Anthony on up. Because I only know Anthony from my age group. You know, I didn't know y'all until I was—shit, till I was old! [Laughter] But I've always sort of—because of the shared kinship with Catholic Church and everything—I've always sort of admired all of y'all because y'all stayed in Mobile—for the most part. I mean, y'all went away and came back, but for the most part y'all stayed, and continued the civic community and church work that your parents did.

S: Yeah, I mean—yeah, we practice what we been taught. And, you know, they were involved, highly involved.

J: And I'm obsessing; this is interesting—this is the Down the Bay Project, to talk about the fact they going put in this bridge over the bay. It's a 15, 20-year project. But it gives us opportunity to talk about *other* things on another project. As you know, in Africatown I'm working with people who were reared in the four churches out there. And who all went to County. This comes up all the time. Yet, we continue to practice what we were taught. And since we're sitting at the southwest campus of Bishop State, and thinking about the branch and how the branch is an extension of that generation's—what they were taught: I'm trying to nail down what the hell y'all were taught. Right? Because you—it's something, because it's something that's being lived. But I'm not too sure anybody's ever written it down.

S: Right. Right.

J: You know? And it speaks to your momma and daddy's values. Right?

S: Mmhm.

J: And whatever goes on the tape, I'll give you a copy of, and you can tell me, like, if you don't want something in it, or if you—

S: That's fine. Yeah.

J: Or if you want to redact stuff or whatever.

S: Right.

J: But what always struck me was, okay, the generation of your parents and my grandparents, they were race people. They did stuff fully conscious of, like, kicking a can down the road for the race.

S: Mmhm.

J: You know? [Laughter] And that's a heavy, heavy burden! Because their parents wanted them to have better.

S: Right.

J: They didn't want them—and they wanted them to be able to provide for their children, and expand the world for their children in ways I don't think that their parents could even wrap their heads around.

S: Right. Right.

J: So, to sort of nail what those values are, of what was taught to you Down the Bay, not only through your momma's and them people, but your dad's people; I'm just sort of curious about.

S: Yeah. So you know, I think what we were taught—well, let me tell you what I saw, right? So, I saw my daddy involved in every activity at church. I saw my daddy *regularly* at my school, right? Whether it was to consult on how we were doing, or whether the convent needed painting, or, you know, the church needed sweeping out. So, I saw my daddy regularly involved. They say there are three kinds of people: there are people who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who wonder what happened, right? So, he was one of those

people who made things happen. And when something needed to be done, he went out and did it.

J: Yeah, I don't ever remember Mr. Stiell ever being a big talker about it.

S: No—

J: Not, not like casually. I just remember seeing him *doing* stuff.

S: Yeah, yeah. He got out and did stuff. Now, as he, when he got older, he would talk about some of the things he did. You know, not only at the church, but at the post office and how he—what he did to bring about change there at the post office. But in terms of the church and the school, you know, he gave the impression that it was ours. And because it was ours, we were responsible for maintaining it, keeping it going, being involved. You know, we had—somebody had to do it, and it was going to be—and when he wasn't able to do it, then it had to be us. So, you know, that's what I saw, and so that's what I learned.

J: Mhm. I never heard it put so cogently before. Because that's what we refer to as, I don't know, church work, or civic work. Like, civic work and church work overlap; they become one and the same. Which school was that that he would come to?

S: St. Peter Claver.

J: Okay.

S: Mhm.

J: Okay. Years ago, I interviewed Edward Johnson's mother.

S: Okay, yeah.

J: My, I don't know, great aunt or whatever she was to me. It was always weird—

S: Ms. Mildred.

J: Ms. Mildred. She was so close to my grandmother's age, I could never wrap my head around generation. And I just can remember her spending a lot of time in the church. But, anyway, I interviewed her one time. She loved Peter Claver.

S: Oh yeah, yeah.

J: I mean, with a passion. And was there as frequently as she could be.

S: And so, I mean, I talked about my mom and dad. I mean, that was the—it wasn't just them I saw. It was Mrs. Johnson, and Mrs. Dembo, and, you know, all those good Creole Catholics Down the Bay were heavily, *heavily* involved in the church and school. And that's the legacy they left us.

J: Mhm. But Ms. Johnson wasn't without critique.

S: Well, I mean, yeah; none of us are.

J: And she was very pinpoint about the privilege of the young men compared to the privilege women received.

S: Hm. Okay.

J: In terms of the school, and how the boys were pushed. Even—[Laughter]—she would say, "Even the dumb ones." [Laughter]

S: Yeah, well now. Yeah. So, that wasn't my experience, right? I mean—

J: No, but she's like 40 or 50 years older than you.

S: Right, right, right. You know, when I was at St. Peter Claver, I think the—you know, / think the young women that we went to school with were treated well. They were recognized for their educational accomplishments. There were just as many smart girls as there were smart boys. And they were recognized for that. So, I mean, that would be *my* take on that.

J: So, you were—

S: Now, you might talk with one of them, and they say, "Oh yeah, they treated us like crap!" But—

J: Well yes; the nuns pushed the boys more is what she was trying to suggest.

S: Yeah, could be.

J: And the *parents* pushed the boys more. But getting back to Peter Claver, it just dawned on me that you saw the church come down.

S: Mhm.

J: And has anybody asked you to sort of comment on or talk about that? Because did the church—what was the impetus for the church coming down? This is not something I've ever had explained to me.

S: Yeah, so my dad, the way he explained it to me was: they knew that there was a Black church on Palmetto Street, and just four or five blocks down the street a white church, right? And so, he tells the story that they wrote a letter to the archbishop at the time. So my dad and a group of people from Peter Claver wrote a letter to the Archbishop and said, "These churches need to be combined; they don't need to be separate. We're one religion." You know, they didn't treat us well at Saint Vincent. We had to sit in the back—you know, the back pews and all that kind of stuff. And they threatened the Bishop with, that if they didn't combine the churches, that they would separate from the Archdiocese and become the first Black Catholic church of America.

J: Which eventually did happen.

S: Yeah, with the guy in Chicago, I think.

J: George Stallings.

S: Yeah, right. Right. So—

J: The Imani Temple.

S: That's right. That's right.

J: I was at the first mass.

S: Were you? Okay.

J: As a youngster. As a young adult. And it was crazy! It happened—the first mass was at Howard University.

S: Wow. Okay.

J: At the law school, in the auditorium.

S: Wow.

J: And they had a 10-year run. They had about two, three physical churches. He had issues, the priest had issues. As it turns out, he wasn't the only priest with issues.

S: Well yeah, yeah. [Laughter]

J: But yeah, get back to the story of Peter Claver. So, they asked—*they* asked! I'm fascinated; they asked to be combined.

S: They, yeah. So, Saint Peter Claver's church was not in the best of condition, right? We didn't get the kind of attention we thought we deserved from the Archdiocese, and so to rectify that, they thought that the best option was to combine the two churches. Which would, you know, give them a higher number of parishioners. More parishioners means more revenue, more support for their activities, and things like that. So, yeah. So, they requested. So, my dad, and I'm sure Mr. Johnson, and some of the other leaders of the parish at the time. Mr. Peter Smith asked—insisted; I won't say they "asked"—they insisted that they be combined with Saint Vincent.

J: And this was Bishop May?

S: Bishop May actually made the final determination to combine the two. Mmhm.

J: That's interesting. I never knew that it was the Black community's volition that caused that.

S: Yeah. And again it was because of the—they didn't feel like they were getting the level of support they needed from the Archdiocese to keep the church.

J: And there's no relationship between urban renewal and Peter Claver closing?

S: Not to my knowledge.

J: Okay. Okay.

S: Well I mean, except—so, what happened with urban renewal is they came in under the guise of improving the community, right? Which on the surface, is a good thing. What they failed to think about were some of those unintended consequences. So, they broke down the culture from Down the Bay. So, people's families—they separated families. Right? So, our families moved to Toulminville, and Maysville, right? So, they separated families, they broke down the culture of the people who were from—who had grown up Down the Bay. And so, as those things happened and new people moved in to take advantage of these newer houses, they didn't have the same background. They weren't all—there were a great deal of Catholics Down the Bay. Now there aren't so many Catholics, which is why the churches Down the Bay tend to struggle a bit.

J: All of the churches!

S: Yeah, everywhere. Yeah.

J: We, as a team, we've sort of subsumed some of Oakleigh and Oakdale into the area that we're investigating. But we counted 36 places of worship.

S: Really?

J: 36.

S: Wow, yeah.

J: Presently.

S: Wow.

J: And some of the communities are—shoot, they got a dozen folk in them? And they still trying to hold on.

S: Yeah.

J: Some of them are thriving and decided to go megachurch style. But, by large, they're disproportionately old, disproportionately elsewhere—the community inside the church lives elsewhere. So this is fascinating, because you've framed it in terms of the unintended consequences.

S: Right.

J: What happened to all the white people that was at Saint Vincent?

S: The Archdiocese built a new Saint Vincent.

J: Where is that at?

S: It is in Theodore, and a great many of them—I don't know what happened to them. They left our parish. And so, you know, the notion of there being this unified Prince of Peace, harmonious Black and white mixed-race parish quickly dissolved, and we were once again a Black parish.

J: I like to think of it as being the Coloreds.

S: [Laughter]

J: You know?

S: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

J: I never—well, yeah. That's interesting, because I had told my colleague Dr. Phil Carr—who's the archaeologist doing digs off of Conception Street where they're going to put the onramp—he's finding really interesting things.

S: Really?

J: Like, underneath all them shotgun houses that used to be on Conception Street, he's finding like a hundred and fifty years of various evolution of spaces, of those plots. But I had told him that some people had referred to that neighborhood down there as being "checkerboard" because it had—prior to urban renewal, there were white people who lived next to Black people living next to white people. This sort of thing.

S: Mmhm.

J: And specific types of folk. You were talking about the Creoles and Catholics, but also the firemen, and sort of people in those types of jobs.

S: Right, right. The Treniers and folks like that.

J: Yeah. And you used the term “split up the culture”—“split up families,” and therefore, diluting the culture.

S: Right, right.

J: That’s interesting.

S: Yeah, so I mean, split up families in terms of—you know, my cousins moved from Down the Bay to Toulminville, from Down the Bay to Birmingham. You know, that—. So when I say, “split up the families,” that’s what I’m talking about. They didn’t separate parents from children or things like that.

J: So, what—when you say Down the Bay, what are the boundaries of it to you?

S: Yeah, Down the Bay, in my mind is—on the north end is Government Street. South end is probably Baltimore Street. And then of course, there’s the bay. And then, this way was probably—I’m not sure where that western boundary would’ve been. Certainly past Broad Street, so maybe to Michigan Avenue.

J: Oh, wow!

S: Yeah.

J: Wow!

S: Mmhm, yeah. Because the other side of Michigan Avenue, in my mind, is Maysville.

J: Oh, wow! That deep west? Okay, okay.

S: Yeah, maybe Ann Street, but you know, Ann—I mean, they’re parallel. Ann is—

J: So, Oakleigh is subsumed for you in Down the Bay.

S: Oh yeah, to me there’s no difference in Oakleigh and Down the Bay.

J: Okay! All right, now. So all them cemeteries; Magnolia Cemetery and all that? All right, all right.

S: Mmhm.

- J: And—unfortunately as an interviewer, my take on stuff is biased by my Catholicism, and my high-yellowness. [Laughter]
- S: Mhm.
- J: I used to talk to a guy at CVS on—at 900 Government Street who used to work at Cox Pharmacy on Savannah Marine. And he used to tell me the same thing—his name was Bubba. And he used to tell me the same thing. I said, “Bubba, that’s Oakleigh; that’s not Down the Bay.” He said, “Well, before it became gentrified.”
- S: Yeah, yeah.
- J: I said, “Well, what do you mean ‘gentrified?’” He said, “Well, there’s always some gentrification going on. Why you think I’m over here at CVS?”
- S: Yeah. [Laughter] Yeah, all that Texas Street, George Street—you know, in my mind all that’s Down the Bay. In my mind, you know?
- J: In your mind, the changing of—the putting in of I-10, and the changing of the configuration of the neighborhood closest to the bay; could you talk a little bit about that? Because it’s my understanding that you lived—you grew up south of Virginia?
- S: I did, right next to the interstate. So, my house, our house—I grew up on the corner of South Carolina and Warren Street. You cross Warren Street, and it’s the interstate, right? So, we played when they were building the interstate. Sliding down the side of the interstate on cardboard boxes. So, prior to that time, there were just what you described: there were white families, there were Black families. I’m not going to suggest there was, you know, this harmonious paradise. But in fact, directly behind my house facing Warren Street was a white man named Mr. Santacruz. And was very, very good to us: his kids, you know, looked out for us; invited us in his house; was never mean to us or anything like that. I remember him distinctly because he was right there, and treated us good. There were other white folks who had to move out because they were building the interstate, so—. And what happened to them, I’m not sure. I also had some relatives who had to, you know, move because of the interstate. I said “relatives”: my mother’s aunts, those people had to give up their houses and go somewhere else.
- J: Could you name them? The aunts?

S: Yeah, one is Cecilia Mack. She passed. She married a man named Paul Mack. They moved out to Toulminville, and I was about to call the street they lived on. In fact, I could take you to the house. Another aunt was Aurelia Curtis. Now Aurelia—we called her “Aunt Relia”—Aunt Relia eventually moved in with her mother who lived across the street, kind of catty-corner from us. So, we lived in 601 South Carolina Street. They lived in 610 and 608 South Carolina Street.

J: Did Mrs. Mack, Mr. and Mrs. Mack have any kids?

S: They had one son who was killed in the Korean War.

J: Mm!

S: Mmhm. In fact, I somehow wound up with his Purple Heart, so his Purple Heart is in my house.

J: Yeah, man.

S: Yeah, and he didn't have any children.

J: Sliding down the hill. I have interviewed a man from—he grew up on the corner of Texas and Conception, and he talked about the same thing: sliding down the hill. And his name was Draine. D-R-A-I-N[-E]. Draine. Mr. Draine. And I guess, he not in his sev—he's somewhere in his 60s.

S: Sam Draine?

J: I don't remember. This guy went on to play football at Auburn.

S: Okay.

J: And now, as of last year, he's got a division one; one of his children plays football in division one.

S: Cool.

J: And, you know, grew up playing ball at the Rec in its many manifestations. And everything. And—because when y'all came along, there was no Seals Center.

S: No.

J: Where was the recreation for the—

S: Council; Council School.

J: W.H. Council School was where y'all—?

S: Mhm. That's where we played basketball, baseball, football. And then there was Texas Street Park.

J: Did y'all know who Council was when y'all—

S: Not Texas Street Park. What's the park right there by the cemetery?

J: Crawford?

S: Crawford Park, yeah.

J: Did y'all—that's a pretty good hop from South Carolina Street to Crawford Park.

S: That's why God made bicycles! [Laughter]

J: It's funny though, because you talk to James Leslie, his wife was from Texas Hill. And I used to talk to her, and she said—I said, "Where was the hill?" She said, "Well, it wasn't really a hill; it was more like a slight incline."

S: A slight incline.

J: And she used to say, "We went everywhere on skates coming up."

S: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

J: I said, "Skates?" She said, "Yeah, with the steel wheels."

S: Yep. Skate key and everything, yeah.

J: So, yeah. Yeah. Did y'all know the historic nature of who Council School was named after when y'all was coming up?

S: No, no.

J: Didn't know he was a rival of Booker T. Washington?

S: No.

J: Didn't know he was the first President of Alabama A&M?

S: No, no idea. Wow.

J: And had a falling from grace because—well, it was a power struggle over ideology. And ended up coming to Mobile and becoming principal of that school.

S: I'll be darned. No, I didn't know that.

J: And was very—like Booker T. Washington, was very much—this is a whole other project, because when you talk about public schools and the roles—and I guess private schools, too—the role of the principal in Gulf Coastal or Deep Southern African American life, this quasi-political figure in addition to being an educational figure. This is really quite fascinating. So he took over what was Augusta School, and eventually they named it after him.

S: Hm.

J: But—

S: So, he's Black?

J: He's Black.

S: I would never have guessed it.

J: W.H. Council was Black.

S: Cool. That's good to know.

J: Mhm, mhm.

S: Yeah, I mean, the other place we played is, we played in the street. And you know, telephone pole to telephone pole were the goal lines. We'd throw down a piece of cardboard for bases and you know, play basketball in our backyards.

J: Can you name your brothers please?

S: Sure!

J: And name their wives, because I have a tendency to not do that.

S: [Laughter]

J: And when they get the tape, they go, “Why didn’t you talk about me?”

S: [Laughter] Yeah, so my oldest brother is George. George married—his first wife was named Carol, Carol Gumbs. Her father was a physician, prominent physician, and at one time was the leader of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. They had one son. They were divorced. George then married—his next wife was Felicia, I can’t recall her last name. They had two kids. And I don’t think he got married again after that. But he did have several common law wives, I guess you might call them. I had one sister, Vivian. She was the next oldest.

J: What’d y’all call her?

S: Tutu, Tutu. Called her Tutu because I think—the story I heard was that George couldn’t quite say “sister,” and it came out Tutu. So that name stuck with her. She married Michael Hall, and then married Floyd Pace. Leonard is the next oldest. Leonard married Linda **Ray** from Louisiana. Andrew is the next brother, and Andrew initially married Deborah Chaney from Mobile, and then married Margaret. I can’t recall Margaret’s maiden name. And Andrew, I think he married Margaret twice, and may have had one other wife in between. And then there’s me, and my wife’s name is Barbara. And my youngest brother is Anthony. Anthony married **Shalonda**. Now, George has quite a story. When he married Carol, her father helped them buy a house on Warren Street just south of Government Street. Big old house, biggest house I had ever seen at the time. And it had several apartments upstairs. Well, one—they rented one of the apartments to a white woman, and so they tried to burn the house down. So folks came when they about it, and I don’t think they ever caught anybody. But they tried at least twice to burn his house down. They succeeded in burning his car up. Yeah. All because they were renting to a white woman.

J: Is that structure, some of it still standing?

- S: Yeah. Mmhm.
- J: Is that next—Warren, there's a bunch of houses on that street.
- S: Yeah, it's—so, you can recognize the house because it's got real tall steps going up the front.
- J: When the Mardi Gras would come, where would y'all stand?
- S: On Government Street, by Warren. Yeah, Warren and Cedar, somewhere in that area.
- J: Is that because it's a straight shot from the house? Or is there some reason for that?
- S: Well, straight shot to the house, and that's where my momma and daddy took us. So—. [Laughter]
- J: And did other—
- S: And we couldn't go downtown, because, you know, that's where white folks stood.
- J: And did other parents take kids there too?
- S: Mmhm.
- J: Okay, so it was where parents from the neighborhood took they kids.
- S: Yeah.
- J: Getting back to the neighborhood, what other things brought people in your neighborhood together? We're talking about Council School being a playground and stuff, but what other stuff—yeah, what brought people together?
- S: Well I mean, our lives was centered around church and school. And so, when we were not in school, Council was a focal point. And then we mostly hung out with relatives; relatives and people we had gone to school with who didn't live very far. In terms of, you know, things that might've brought us together, Hartwell Field was there. And so, you know, baseball, the fair, the circus—you know, the kinds of

things that still exist to a limited degree today. But I mean, that was probably about it.

J: Coming up in school, who were your principals or memorable teachers?

S: Mmhm. So my most memorable teachers are a lady named Frankie Briggs, who eventually left the school and started the Head Start programs. So, she was—you know, if I had to pick a favorite teacher, it would've been her. Ms. Olivette Clarke was a favorite teacher; I think I had her in second grade. Most of the other times, I was taught by nuns. You know, some of whom I have very good memories of; others, like anybody else, not-so-good memories. But, you know, I was fortunate in that I was favored, I think. They considered me bright and intelligent, and I didn't get in a whole lot of trouble. So I was treated—I've been treated really well wherever I've gone. Yeah, really well. When I look back on my life, that's what I think: I have been blessed. I can't think of anybody who was just mean to me.

J: Two more things I want to ask you. One is totally off-topic, but could you explain for church and school, the function of an ad book?

S: [Laughter] Yeah, the function of an ad book is solely to raise revenue, right? So, you know, we—I've talked before about there not—about us not getting enough resources from the Archdiocese. And so, we had to figure out how to get it on our own. One way to do that is, you know, whenever there was an event, then we would go around to different companies, or people, or other churches, or the schools, and invite them to take out an ad in this souvenir book. So, we call it an "ad book," it was really marketed as a souvenir book. So, in that souvenir book, would not only be ads, but there might be some letters from some important people, some pictures of past events. So it was really considered a souvenir.

J: Mrs. Caroline Francis, and Mildred Johnson and her sister; they all want to be interviewed. And they really talk about those letters that appeared in the ad book. And they want—you know, when they find out you're doing stuff like this: "This what we want you to do:—."

S: [Laughter] Yeah!

J: They want me to start collecting photographs and memorabilia like ad books. And so, I sort of cut a deal with our archivist, because I go around—there's another woman who's been doing this type of work in Mobile for years named Paulette Horton. She wrote the Davis Avenue book, and she wrote another book that

investigates the people who the schools in Mobile were named after. Paulette's been—she's got like a whole house full of stuff. People over there—because when she started writing the Avenue book, she was an LPN. And she was a trusted LPN who not only dressed sores and checked in on people, but she also took people groceries. I mean, she was like a one-woman social work. And she's parlayed that into three books now, and she's still working as a nurse.

S: Wow. [Laughter]

J: She's about to retire; she's on the cusp. But anyway, but she's got all these ad books from—talking about Michigan Avenue—from you know, Wesley Chapel and—you know, ad books with names like Griffith Shell, and this sort of thing. Because it seems like you not only went to the tried and true people of business in the Black community, but you also went to the places where people, Black people, patroned white businesses. And they knew they needed to—. [Laughter]

S: That's right!

J: You know? Naman's knew they had to put out for the ad book.

S: That's right.

J: Did you know about Fletcher's Barbeque?

S: I have eaten Fletcher's Barbeque, yeah. Now, if there's a story behind it, I'm ignorant of the story.

J: Where was it located when you were eating from it?

S: Oh man, I—

J: Was it near the Ditch, or was it near Texas Street?

S: Texas Street, I think, is where I recall. Yeah.

J: Okay, all right. That came to mind because it came up from another interview, somebody was talking about Fletcher's.

S: Mm, okay.

J: And finally, you sort of alluded to this: what's a Creole?

S: [Laughter] You want the Webster's definition of Creole, or you—?

J: I want the Down the Bay definition.

S: You want the Down the Bay definition? So, Creoles were typically—I can describe the Down the Bay Creoles: so, they were typically lighter-skinned people with—you know, men tended to have thick mustaches. [Laughter] You know, like mine. A lot of them would have originated kind of down on Mon Louis Island, in that area, and then matriculated to Down the Bay. They were heavily Catholic. You know, sometimes a mixture of Black and white somewhere in their ancestry. We didn't—you know, I wasn't conscious of many people who claimed to have some Indian descent. A lot of us would've been descendants from the Spaniards, from the Spanish American War. So, you know, again, heavily—we ate the same foods. So, we had the shrimp Creole; gumbo; those red beans and rice; those kinds of foods you typically associate with Creoles. In fact, when I—when you look at the cultures of, say, from New Orleans to east of Pensacola along the Gulf Coast, it's mostly the same. We eat the same kind of foods, we listen to same kinds of music. So, Creole in my mind is Catholic, mostly of Spanish descent, maybe some Caucasian blood, and African American blood.

J: It's funny. A long time ago, I interviewed some older folk, and they would talk about—they were so skin caste-conscious, so to have options to marry, people would go to Moss Point, Pascagoula, Pass Christian to find people to marry. They'd go to a dance.

S: Yeah, yeah. [Phone pings.] I think that's me.

J: Okay, and—but I think this comes back to values and stuff, because, in my lifetime, the Prince of Peace lawn party or whatever was a convergence point for some of these things we're talking about. And it was a natural progression y'all have had—"y'all"; we, now—y'all have had jazz performances that have been successful subsequently, or you've had things in the room above the CCD area in the past that were natural progressions of the ad book. The generating—I mean, I talked to Mildred Johnson and my grandmother who grew up on Monroe Street, which they call the Church Street District now.

S: Okay, yeah. They're all fancy these days.

- J: That seems to be—well, that’s a whole other story. I’m glad to know that Down the Bay to you extends to Government.
- S: Yeah, definitely to Government. The only place I’m not—I can’t give you a definitive answer is west.
- J: West.
- S: Because, like, you mentioned Texas Hill. Well, Texas Hill was a distinct area, but in my mind all that—I would’ve considered that Down the Bay, but it is definitely Texas Hill. Now where I grew on South Carolina Street, that was sometimes—the white folks would refer to it as “Oakdale.” But to me, it’s Down the Bay. You know, this Church Street District? To me, that’s Down the Bay. Oakleigh is Down the Bay. So. Also, you asked about what kinds of things brought us together, and I steered away from the church activities. But like I said, our lives were centered around church. So the lawn festivals, the Christmas fair, the bazaars; all those opportunities to create souvenir books and sell ads. Those were all church and school functions.
- J: Yeah, because people don’t—and I don’t think anybody’s investigated this in a cultural way or historical way, but those were ways that come out of segregation; that you retain money in the community to sustain your cultural, religious, and spiritual institutions. Yeah, my grandmother and Mrs. Mildred Johnson would talk about penny fairs.
- S: Mmhm. Mmhm, yep.
- J: Even in those things that drive revenue, there’s a scale, right? You know, we’re trying to raise—in the [19]40s, we’re trying to raise 50 dollars, or we trying to raise 200 dollars.
- S: Right.
- J: If it’s a *penny* fair—well you know, lot of little stuff for a penny.
- S: Yep, lot of little stuff for a penny.
- J: So, they were doing—talking about values and everything. Because that’s another thing I think about your dad and my—I don’t know so much my uncle. Cause I—you know, he’s a little bit of a wild card, my uncle.

S: That James **Lesley**?

J: Yes. But he, too—I mean, he went to meetings. He went to meetings. He wasn't a *big* meeting guy, but he went to meetings.

S: Yeah, and he was more Heart of Mary. So, they were Crosstown until they moved Down the Bay. And so, you know, they were big supporters, as I recall, of Most Pure Heart of Mary.

J: Well, they moved Down the Bay, and this is the other interesting thing about them: they moved on double lots.

S: Mhm. Yep.

J: So, they were the beneficiaries of urban renewal on a certain level. I mean—

S: Mhm. Yeah, they had one of the nicest houses.

J: What they constructed for Cardell was nothing short of amazing.

S: Yeah, yeah.

J: That was—

S: [Laughter]

J: —amazing. And I think about Cardell, too, having his first mass at Prince of Peace, and doing this transition. It was sort of a heyday of Black Catholicism, the number of people wanting to be Catholic, to convert.

S: Yeah.

J: Now, it created a whole other kind of **la fie** about, are you cradle Catholic or are you conversion Catholic? Did you go to RCIA? But the numbers of Knights of Peter Claver; the numbers of the ladies were high. And they were doing really sort of interesting work, while at the same time—you know, folks who used to live in the poor condition houses prior to 1975 had to go somewhere else. And it almost seems like a playbook in Mobile city. You know, right now we're ate up with the Africatown narrative. Once upon a time, we were ate up with the Orange Grove

narrative, and the displacement of people. Where did they go? On the west side of Cody Road, on the other side of Hillsdale, and this sort of thing. The migration patterns, you know; people leave Down the Bay, they go to Maysville, and they go to Toulminville. Toulminville blows up, and they change the name of the high school to LeFlore.

S: Yeah.

J: It's all connected.

S: [Laughter]

J: Right? And these are, like, political things that are happening on top of overt, what we think as traditional civil rights organizing.

S: Yeah.

J: Right? So that's why I ask you about that. And I also think about people going—you know, in a Catholic context, going to—you know, Knights of Peter Claver conferences. Wherever they are.

S: Right, right.

J: But that was like, for missionary Baptist women, that's like going to the Order of the Eastern Star Convention.

S: Yeah, that's right.

J: And if it's in Los Angeles, we going.

S: We going to Los Angeles.

J: We going to Los Angeles!

S: It's in Chicago this year, I'm going to Chicago.

J: But even the regional meetings were training grounds for leadership.

S: Mmhm, mmhm.

J: It seemed to me that all those meetings in Biloxi—I'll never forget. What was the man's name who came out of Moss Point, who ran the Gulf Coast area for a long time?

S: Elley. Jackie Elley.

J: Elley, yeah. I got to meet all those guys at the end, right? In Council—

S: He's still around.

J: Is he?

S: Uh-huh, yeah.

J: I got to meet him, like, at the Knights of Peter Claver Hall. I learned more stuff about being a Black Catholic man from sitting up there pouring people drinks.

S: [Laughter]

J: They discovered I was heavy-handed, so I was liked. [Laughter] So on Mardi Gras Day, to sit in there and watch them come through—even though they weren't moving as fast, they were still moving. And they would pass through with less frequency. But on certain—you know, Super Bowl Sunday, they would pass through. Mardi Gras Tuesday, they would pass through, because the floats were lining up on Saint Anthony Street.

S: Yep.

J: You know.

S: Yep. Yep. Knights of Peter Claver Hall was at one time kind of the hub of Black Mardi Gras. That's where we went. That's where our momma and daddy took us, and that's where we hung out all day.

J: Mmhm.

S: Mardi Gras Day, it was down at the Hall.

J: Well, I thank you, man.

S: Sure. I hope I helped.

J: Oh my God, yeah, yeah, yeah! I mean, Mrs.—what was that lady's name? That teacher who went on to start Head Start?

S: Oh, Frankie Briggs.

J: Yeah, is—the way you describe her, I can see how she influenced your own sort of altruistic path. Here you are here, doing some similar stuff.

S: Right. Yeah, I guess so. I had never thought about it, but yeah; I mean, she was a remarkable teacher. You know, she was good to me. She celebrated my successes.

J: Did she marry?

S: If she had a husband, I never knew him, or never heard of him. She had one daughter named Deborah, who was a year younger than me. So. But I never heard talk of Mr. Briggs.

J: Did you know my cousin, Walter Johnson?

S: Yeah.

J: Lived over on Monroe Street?

S: Mmhm, mmhm.

J: And Marquita, and Deborah.

S: Marquita, Deborah. Yeah, Walter and my brother Andrew were really good friends. Really good friends.

J: Yeah, I didn't—you know, reconnect: they're all in Nashville now.

S: Oh, really?

J: Yeah, they're all living in Nashville now.

S: Okay.

J: Because he was in New Orleans for years and years. And I don't know where Deborah was. Marquita, I think Marquita works at Vanderbilt Hospital, which is where I go to get my treatment.

S: Oh, cool.

J: Yeah Anyhow, that was good, man!

S: All right, well good.

[Break in recording]

J: Prince of Peace had a school?

S: Yeah, so the first—for one year.

J: Okay, after they closed Saint Peter Claver?

S: Mmhm.

J: And then they sent the kids from Prince of Peace to Saint Matthew's, and from Saint Matthew's, to Saint Mary's.

S: Mmhm.

J: That's systematic. That was planned.

S: Sounds like it, doesn't it?

J: That was a planned—you know, that was—. You know, ain't nobody more strategic than the Catholic Church!

S: [Laughter] They don't do stuff by accident.

J: Unh-uh! And you know, as sweet as Lipscomb was—he was sweet. I'll tell you a story.

S: He grew up in the system.

J: He grew up in the system, but I'll tell you a story: Archbishop May was a wild card.

S: Mmhm.

J: Cardell took me—I guess before he got ordained, he took me on some sort of retreat at this big Catholic's house, and they were on the water. And that's when he was still driving himself, with the controls.

S: Right.

J: And we went somewhere, and he introduced me to Bishop May. He said, "This is the bishop." And I did something that embarrassed him. I poor-mouthed and I looked down; "Yes, sir." And he was on them canes. He said, "Excuse us, Archbishop. Come here with me." Took me over to the corner: "Don't you ever not look a white man in the eye and shake his hand!"

S: Really? Okay.

J: "Now we going to go back over there, and we going to do this again."

S: [Laughter]

J: And I—you know, he had never tried to do anything to rear me. But that pissed him the hell off. And so I had to go back over there, and look Bishop May in the face, and grip his hand and shake his hand. And Bishop May knew what was going on, you know?

S: Mmhm, yeah. Bishop May was cool.

J: He was real cool.

S: The ones before and after him; especially the ones before—.

J: Toolen.

S: Toolen. Oh, geez! Toolen was—

J: Evil.

S: —horrible for Black people.

J: He was evil.

S: Yeah, he was horrible for Black people.

J: But yeah, there was a plan to subvert Black education. And they have systematically shut down all the Black schools. St. James was thriving. Heart of Mary—you know, was thriving.

S: Mhm.

J: And between that and—well, we didn't do ourselves any favors, right? We didn't rear up any more priests and nuns. Everybody went off to become them, and all of them said, "To heck with that!" [Laughter]

S: Well, yeah. There are some priests and nuns, they just wouldn't let them practice in Mobile. So, Father Huguley—do you know Vernon Huguley?

J: Yeah.

S: Yeah, went to Heart of Mary. They wouldn't let him in the Mobile Archdiocese, wouldn't let him in the Josephites. He is now a—Father Huguley is one of the best priests I think I have ever met. I wish he was my pastor. But you know, they wouldn't let him in Mobile. And then around the time when Cardell was a priest? Man, I knew a bunch of Black priests. You know, young Black priests. The Moores—Vernon Moore, was a priest. Now he eventually—

J: Came out.

S: Came out. His brother, Alex Moore. There are people who are nuns who went to school with me and Andrew. Williams—I forget her first name—but she left McGill-Toolen, went to school at Loyola. When I got to Loyola, she was a senior. But she eventually went into the convent. Louise Busby went to school with me, who is a nun. She's from Most Pure Heart of Mary. So, they say we don't produce—

J: It's not true.

S: It's not true. Yeah. They may not be giving us credit for it. Phillip Moody has a brother who is a priest.

J: Oh, I didn't know that!

S: Yeah. Mmhm.

J: I didn't know that.

S: Yeah.

J: I didn't know Mr. Moody went to County.

S: [Laughter]

J: He does all kind of stuff. But yeah, that—I think the racism of the Catholic Church, the systematic racism—. But this is the way that the racism works: one person only does a little bit of the racism, but it's the cumulative effect that cuts off African American evangelization, that cuts off African American literacy.

S: Yeah.

J: You know. I got Black children who want to get on a bus and got to a Right to Life celebration in D.C., but they got to step over homeless people in Mobile to get to the bus. What're we talking about here?

S: Yeah, yeah.

J: You want to proselytize on abortion, which is a political issue that white Catholics can join with evangelical Christians, Baptists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and whatever—Southern Baptists—at the cost of, you know, to speak of Voncille; at the cost of incredible work that Catholic charities would do in the Black community.

S: Mmhm.

J: Yeoman's work. Putting Catholic charity on Florida Street takes them out the mix.

S: Takes them out of the mix.

J: The mission is downtown! The rescue mission is downtown. All the mission work is downtown. All the rehab—you know, the methadone—

S: All downtown.

J: It's downtown. You can't get to Florida Street with no car.

S: Unh-uh.

J: That Saint Vincent de Paul on Broad Street, they were doing incredible work.

S: Yeah, yeah.

J: Which is we have a variety store or whatever it's called. Not too sure about that, but anyway—[inaudible 6:35]

[End of recording]

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