

INTERVIEWEE: James Moss

INTERVIEWER: Dana Joseph

DATE: March 22, 2002

TRANSCRIBER: Andrea Benitez

TRANSCRIBED: June 13, 2007

INTERVIEW LENGTH: 00:10:17

Joseph: Hello, my name is Dana Joseph. I am at Turner Tech High School March 22, 2002 interviewing--

Moss: James M. Moss

J: What was your childhood like growing up?

M: Beautiful, next question. [laughs] Oh, my childhood life was nice. My mother sent me to my grandmother at a very early age and my grandmother lived in-- I was born in Nassau, Bahamas by the way and my grandmother lived in a little island called 'Crooked Island' in the Bahamas. Now, as I-- I think I mentioned this to some of the other kids before that the Crooked Island-- the Crooked-- the word 'crooked' has nothing to do with the character of the people on the island, it is only that the island- the physical shape of the island- is why they call it 'Crooked Island' and I went there to live with my mother and I thought I had a beautiful life there. It was [school bell rings] very primitive. There was no light at night, only lights you see are lamp lighters and the moon- that was the light at night. There were beautiful days, there were times when you could-- you lived near the beach and you could hear the sea roaring on the on the be-- on the side on the rocks and whatsnot and I could imagine how, you know, my ha-- as I reflect back, I can

see myself running down and around the beaches and fishing and in summertime after close-- when school is closed in the summertime, we practically stay on the beach all day long and we had a way of doing this and defending ourselves, so to speak, from rain and wetting your clothing: we'll dig holes in the sand and bury our clothing and if it rains, you just stay out in the rain naked and then your clothes be dry when the time comes to go home, you know what I mean? So you-- I had a beautiful time, eating seagrapes and all that kind of stuff. So you imagine-- you could image from the way I'm express-- expressing this thing, it was beautiful for a child. Nature is always beautiful to children, you know, in my opinion, okay? And I had a wonderful time and I th-- I only wish that my children could experience the same thing, experience the same thing that I have experienced as a child.

J: Describe what your community was like when you were a child?

M: Will you repeat the qu-- you gotta talk a little louder for me because I'm an old man and I can't hear well.

J: Okay, describe what your community was like when you were a child.

M: When I was a child? My community? Oh! My community was-- it was a beautiful place. In other words, everybody looks out for everybody else. Not get into everybody else business, now. Look out for everybody else. In other words, if your child was at home and you were not there, the next-door neighbor will keep a watch on the-- for the child and look out for you while you were not there. At the same token, if your child had done something bad and you were not there, you might get a spanking by the next neighbor. And please, don't tell your mother about it because you'll get another spanking. So to me, the community was like taking care of each other.

J: Growing up, have you ever been called 'boy'?

M: Yes, many times by white people, yeah. Didn't bother me much because I know I was a man. Why should I worry about some white man calling me 'boy' when I know I'm a man? Didn't bother me much, but when it was done in company is when it really bothered me, because I thought then they trying to degrade or belittle me, you understand what I mean? Especially when some white people were standing around. But if he and-- if he and I are there and we working and then he call me 'boy', I don't-- I may call him 'boy', too.

J: Have you ever been involved-- no. Have you ever been involved in the Civil Rights Movement?

M: All black people were involved in the Civil Right Movement. Maybe not physically involved, but it was a thing that black people- all black people- was concerned about, all black people. We all were concerned about civil right. Some of us took the forefront, some of us suffered physically for what we accomplished today, and believe me, my heart go out to those and the family of those who have suffered. Some people-- some of us died because of fighting for their civil right. Let it be said that we all were involved in the movement, okay?

J: Have you ever met Martin Luther King, Jr.?

M: I saw him from afar. I have never shook his hand. We never had a conversation, but I have listened to his speeches, his direction, and his humility, etcetera, but I have never shook his hand.

J: Was there anybody in your life that inspired you during that period of time?

M: Was there anybody in my life that did what?

J: Inspire you during that period of time?

M: Inspire me? Oh yeah, King himself inspired me. Martin Luther King inspired me.

Luckily I had Reverend-- Father Theodore Gibson, he inspired me. Graham inspired me.

Garth Reeves, the editor for the *Miami Times*, he inspired me. You know, there were a whole lot of people. Athalie Range, she was a wonderful inspiration. There were a whole lot of people [telephone rings] that inspired me. Inspirational. It was-- yeah, inspired me.

J: How was it for you when you tried to register to vote?

M: How was it when I decided to register to vote? I had no problem in registering to vote.

I-- when I went down-- I know there were people all over country, especially in the south -- in the South who had problems to register to vote. I-- I was eighteen years old, I think I

was. Eighteen? Yeah, I think I was eighteen when I registered to vote, I can't remember

it's so long. But I went down to the courthouse, went out of the courthouse, and

registered. No one gave me no hassle, but I know there were a whole lot of people that got, you know-- had a problem trying to register to vote.

J: Are you married and do you have any kids?

M: Yes, I am married. I am married to the-- Patricia Davis- Moss now- and I have three children: one boy and two girls. My boy work for the post office in New York; my two daughters work for the State of Florida.

J: In high school, did you have any white friends?

M: Yes, I had-- I consider them friends because I-- and the reason I consider them friends because they-- if-- during the segregation time, if a white person come to you and being friendly with you, that was a kind of hard thing to do and they-- it was like a kind

sacrifice, you understand, because white people looked down on other white people who tried to befriend black people, you understand? But I did have friends, yeah.

J: Did you join any clubs in high school?

M: Did I--?

J: Did you join any clubs in high school?

M: Clubs?

J: Yeah.

M: No, well I-- well, no, when I was go in the Bahamas I no-- no-- no clubs, I wouldn't belong to no clubs, no. I never did believe too much in gang things and, you know-- well, it's not a gang, but when you say club you talking about legal, authorized group. [laughs]
No, I wasn't in none of them, no.

J: And what would you say to kids now that are racist or being a target of racism?

M: (If it's a boy?), I'll tell him that it's wrong, that racism is wrong. And if they're racist, I would more or less try to tell him that they need to more or less look at themselves.

There is no different in people other than maybe color or-- that's about it, we all people.

So, those who are suffering from racism I'd tell them, "Hey, you better go and study hard so you can work against racism." And those who are racist, I'll say to them how your position is (fast-forward?). Soon, and very soon, you're gonna hit-- have to take another look at your position, okay?

J: I'd like to thank you for coming sir.

END OF INTERVIEW

