

INTERVIEWEE: James Moss

INTERVIEWER: Lucy Garrier?

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Garrier: Okay. Hi, my name is Lucy Garrier and I'm interviewing you at-- the location is at Turner Tech. Could you please state your name?

Moss: My name? You want me to spell it or just call it?

G: State it and spell it.

M: Hmm?

G: State it and spell it.

M: My name is James M. Moss. J-A-M-E-S M period M-O-S-S.

G: Okay, is that what you go by now?

M: That's my name.

G: Okay, what was your childhood like? Your childhood?

M: What was my childhood like?

G: Yeah.

M: Beautiful.

G: It was beautiful?

M: And I could stop right there. [laughs] My childhood was beautiful. I grew up in a very-- most of my childhood, well, I wouldn't say most but the most important years of my childhood- which is the earlier years- I grew up in a kind of primitive place. No

electric lights, no, you know, things to distract you and (?) young people, you know like television and all that kind of stuff, there was nothing like that there. So-- and I consider it beautiful because I really just--after become a man and grow up, I just really-- I took note of what I have lost when I, you know, when I left there.

G: What affected you as a child that you wish you could change now?

M: That I wish I could change?

G: Yeah.

M: Um, well I guess the--as a child, what I would wish to change would be- at that time- I would wish-- I guess-- [laughs] at that time, I would wish I had more modern equipment to deal with in school or something like that but that has been accomplished so I guess I can't very well answer that question.

G: Okay. Did anything influence you, like, to become active in the Civil Right Movement?

M: What was it like to become active in the Civil?

G: Were you active?

M: I think every black person was active in the Civil Rights Movement in a sense. I haven't been to Washington when Martin Luther King gave his speech. I was not on Virginia Key when Garth Reeves, and Theodore Gibson, and (?) beach was. But I was in full support with-- of all of that, you know? In other words, I would have given my right hand, more or less, to support that.

G: How did you experience racism, and what was your reaction to oppression?

M: I have a hard hearing and you better speak a little louder.

G: Okay. How did you experience racism and what was your reaction to oppression? Did you experience in any way?

M: What was my experience in uh--?

G: With racism.

M: Oh. I explained to some young people just a while ago that one of the things that I experienced in racialism the first thing when I came from the Bahamas here to America, the first encounter I had with racism was in Homestead, and I told the young person that I was living there with my father and usually I would want to go to Miami to visit my uncle and in doing so, I would ride the bus. And going to get my ticket for the bus, I had to stand on the porch and ask-- until the lady come and finds out from me what I would like to have. And she comes out there, I say, "Well, I want a ticket to go to Miami", and she says, "Well, give me your money." So I gave her my money and she goes back and bring the ticket. Okay. Secondly, I would-- I have an experience was the second encounter I had with racism and segregation was when I get to the bus, then I had to deal with this bus driver. The bus driver would pick tickets from every white person that--
[both speak at the same time]

G: So he was racial?

M: -- (on the way?) And then after getting all the white tickets, he decided that he would take mine. Mind me, I'm shaking this ticket in his eyes all the time.

G: Oh.

M: So those were the kinds of things that--

G: Were you ever called the word, 'nigger'? If so, what was it like?

M: Um, no white people have called me 'nigger' but I know that they called me that all the time when I'm not there. [laughs]

G: Were your parents strong-minded?

M: Hmm?

G: Were your parents strong-minded?

M: Strong-minded? Yeah, my parents were pretty strong-minded. They were--

G: Did they teach you to be strong-minded?

M: They taught me a whole lot of things. They taught me a whole lot of things like my grandmother particularly was kind of a-- very instrumental in my bringing up because when my mother sent me to Crooked Island- I mentioned Crooked Island- I went to live with my grandmother, and my grandmother had a session with us every morning like around maybe four-thirty in the morning because we had to get up early to go to school because sometimes-- not sometimes, you had to walk to school and school was like, what, four or five miles. So you had to walk to school, and she would get us up and she would talk to us about behaving in the school and paying attention to the teacher and being respectful to the teacher and don't bother with the people property and don't bother with other people children. Those were the kinds of strong teaching that we-- [both speak at the same time]

G: So, she taught you to behave, right?

M: Behavior, yes.

G: Did you-- you attend college right?

M: Pardon me?

G: Did you attend college?

M: I attend Dade Junior College.

G: Oh, um--

M: And I'm still thinking about going back to college.

G: How many black kids do you remember got rejected for college?

M: How many black kids you--?

G: Did you-- do you remember that got rejected from the college?

M: From the college?

G: Mm-hmm.

M: I --none from Dade, I know.

G: Oh, none from Dade?

M: Not that I know of, I was more or less in a cont-concerned with my thing in college I wasn't thinking there was black kids getting re-- [laughs] rejected.

G: When did you move to Miami?

M: I moved to Miami '44- 1944 that's a long time.

G: Were there any racism going on (?) segregation?

M: Segregation was full-blown.

G: Okay. What else do you remember about those days of segregation?

M: Oh. With segregation, I have experienced some pretty bad (vibes?) of segregation, particularly with Bell Telephone Company because I thought that I would, you know working for Bell Telephone Company, I though that I would be able to move more rapidly in the company but segregation was a set-back for me with Bell Telephone Company. I never began to get work for me until after the Supreme Courts decision- the Brown versus education or however that was stated and then I got-- I wrote a letter asking

to get into the mainstream of the company and they sent me a letter and asked me to go to take the test, and I took the test and I found that I began to move up in the company, and in doing so, I experienced that there was a mass difference between-- in salary from where I was before. Eighteen years I worked for Bell Telephone Company and just one entrance step put me \$40 a week more than I was getting for the eighteen years that I was working there. That really kind of struck me hard. However, I did move up with Bell Telephone Company in the engineering department and when I retired from Bell Telephone Company, I retired as a (long-line?) technician and I did make some stride there.

G: Is there any, like, particular story you would like to tell us, like, that happened during-- when you was a child?

M: [pauses] Some devilish things. I don't want to tell you that. [laughs]

G: Oh, okay.

M: But I can tell you some good things that happened to me when I was a child. When I was a child, I was kind of interested in music, at singing and I entered quite a few little plays and whatsnot and I thought it was so beautiful. And my first fish that I caught, I think that was one of the happiest day of my life.

G: Did you play any instruments?

M: Yes, I play saxophone.

G: Saxophone? Um, when you were, like, in high school, did you participate in any bands or choirs?

M: No, when I-- I went to school in the Bahamas, you must remember that.

G: Oh, yeah.

M: I came here and did not get me the diploma. So when I came here, I went to Northwestern after-- this was after I got married. All these things, all these great things happened after I got married. I discovered that you can't take care of wife and children, you gotta know what you're doing, you gotta--you know?

G: Mm-hmm

M: So I discovered-- I started playing the saxophone after I got married. I took the money and bought a saxophone. My wife said, "You took my child milk money and bought this thing?" [both laugh] So, I had to use it-- saxophone to take care of my family and that was one of the many reasons to do that. One of the things that I did, I went to Northwestern and I-- there was a course called 'Communism versus Government' or something like that, I can't remember the name. I took that course and you had to take that course so you can-- to get a G.E.D. diploma. I took the course and took the other test and I got a G.E.D. diploma because I didn't bring one with me from the Bahamas, okay?

G: How did your school handle-- did your school handle the effort when they were integrating-- the integration was going on?

M: When something was going on, what was that now?

G: I said, how did your school handle the effort integration that-- when integration was going on?

M: [both speak at the same time] In my school?

G: At the schools, yeah.

M: Okay, well as I said, I didn't really attend no school here no more than I went to night--this night school and take those two courses: Government and-- what was it?

Government and American history along with Communism versus something I can't remember what it was.

G: Okay, what thoughts do remember about during the 1950s and 1960s?

M: Talk slowly, you know you talk real fast.

G: Oh, sorry. I said what thoughts do you remember during the 1950s [school intercom comes on] and the 1960s? Sorry about that. What thoughts do you remember, like, during the 1950s and the 1960s?

M: What else do I remember?

G: Yeah, do you remember anything from that point in time?

M: Well, I could remember that, you know, we always in an area and-- called 'Overtown', more or less. You heard of Overtown?

G: Yeah.

M: And to me, it was a happy little area. It was segregated, of course. When I say segregated, I mean it was set aside from other areas. It was not segregated within itself but it was set aside from other areas. And I think we-- it was nice. People were happy there, and there were a whole lot of things happen there. And it seems to me, the more I go it seems to me that maybe we lost that-- we have lost that kind of knitting, that kind of togetherness. Somehow integration itself might have more or less become not so much of a blessing but a slight curse, that's my opinion. Because we have lost some values since integration, to me, and that's my opinion again. I see the way young people are acting, they way they carry on nowadays, so different from my time. And rightly so, it's a different time. A whole lot of things that excite young people that we didn't have during my time. And a whole lot to make young people-- turn young people from what I may

consider to be value than we have had in our time. So, it-- to me, we lost quite a bit when we lost that kind of amalgamation, that kind of togetherness that we've had during--even during the segregation time.

G: I know this interview was short but is there anything you want to say?

M: No. That's about all I-- I'd like to say that I really appreciate the fact that you called-- you asked me to talk to you. I hope-- I wish that, you know, someday we can set up something that we can talk a little longer and we can ask some other question different from integrations and some other questions pertaining to life and living and things like that because I'm really disturbed the way-- as I mentioned, I think you were here when I mentioned on how some of our young people are acting and I think we kind of need to wake up, start moving trying to save ourselves, so to speak. Okay?

G: Thank you.

M: Thank You.

END OF INTERVIEW