

INTERVIEWEE: James Moss

INTERVIEWER: Unknown 1 and Unknown 2

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Unknown: Can you please state your name and spell it, please?

Moss: Okay. My name is James M. Moss, M-O-S-S.

U1: Today's date third twenty-second, 07

M: Hmm?

U1: Can you describe when and where you were born and a bit about your parents [both speak at the same time] and grandparents?

M: Okay. Alright. I was born in the Bahamas- Nassau, Bahamas I was born- and my parents-- I'm the son of (Aretha) and Clarence Moss, okay? At an early age, my mother sent me to an island about 365 miles away from Nassau called, 'Crooked Island', C-R-O-O-K-E-D Island. Now as I said to some young person before, it has no bearing on the character of the people that lived on that island, it's only because of the physical shape of the island, it was called 'Crooked Island', okay? There I went to live with my grandmother and went to school there for awhile and I guess you would have another question you wanna ask me? [both laugh]

U2: When did you first move to Miami?

M: I came to Miami in 1944, that's long time ago, almost a century ago.

U2: What part of town in Miami did you come to?

M: In Miami? I came to Miami and my father was living in a place called 'Redland', you know where Redland is?

U2: Redland? Yeah.

U1: Never heard of it.

M: Redland is a area down here in-- what's that? Is that southwest Dade? It's down there by Homestead.

U1: Oh, okay.

M: Okay? Down in that farming citric area, that's called Redland. And my father was living there and I went there to live with my father. I first came-- I came in to the International Airport at Thirty-Sixth Street and in seeing all the beautiful lights, I was so excited that I'm gonna come here to this city in Miami and my father and I driving to go to his home and I saw all the light diminishing, all the light diminishing when I saw one light, then I began seeing no light [laughs] and then my father say, "Hey, you gonna be living right there in that house there (one of the light?) beyond the-- in the grove."

U2: How did you feel about that?

M: [inaudible]

U2: [laughs]

M: You know, young people want to be where the things are happening, not in no dead place, and here this is a grove, who's gonna be there? My father, myself, and maybe some one or two more (?). However, that kind of killed my spirit but in-- in-- in kind of rallying myself, I decided that I would go to visit my uncle who was living in Miami and I told my father about it and he gave me permission to go and what I have to do-- what I

had to do at that time was to go and get me a ticket and ride the bus to Miami and that was my first encounter with segregation. You go to get a ticket and you have to stand on the porch, you couldn't go inside the house-- the office place. You stand on the porch until the lady saw you and she'll come out and ask you want you want and you tell her what you want and then she'd ask for the money, she'd take you money go in there and buy your ticket and bring the ticket back out. That's the-- my first encounter with really with segregation. Secondly, my second encounter was with the bus driver. You getting on the bus now you in line everybody get on the bus and he would take all the white tickets, pick out all the white tickets until all the white peoples on the bus. And when the white people get on the bus, then he'll take your ticket. When you get on the bus, if there were seat up front, you couldn't sit in the front because the big sign up there say, 'Colored in the Rear', okay? It's a big sign, you can't miss it. It says, 'Colored Seat from Rear.' So if you want to sit down, you gotta go to the rear to sit. If there's white people sitting all through the buses, then you have to stand up even if there's one seat up there, you understand? You can't sit up there. So those are the-- my first encounter with segregation which was not pleasing at all.

U1: Did you try to stand up to it, like stand up against segregation once (??)?

M: If you had to stand up?

U1: Like, did you ever once have to stand up?

M: Oh yeah! Oh yeah, I had to stand up.

U1: (Multiple times??)?

M: Yeah, but you know, your mindful-- you are mindful of what's happening. Although I came from the Bahamas and probably haven't experienced that, but my father kind of--

kind of schooled me about these things before I go, because he was concerned about my safety, you understand what I mean? And the way it was, they could happen to you and it could be just like no one knows, you know what I mean?[both speak at the same time]

Because--

U1: Go ahead.

M: Because the people who were in charge, well those are the people who are the evil ones. You hear Bush talking about the evil ones? The evil ones used to live down south here. [laughs] Go ahead.

U1: What else do you remember about segregation?

M: What else? Okay, I remember-- I like to-- there's a whole lot about segregation I can tell you about. I know at times you-- if you were downtown at night and the police sees you, he'll try to harass you and all of that, might put you in jail and all of that. On Miami Beach, for instance, if you didn't have a I.D. card- you see that card you got?- if you don't have one of those on Miami Beach, police find you out-- over there, you're going to jail. So, all of that was segregation. The one that I dealt with most-- so severely was the one with Bell Telephone Company, I encountered a whole lot of segregation down there with-- and it really hurted me because of the fact that I supposed to have been a member of this company, okay? And like anybody else within the company. And there were these people who have a whole lot of privileges and have a whole lot of opportunity and there was me, I am sitting there and I can't get anything done so what I did, I saw things on the-- written on the bulletin board that you can apply for a-- other positions and whatnot and so I decided that I would file application to do so and being the janitor of the place I clean up- because that's all you could do for Bell at them day-- in them days, a janitor-

you clean up and that's it, take the trash out, you couldn't do anything else, there was no operator, there was no lineman, there was no engineer, there was nothing with Bell Telephone Company but white people all the way down, a sheet of white. You go on the- - in the building, right? The whole third floor in this big building was operators, they had, like, hundreds of people-- operators- young girls operating because in them days it wasn't modern as nowadays, they don't have that many people doing things (like that?) nowadays. In them days, you know, you depend on people to do it and you have hundreds of girls up there and all you can see up there is white girls, there were no black girls up there. The only thing black girls could do was to clean the floor, clean the bathroom, and the same thing with black people, okay?

U1: Where did you go, like, where did you hang out in that time period where-- was it segregated or it was just--?

M: Okay, you mean like, for my lit--

U1: Childhood, yeah [chuckles]

M: My little (?)? Okay.

U1: Your hang out spot.

M: For my fun, I hang out-- you hang out where you live more or less. There were a whole lot of nightclubs around about, if you're a nightclub person. You hang out where you live and that's it because you don't go in white town like if-- like you guys can go in South Beach and all of that, man, no none of that, you couldn't do that.

U1: Did you ever try to?

M: Try? No. The only time that I have gone-- go into those places was-- I play saxophone, so if I had a job to play, I would (?). And even there, I encountered some

segregation. I remember working for a place in Hialeah, right? Played. And when you get through playing, you had to go in the back in this little room. You can't sit and mingle with the people out there, you understand? There were white people out there, you-- they didn't-- you were not allowed to mingle with those people. So you have to go in the back in your little room until your little twenty minutes is up and you go up there and play again.

U2: School, um, let's talk about school.

M: School?

U2: How did your school handles the effort to integrate-- integration?

M: How did-- how my school?

U2: Yeah.

M: Handle integration? When I was going to school, there was no integration so, you know, I can't say how my school handled integration. And I don't know too much about how the other schools handle integration.

U2: What-- what school did you go to?

M: I go to school in the Bahamas.

U2: In the Bahamas?

M: Yeah, and after I came to America, I went to Northwestern School after-- this was after I got married, now. Went to Northwestern School and got me a-- I took the government and history, communism versus something and I got me a G.E.D. Diploma, so I never had no long intermingle in school in America, okay?

U1: How long have you been married?

M: How long have I been here? Since nineteen--

U1: Married, married.

M: I've been married since 1948- that's about fifty-something years. So you see I've been married a long time and asking me questions sometimes, I could understand you asking me some--sometime, it had been so long it's like a generation-- two or three generations ago, huh? Okay.

U1: Did you have any like, conflicts with white male-- white Klan members, like, when you were-- when you were married?

M: Klan? Like the Ku Klux Klan people?

U1: Yes.

M: No, I haven't had any conflicts with the Ku Klux Klan, but I had a friend that had a conflict with the Ku Klux Klan. He had bought a house into a neighborhood that more or less at those times, called a white neighborhood and they come and burn a cross in his lawn and uh-- his name is Frank Legree, he's living now, today, yeah a friend of mine. Maybe he would be a good one for you to-- to interview one day.

U2: Is there any other haunting memory of discrimination or segregation of the races?

M: Okay, memory of discrimination with Bell Telephone Company and I started to tell you that. I don't know how far I went with that. Did I go that with you as far as going into the-- with my new position? After filing the letter- this was after the Supreme Court [school bell rings] decision Brown vs. Education- I filed a letter with the district manager of the company asking to be involved in the mainstream of Bell Telephone Company and they wrote me a letter and told me to go and take a test and I-- this-- this what I-- this is the important part I'd like to get over to you: be prepared, be prepared. And I'm going to tell you why. You know, I think that's a scout model also, right? Be prepared? Be

prepared. I'll tell you why: I wrote the letter to district deputy asking the district deputy for-- telling him that I think it's time that I get involved in the mainstream of Bell Telephone Company business. He wrote a letter to me telling me, "Okay, go take the test." That was-- the test was exactly set up to make sure that you don't even get in there. But if you smart enough to pass it, then we'll let you go, you understand what I mean? So that what I meant by-- about being prepared. I took the test, I passed the test. So I went into the new position with Bell Telephone Company. Now at that time, I had been working for Bell Telephone Company for eighteen long years. The difference between the salary that I got at that time and the salary that I was making for eighteen years was \$40 a week and the thing about it, this new position is now-- is-- was called and is now called 'entrance position'. So the guy that came in- the white man that came in- he came in the entrance position, right? And I've been eighteen years, he was making more than me. He just came in there now. Eighteen years I've been out here working, he came in like today and he making \$40 more than I'm making who been here for eighteen years. So you see how devastating segregation was? So I got the job working for Bell Telephone Company and I got the position. In the-- in going to the central office that morning when we got there when I-- all the white people is outside. I guess they were outside to see who these two- it was just two of us: my cousin and I. Two black-- the two first black people ever work Bell Telephone Company central office here in Dade County- me and my cousin. So when we got there, I told my cousin, "Well, we have quite an audience this morning" so he said, "Well, let's go." We went-- so we went in there. Well, we didn't have any problem with that. They didn't, you know, try to hurt us or anything. We didn't have no problem, but there was stumbling blocks set at interval to

make you look bad. Somebody will go and cut a wire, somebody-- and especially you gotta-- now you get the-- the order comes in, if you call and say, "Hey, look, I'm not getting a dial-tone on my phone", so (the male?) call me and say, "Okay, go over there Moss and see what happened and why this customer not getting dial-tone." So when you go over there to work on this thing, you might find the problem, you fix it, then you think everything is alright, then the customer call back again, say, "I'm not getting dial-tone." So the boss-man said, "I sent you over Moss, what's the problem, let's go see what the problem." When you get over there, the wire cut. "You didn't connect this wire!", you're blamed for that, you understand me? Things like that. Okay.

U2: Like, after you and your cousin done join the phone company, did any other more people- any more black African American people--?

M: Came to work with the company?

U2: Yeah.

M: Oh yeah. After that, oh yeah. I mean, then the company was open more or less to-- young people who had the college degrees and whatnot began to come to work for the company, especially in engineering. If you had degrees in engineering, you could really get a job with the company. One thing about tel-- Bell Telephone Company, though, although you may have an engineer degree, when you come in , they still work you in a position where you have to learn the company because Bell Company is so different from other companies, you have to learn the company because I know that I came and he had an engineering degree and he (came on to me?), I had to train him to run the-- to get familiarized with what's going on, you understand what I mean? So, a lot of black people come in. We have some young people there now, I think two I can remember, two very,

very nice young people was [school bell rings]-- one name is (Willie Larson ?), he's an engineer and got a big second-level management position. There's another one named-- what's her name? (Yvonne?), young lady,(Yvonne?) Harris. Same young lady has a second-level manage-- managerial position and working in the engineering department. So a whole lot of young people coming. In those days, women weren't working outside and, you know? Today, women are working outside with Bell Telephone Company, women are hooking up telephone and all of that, women are working in (manholes?) and all of that kind of-- well, it's quite different from when I first went there.

U1: Well I thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to talk with us-- [both interviewers speak at the same time]

U2: --To come visit us and stuff

M: Okay. Don't forget, be prepared now.

U1: [laughs] Be prepared--

M: Be prepared so when the thing come falling, you'll be ready.

END OF INTERVIEW