

**Interview with Dr. Gregory Beach at his home in Coconut Grove on March 16, 2018 starting at 3:52 PM. We were sitting in his living room for the duration of the interview.**

Interviewer: Yuleisy Mena

Narrator: Dr. Gregory Bush

**YM:** It's March 16, 2018 and I am here with Dr. Gregory Bush who wrote the book *White Sand, Black Beach* and its 3:52 pm, and I am here today to speak to you a little bit about what you wrote in your book and your experience with Virginia Key Beach. But before that I just want to get to know a little bit about you and your early life. Tell me if you are a Miami native or not.

**GB:** Resident. I come from a New Jersey family [from] way back in to New Jersey [history]. I'm actually a direct descendent of William Bradford, who came over the Mayflower... and so I didn't come down to Miami until 1983 when I graduated from Columbia University

**YM:** Did you come directly for—?

**GB:** Job.

**YM:** The position at U.M.?

**GB:** Yes to be an assistant professor of history and director of the Institute for Public History.

**YM:** And where did you live in Miami? What did you think of the city?

**GB:** Well I lived in Kendall the first time, then I lived in Coral Gables, and finally moved to kind of the South Miami area, so I lived in three different areas. What did I think of the area? Well I remember first arriving in the airport in the middle of July and just thinking, Oh my God, how hot it was and sweaty and stuff like that. I left first summer or two to go north and then I got used to the summers, and more recently they've gotten too hot again. I still like Miami in many ways, but to be honest over the years and more recently the congestion, the corruption, the traffic, things like sea level rise in Turkey point and all the rest, make this—it seems to me you know a place that won't necessarily last.

**YM:** By won't last do you mean geographically with climate?

**GB:** Oh that's part of it. Obviously, climate change being one thing and then the real estate market. You know, I'm something of an apocalypticist you can argue, and I just think that much sooner than people think with hurricanes, etc. real estate values could plummet. I think we are living in a bit of a bubble to be honest.

**YM:** So in Miami, as a professor involved with public history, and seeing the environment in this new area that you came to, how did you get involved with the Virginia Key Beach initiative? Was it other things that you had researched that got you to that point to do research on this?

**GB:** (Sigh) I first got involved through the Institute of Public History in creating what became the Florida Moving Image Archive that exists now, and then I got involved in and writing about Miami as a 'culture of spectacle' which interested me, and I simultaneously started doing oral histories with elder African-Americans from actually very early days, and then I would say by 1996, along with some others, we helped start the Urban Environment League which was interested in saving public waterfront spaces, starting with American Airlines Arena which is a fight that we lost. And then we went on somewhat later to so try to save the Miami Circle in 1999, the so-called barnacle addition, where the cloisters is now a little bit earlier and at the same time as the Miami Circle, the Virginia key issue came up.

I had just become president of the Urban Environment League and a woman named Mabel Miller who is a very important person in Virginia key history came to me and said "You should come to this meeting about Virginia key. It's an issue that's really important." I hadn't known that much about it at all and I went in early 1999. I think it was January if I recall- it's in the book- and listened to I would say a dozen environmental leaders at city of Miami lower-level meeting and they were talking about the need to preserve the park as an environmental asset and I had just finished reading Marvin Dunn's book *Black Miami* and reviewing of it I think it was for the Journal of American History and so I was somewhat familiar with Virginia Key's history at least from that book at that point. It just clicked to me that environmentalists weren't winning the day in the committee at all. I stood up and I said something like, "I think that this should be saved and of the history of the Civil Rights Movement and for the African-American community and others as well as the environment." I strongly pushed that and then I remember there was scoffing by some of the members of the committee. The committee was all white. No Hispanics, no African-Americans in the committee, which one point I made an issue of too. And so anyway, I then subsequently met some of the people who are advocates to save the park, Nancy Lee being one of them and Bob Winreb, and they had a collected whole bunch of information, historical information on Virginia key and so I got much more interested in the issue pretty much at the same time we were trying to save the Miami Circle, and so it became a whole thing of trying to save public waterfront spaces and that we have civil rights to public spaces. The whole concept grew in my head about that time. Public spaces are going away and I came to see that there is almost no organization that had much clout to be able to save them. People get so cynical in South Florida about trying to save public spaces.

There were major advocates over many years, like Dan Paul. He is a key character who was a brilliant lawyer and he would sue the city and go before the city commission all the time. He was not particularly involved in this particular issue, but in that I was president on the Urban Environment League at the time I thought that was what we were in business to do. We had lost the American Airlines fight, but in fact we won the Miami Circle fight because that was saved. Not just because of us, but Dade-Heritage Trust and there were other organizations, it was coalition building. We could save Virginia Key Beach if we built the coalition. Also, we were also conscious enough to know that I'm a white guy you know and other white folks aren't going to do it necessarily. I contacted Athalie Range and several others including Gene Tinnie to say, "Look this is out here now." They clearly cared, but I guess a lot of people don't realize what committees are going on, what the status [of a space] is and stuff like that so they grow interested. [Enid C.] Pickney grew interested and others. So I guess, you know, they took more the initiative.

It was a long process then of going through a waterfront committee of the city of Miami to get our resolution passed that it be preserved as a civil rights park, and then we had a subsequent as you may be aware, charrette or design workshop try to figure out what goes in the 80 acres of the park and so it became a bigger and bigger effort over time and in one sense it was successful because we were able to get the city commission. We worked with Commissioner Arthur Teal at that point the loan African-American Commissioner, brilliant guy to be able to redesign the park, to do oral histories of other people-others were just starting to do oral histories of participants back then. I became and have remained since then close friends with Gene Tinney and Enid Pinckney, two long stalwarts in preserving the park, and also Eugenia Thomas who was the wife of Judge Thomas, L.E. Thomas, who was the guy back in 1945, who basically led the civil rights demonstration that created Virginia Key Beach out in Haulover Beach. I kind of got involved and then really interested in a lot more of the history and thought it should be detailed more, contextualized more, and so it's the context that got interesting to me for a while because it wasn't just about African-American history.

I never presume to be an expert about folk life in Overtown and will whatnot but obviously I read a lot of stuff which I didn't talk to people but was equally interesting to me was that the waterfront in general and then learning about the political process and how people became so cynical about getting involved. Then I over time came to see you make a little bit of an impact you know as a historian and you can gain some respect from city commissioners, county commissioners, if you do the research if you talk to them you know if you, you gain some respect from them and so in the long-run I got involved in and out of that effort I wrote the legislation for Parks Advisory Board for the city of Miami that had one before and then had gone away. So I said, should have a Parks Advisory Board so I worked with the park's director. His name was Alberto Rooter, good friend to this day.

[I got involved in] another [cause] with Bicentennial Park in downtown Miami trying to stop them from becoming Marlin's Stadium, which was a long fight, so somehow I got myself involved in all these waterfront fights over a number years and it just took an enormous amount of time. I don't regret it at all, but it clearly ate away some of my quality preparation for classes, certainly ate away a lot of my personal research and getting books and articles out so things like raises didn't come to me and you know I knew some bosses at UM weren't that happy that I wasn't turning in enough publications, but certainly after I had tenure you could do what you want. There is there is a real value and that kind of freedom to be able to use whatever historical skills I had as I saw fit. I thought that as a director of [the] Public History [Institute] for me [this meant] to be involved in using those skills in what I saw to be the public's interest. Others would disagree with that. [They think these spaces] should all be commercialized, should be shopping centers or whatever else. It's not what I understood from the lot the public wanted. It was just my decision and my organizations so it's an interesting academic question of objectivity versus advocacy. I became an advocate and yet I tried to write as objective history in that book as I could, even though I was, weaving my own story through some of it.

**YM:** Okay, you talk a lot about 'interdisciplinary', or 'intersectional', the idea of the 'public', and 'bridging that gap'. That's what public history is, right? [Bridging the gap] between academia and these communities, and that shared authority creating their history and being part

of it. So before we talk more about the political and economic obstacles [of proclaiming] Virginia Key Beach as a civil rights beach, if you can, put into context the inequality of public spaces in Miami. In your book [you mention] people forgot about the beach after using it for a couple of years and the struggle of the wade-in, that it kind of got forgotten after it was used to appease African Americans as a way to remove them a little bit, give them their beach but continue segregated areas more for other groups. So just a little bit of context is important and bringing in a bit of the politics, the economics, and the social history together whatever you just want to say about that context that we need to know before we get into the full political economic, obstacles.

**GB:** Essentially, the park was opened in 1945 after this demonstration that I mentioned earlier, but I guess I found that there had been long-standing negotiations between Thomas and other white commissioners and that they had been stalling, the commissions had been stalling, so there were only a handful of people at the demonstration. It was a strategic push and so they were able to get be given quote/unquote the beach land and you couldn't get out there by boat for nearly days from 1945 to 1947, and it was a lonely piece of unused beach land, and yet African-Americans have been going there earlier interestingly. So there's actually a history of that even before it became a park, and then in the late 40s and 50s, there was more of an infrastructure that was created. This includes the food concession building that still there that I used with group nature links that I have been involved in, and it became an incredibly vital place .I'm sure you've seen a number of photographs of the parking lot with hundreds and hundreds of cars, some of them late-model and so the end of the photographic record is actually fascinating. There is not that many, so [there] needs to be a lot more photographs found in the community as far as I'm concerned, that's another thing.

But [Virginia Key Beach] became an incredibly powerful community magnet, I guess that is a way to put it, and I would even argue, a kind of proto-political space. The community, I mean, never had gathered in such large numbers for fun in that regard, and being out in the environment, being by the water, celebrating themselves as a community. Music stars showed up, and it was a place Martin Luther Kings, as you are probably aware, went on a number of occasions, and others. It functioned I think as an important locust for the for the community, but by the early sixties that as desegregation was gaining steam in different ways, and it didn't happen overnight through a whole series of changes that I try to chart in my book, but even related up to Delray Beach and then Rev. Gibson and an opening of Crandon parked nearby. By 1960 or so.

Slowly but surely the sixties into the very early seventies less and less African-Americans would go there to that beach because they could go anywhere and they did, so they celebrated their freedom to go anywhere and then whatever beach they like to go to which, of course, that's understandable. By the seventies, you know, not that many people are using it. It was I guess in the county's mind costing more money to keep it up. So by 1983 82', 83' I think it was, 82' maybe, there was kind of a global deal between the county and city and the County transferred title to the park to the city of Miami with expressed provisions that it be used for public park purposes only or it would revert back to the county. That was signed, sealed and then that agreement was essentially totally ignored so the city shut it down so it was effectively not open to the public from 1982 until one of us came on to the scene in 1999. I think it was, which is

pretty shocking in and of itself to me, that they would be so brazen. But we also some of us knocked on the door of county administrators to say, “Hello. Was there supposed to be some oversight of the deed restrictions so this is to be open as a public park?” They didn’t know. Or they would say, “Oh, well we have these yearly things.” But there was a total lack of oversight of their own deed restrictions, which I think is often the case so you that’s why I guess over time I became more and more convinced that you need organizations like the Urban Environment League or others, and frankly younger people to get involved in the also looking out for these things that are relatively complex.

Most people like simple issues, but even now they do not. I’m obviously on the side of gun control. For example, to my mind it’s an easy moral issue. Even though we can say, okay hand guns for hunters are not so bad. It’s not complex to me. I’m an urban person and against [someone] having an AK 15’S and things like that. Whereas some of these other issues are more complex and necessitate people going to meetings and knowing the process. Most of the younger people in general don’t have enough time. Even, for example, faculty of universities doing some research don’t really have the time to go a lot of these meetings and to keep up with all the stuff, so who does? So it’s kind interesting even generationally who gets involved in these kinds of issues or even planning, development issues. That’s why I think you really need strong, even countywide certainly citywide organizations, nonprofit organizations where you have experts involved in people. Public meetings where you bring attention to it, etc. But it takes work, it takes money, it takes staff, almost none of which— we have no money, we have no staff so we scrambled, trying to fill out that stuff and it remains a problem, it still is.

**YM:** Do you think- just to expand a little bit more on context- do you think that because of the large influx of immigrants, from Latin America after the sixties, people had forgotten that Miami was a segregated space, even though we can see redlining because of Overtown and different ethnic enclaves? Do you think [forgetting] wasn’t on purpose, or [that] maybe it was? This can contribute to the lack of interest in some people in the community or even at the higher level of local officials.

**GB:** I mean in one sense, African Americans were overlooked a lot, but I would also say park land, for example, for Hispanics and Little Havana was also overlooked. Little Havana, that commission district has the least amount of public park spaces of any, so I think a lot of poor communities just get shafted when it comes to public spaces and quality public spaces and I think that does not help you know quality of life in the community. It doesn’t bring people together. I mean there is a perception even into the 1990s of parks as dangerous places. “We don’t want to have so many trees because criminals hide in trees.” Literally that’s what I heard was about Hialeah, and I believe it. I heard that, you know, and there are perceptions like that out there that you know and that people want to go shopping malls they want air conditioning, so they don’t want to be out in the so-called real world. I think that perception was even relatively prevalent by the 1990s I think it’s changed now with people on bicycles and you know, it’s a different thing these days, but back then I would say that was a political perceptions that was pretty predominant. “Oh who cares, if some of this parkland goes away if there’s generation of jobs out of it or it’s greater at tourist appeal.” Especially—it’s not beach but let’s say the downtown waterfront so when you drive along Biscayne Boulevard or whatever, when do you see the waterfront these days?

You know, it's pathetic as far as I'm concerned that this lack of long-term public planning that is adequate in Miami. I don't see it getting that much better and I don't see the fact of public conclusion in the planning process, very good. A lot of that's just set up and made up. So the public says oh you're invited to a meeting but nobody knows about it. I went to one actually. I've been to a couple like this where it's really a little set up. Okay, everybody can speak their mind but do it in these little groups you know and or write your comments and little dots on a you know a design thing but a lot of its quasi-meaningless and then you're not asked back to you know to kind of the design is somewhat finished and then you can comment. I think the process is often really stilted, that's a way to put it, or skewed maybe is better term. That's why I also think that in the planning process, I've come to believe, you need to do more oral histories of people in the neighborhoods early on in the process so you find out what went on there before, what people are interested in, cultural diversity of an area and all sorts of things like that and not late in the game, you know. And then that can also forestall...a lot of planning officials are afraid of too many public meetings or people get up in they just kind of mouth off and just go on and on the on, without clarity and just even getting in the verbal antagonism, etc. Whereas I think you if can do some oral histories and bring a lot of those concerns out early...If students get involved in it or others professionals. I think that, then you edit some of that and you show the public at an early design workshop so that these different kinds of opinions and here's a whole bunch of them and then people say Oh yeah, some people expressing my opinion, then you can get some better place of consensus easier, seems to me.

**YM:** Does you believe, there is a problem with the disconnect over the public spaces that are more in the center of Miami? Since there's been such an urban sprawl in the suburbs and as you say this lack of communication even in feeling you're from Miami, the history like some other states have or cities. Do you believe this contributes to preservation and nature's preservation?

**GB:** I'm not exactly sure what you are saying I mean—

**YM:** The connection of the community to these spaces and people outside of Miami as in the suburbs of Miami?

**GB:** Yeah I mean a lot of people in the suburbs, are afraid to go into the Center City period. It was much more intense in the early days. Also, when I first came in just absolute fear to be going to Overtown or places like that, or the Grove for that matter near where we are sitting.

I think that's changed quite a bit but still I think that had a significant impact on the lack of sensitivity, to quality place, I think you know, lack of really stunning parks. For example, I mean there were early on there were a couple little parks at work given to the African-American community, Dixie Park, etc. A lot of the- kind of a cynical view on my part- but a lot of the attitude I think coming out of the 1960s when there were some more public spaces given to the African-American community often it was just focused on sports. I have nothing against that at a certain point, but you know I don't think there was as much attention on being intergenerational places. Places where you know picnics and other things could go on. It was a prevalent attitude to have young black males for example get exhausted in sports and then theoretically they're not going to be causing other trouble which I think is inherently racist, but I think those kind attitudes and funding was central to a lot.



Can you cut?

**(26:43)**

**YM:** You just had a conversation off the record with me that if you want to keep expanding on that that would be great.

**GB:** Well I guess, I was talking about a sense of place that I tried to develop in Miami. When I came to see a number of things about this place. I got interested in the whole Miami as a culture of spectacle. And going back to Carl Fisher in 1920s, speed boat races, flash and fast, speed, spectacle, and status all kind of came together as I saw a lot of people see Miami with alcohol and Al Capone, and fast life and all sorts of stuff like that, and wintertime fun. I am not trying to be overly judgment at a certain point, but I think the whole notion of pleasing the tourists and trying to create the newest biggest spectacle to attract people, has consequences to a sense of community. Now when you have Disneyworld in Orlando as rivals, which they of course have been since the seventies if not earlier, that left us to some degree in the lurch, or we were still trying to compete with them in different ways so gambling then becomes a big issue and to get more jobs and I was involved along with a bunch of other people in trying to find genting from taking over and creating the world's largest resort casino at the site of the Miami Herald building. Things like that to me would ruin Miami much worse, and just represent a lot of the worst characteristics of modern life. I mean to be very honest, maybe it's going off the subject a little bit, but we have a president that represents a lot of those worst characteristics now in terms of- I don't want to go too far into it- but in terms of just gambling and corruption and a whole bunch of TV personalities and spectacle, and gold. Somehow we've gone away from a lot of simpler values that I frankly wish that Miami would exhibit a little bit more. But you know, it's a crowded place, and a lot of people want to live here and you can't stop a lot in one sense and yet you can plan it better, you sure can, and you can sure get a lot more people involved in planning process if one's government officials are smart.

But it's so kind of encrusted that the whole political process is encrusted with insider names, lobbyists, and PR experts, and moving this forward and that forward. The average citizens become cynical about getting involved. I think that we also live in a culture of spectacle but also a culture of cynicism. It's changed sometimes and somewhat in the last ten years, but I still see that as really significant because most people for example, are not sure the different jurisdictions which they live

You know there's a member of the school board. Which school board district? Which state representative? Which city commissioner? Which county commissioner? All the different jurisdictions are very complex. Most people don't have a clue and it's kind of understandable. I'm not blaming all the residents, but it's very poor public education about the political process and the development process and then the whole sense of trying to preserve either a sense of place or limits to growth or focus growth, things like that.

Difficult to bring together it seems to me. And I personally think there's, a couple of the first rate leaders like Daniella Levine Cava, for example, is one that I thought very highly of, but most county commissioners, and I don't want to name any negatives but, I just think there is a limited

imagination about public involvement and changing the system to make it better planning mechanisms.

YM: Can you develop what you mean by this idea of having a sense of placelessness?

GB: Oh you know I didn't put [the mic] back on. Wonder how bad the sound is. Probably pretty bad.

YM: So if I could hear you on the microphone?

GB: Am I working?

YM: Perfect! So we were quickly discussing the idea of people and the relationship to the water. I wanted you to expand on that.

GB: One thing that I was involved in, some planning exercise with county planners and others about 10 years or maybe more. I came to see that so many people in Miami, especially low income folks, etc. have very little relationship to the water, to Biscayne Bay. You know, they can't get there for one thing or they don't have regular experiences. It was the idea originally of Mabel Miller who was one of the founders of Virginia Key preservation effort going back with Marjory Stoneman Douglas and others literally to mandate that there be through the school system at least one day or a couple of days every year or something like that where all Miami-Dade students get an experience on the water. Which might be a lot. I mean a lot [locals] don't know how to swim.

So here we are in this absolutely gorgeous bay and most people can't see it as they drive-by and because of all these tall buildings that are valued at high prices and all that kind of stuff, and then a lot of people are just kind of walled off. It's almost the right way to put it, in Donald Trump's world, talk about a wall, I mean it's a wall against the water that lot of people are experiencing, unfortunately. [We should be] finding ways to get more people out to appreciate what the water is all about, learning about the fish and all sorts of aspects of aquaculture, and things like that. I think it's really important. There are also two programs that would take [students] out to the Everglades, for example. I'm not reinventing a wheel with this totally new idea. But I just think that such a push for STEM these days, you know science, education and technology. I'm not against that either, that's not the point, but history gets lost, a sense of place gets lost and the kind of environmental sensitivity, and how they work. I think it's lost in the mix. It kind of becomes institutionalized seems to me. And you can see it, there's almost no time. For example, in the- what do you call it- the state mandates, [there's] very little time for local history at all and so teachers don't teach local history. It's American history [mostly], then it is what? Florida history and I forget what it is [in the] fourth grade.

YM: In fourth grade, exactly what you said, students get an ecology of Florida and they do take that field trip to the Everglades.



**GB:** Right which is all fine, but I mean you need to do that with older kids too and have interesting projects. If you teach to the test, the state test, I think there's a lot lost in that process I really do.

**YM:** So you are saying there's a disconnect between the—

**GB:** Place

**YM:** The Florida ecology and the history of civil rights in America, but we are not bringing it to the backyard of the students to see it in play.

**GB:** Yeah, I mean to give an example. I did this project with Barbara Moore Parks McCabe who was a good friend and a really good historian of Miami, you may know of her. We wrote a book published in 1996 called *Miami: The American Crossroad*, and we- it's all basically a documentary history of Miami and it won the state prize or something like that back then, and we had- We went the trouble to get Prentice-Hall to donate 30,000 copies to Miami-Dade Public School System and we had a teacher's guide along with it so that when students were taking American history they could also learn about local history.

As far as I know, it's almost never been used. They didn't even know where thousands of these copies are. They probably have been destroyed or whatever, so I mean that's the way life is. But because of the mandates, coming down from the state, they don't give a darn about if we learn any Miami related history. It's kind of narrow in my point-of-view. I think local ignorance about politics and political consciousness has ramifications.

For example, there has never been a—and I think I put this in my book—a real, even adequate or thorough, political history of Miami. Doesn't exist. There have been specialized histories and biographies and other stuff like that. And it's a complex history because you have city, the county, different municipalities, so it's complex and kind of daunting. I never wanted to do it. It was too much! But you know it really needs to be done. A lot of the materials need to be pulled together better, even notes. As far as I know, when the Miami Herald building went out of existence a few years back they had all these archives. In fact, I don't know this for sure but I think a lot of them were destroyed and they. I used some clipping files that were incredibly extensive, and as you may know, may or may not, the Miami Herald is not adequately indexed at all. We have a history that's not indexed through the leading newspaper. The Miami Daily News is but most people don't know how to get to it. The Palm Beach Post I think is, but that just underscores, it seems to me, the lack of historical consciousness [in Miami]. And then people at certain levels just don't care. You know, because they are wanting to drive fast in this day and age. That seems to be where the action is. So I guess I've come to dislike that aspect of Miami. You know it's not a very thoughtful place and that's kind of a critical comment to say the least, but I think that just means that—not to say they don't have conferences with smart people to come and talk and stuff like that but just as culture in general—it's just been disappointing to me.

**YM:** Do you think it's unlike older cities in the United States? Do you think it's relatively new and transient? [With its] history of immigration and some of the generations that are not even

second generation immigrants, it's difficult to have roots in Miami. Going back to your great-grandfather, and your father— your father might have come from Miami twenty years ago and you were been born in Miami, or many school children—

**GB:** From Guatemala or whatever, you mean?

**YM:** Right. Do you think that's something that we can fix? Make them have that identity of Miami?

**GB:** Sure and [to believe] that it's exciting and the intercultural aspect of it can lead to really good things you know. Maybe we're on the cusp of that. I mean we are living in an era now where you know Muslims and aliens and whatnot are so castigated by roughly one third of the population, but the rest of us, I would argue, are victimized by that discrimination, by that intolerance that is there among some. We need to find positive ways to move forward to show even to show the rest of people and ourselves that there's excitement and learning about different cultures and different peoples from you know from Cuba or Guatemala or Israel or whatever it is you know and how that interaction really can create fascinating things.

In terms of art, memories, exchanging memories so kind of concessions where people are talking. I forget the guy's name, he used to be head of the New World School of the Arts. I think his name is Mel Alexenberg, if I recall correctly. He moved to Israel. He got involved with a number of his students and I thought this was brilliant in doing a whole series of oral histories. This was maybe fifteen years ago and coming up with symbols from people from different cultural backgrounds. I think they interviewed people in retirement homes. Older Jewish folks, Hispanics, African-Americans. I'm not sure exactly the breakdown of three or four. And then kind of came up with some symbols that were relevant to people from different cultural backgrounds that were powerful, and then they made with art students multicultural thrones with the symbols embedded. I thought that was really cool. I think they're there, at least they were a few years back still at Margaret Pace Park. They may be going, who knows how long will they last. But there are things like that that can be done that can really bring out the different cultural background of different people and groups, and be excited about this creative effort that can build culture rather than tear it down, be critical of it, etc., and yet being honest through it too hopefully.

**YM:** I want to go back to the comment you made about, when we were talking earlier—I think it was off the record—about an Exile Museum and an African American Museum. Because Miami seems to be a place with so many ethnic enclaves, there seems to be, correct me if I am wrong, a disconnect between maybe white and Latino groups in some suburbs, as well, as African-Americans and other groups that also that live like in the inner city areas and Overtown [when] hey can share those histories of Virginia Key and African American history of Miami. How can we bridge that, being such a large city and so expansive? And it's like these people are living in two different world's maybe? I don't know if you agree.

**GB:** Well yeah, and as my own specific reference here to kind of thinking about that has come about with the whole notion of the Cuban Exile History Museum that was originally proposed

for parcel B in front of the American Airlines Arena, and now in March of 2018. The issue is coming up very soon before the County commission Bayfront Park trust, if I'm not mistaken, about having two museums in Bicentennial Park or Museum Park now called Museum Park, a Cuban Exile History Museum and an African-American history Museum. I guess my own view is—and others I've had a lot of conversations people that this—well there should be a Haitian Museum we could argue. There should be a Jamaican Museum, or a Native American obviously. So why just two?

So that then brings up several different sets of questions. Bicentennial Park does not have space for these. It's supposed to be a park. It's not appropriate in my view to just always take park land and open spaces away for the favorite museum of the day.

I further think A) museums don't need to be on the waterfront. I also came to the belief that you don't really need stadiums on the waterfront just because the owner wants a waterfront location. It is nice and telegenic, but that doesn't mean you should give away your prime public spaces worth hundreds of millions of dollars to somebody's whose then gonna sell it and make money out of it, which is exactly what's happened with Marlin Stadium in a different way. I further think that, and I guess I got some of these ideas from Nelson Mandela, *The Ties that Bind*, that we in fact need to have either a museum and or video series or different ways of bringing people together from different cultural backgrounds and learning about each other's past. That's more important, in my view, then you know just a particular group learning about their own or preserving their own. Nothing against that, against preserving our own particular cultural background. I mean you need to do that.

But I mean, I'm even questioning museums more in my own mind these days. A lot of times people go to a museum and they're often relatively static. They have certain set limit of artifacts or whatever your manuscripts and you go there once, twice, that may be it. Obviously. some have changing exhibits and things like that which I was brings people back and that makes a lot of sense but I guess in my view, you know, we really need to think outside the box a little bit more you know of, really, how we're learning about each other's history and how much of an art, cultural differences, and gender differences within cultures and so many interesting questions and you can't have definitive answers but you can stimulate curiosity and then be provocative too because we're so afraid.

I think Miami I could argue too is so afraid of being too provocative sometimes, that that the school system is going to come down on you [with], "You're not teaching the test," or whatever it is. There's too much bureaucratic constraining qualities in Miami. My view, even though, I've had an unusual amount of freedom to do what I wanted to do so I can't assure you I'm not complaining on my own behalf. Being a tenured professor at a university when you have limited teaching responsibilities, you are supposed to be churning up publications and I spend my time doing what I want to do with a lot of this stuff that I thought was more important than getting another publication. I don't know. That didn't answer your question.

**YM:** Virginia Key really is an important part of the history and we might lose it. If you can just tell me how the politics a little more in depth and the economic situation of Miami had prevented this space that's socially is really important with [the] civil rights [history of] the African

American community. And once we get that museum, you could leave this for the end, what should it look like for them to preserve their history?

**GB:** One never wants to presume to tell them, but you know what a museum is. Even with Bicentennial Park, when we fought to save that, we had all these charrettes of an idea of mine that I was trying to reinforce. I like, I'm a process person, so I like a public process and open process and I'm very critical of most of them because they're usually a set of insiders that have a game and even planners have a set of ideas, and I experienced that many, many times in different ways with Virginia Key.

There was a positive planning process as you're probably well aware and the master planner came out and then there was a Virginia Key Park Trust that was created and I kind of observed it a bit from afar, but they eventually were able to get \$15 million dollars, as you may know, of County bond money out of—there was a 2000—I'm probably going to get this wrong—but four bond issues. I think it might have been 2006. And that was another struggle some of us went through, but they haven't really built the structure yet and that's been problematic. I followed some of it and became very impatient on a number of occasions.

But one of the hoops that they had to go was that those were capital dollars that were not operating dollars, so they—in other words could build a fancy \$50 million dollar structure, history structure something like that, but if you don't have a way to operate, cover the operational costs and now it won't be self-sustaining at all. I think is been part of the problem all along. So they look for different entrepreneurs to partner with whom to partner and that's I guess never worked out like restaurants and this. I have my own bias because I ran an organization that I mentioned earlier, nature links for lifelong learning for young adults with intellectual disabilities and they were welcoming to us as a location using their food, old food concession building as a place for us to teach kids with learning disabilities eighteen to thirty about the natural world. We have a garden there and learning about cooking and some other stuff like that for years and [they] never upgraded the building and it was not the code, dangerous and, not to mention not even the air conditioner was even a problem. Unsafe I guess is a way to put it.

And it's still sitting there like that and I don't really understand why they couldn't make some decisions not just for nature links, but to upgrade that building but they kept saying, all well we're waiting for a major restaurant tour. I think to maybe come along and use that as part of some big thing in a restaurant complex where they make more money, but it's been years and that just strikes me as, I don't know. I don't be overly critical, but it's like that money can go away but \$50 million could be snagged by the County commission for another project so they know if they can't get together to do that, you know, they could lose that I had a notion that brought before them once having—Have you ever heard of Chautauqua? There's actually very interesting PBS program about Chautauqua. It was in upstate New York. It was a movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of their locations around the country actually there's one in North Florida where people would get together for a weekend or week or whatever and they're kind of educational, musical, theatrical events, sometimes noted speakers bureaus about William James and others would come and speak and there was a Chautauqua in upstate New York in the videos about that by large and it would stay overnight the check for the day a minute. They were great events, community events that was singing Virginia Beach could have

something like that, with the sole exception that Chautauqua but New York State has also to rooming houses and stuff and I don't think you want overnight, a lot overnight stuff on Virginia Key Beach, then it becomes commercial, which a lot of people not wanted there want to keep it more natural. But, you could have some of those buildings used as educational buildings. Open air with environmental history, African-American history—the Cuban-Americans came over as rafters. You can make it in that sense, and I think Thomas Regalado could see some of that to you know of Cuban-American history involved with that as well and I don't know, it never went anywhere. (Laughter)

**YM:** I believe your book said that there were also Jewish Miami residents on the beach as well? Eventually after it was open?

**GB:** I'm sure. I mean there were several. Jewish folks owned Hampton House. You may know about the Hampton House hotel or motel on 27<sup>th</sup> Ave. [I] was just there the other day. So they would go back and forth but I don't. There were Jewish folks all over Miami by the 1930s, etc. in Shenandoah, but I don't think there was a specific [area]. Jews were kept off of Miami Beach as you may well know, but I don't recall there was a specific location for Jews on Virginia Key. There was a nude beach there and I don't think I write much about that in my book, and I should have more. In the 1970s. So is a significant location for naturists and then they were shushed away and where I guess they have that location now so it's to me Virginia key at large a thousand acre I will begin a fascinating subject, because it's such a hodgepodge of uses.

There's a huge wastewater treatment plant there and what's that's going to be like when sea level rise comes really interesting. You know then there's the Marine Stadium, that's been sitting there since 1992, and may sit there while longer because the planning for that. Lord knows where that is. I got involved a lot of planning and helped now Mayor Suarez write the legislation for the Virginia Key Advisory Board. I may have mentioned in my book that I chaired for a couple years until I left Miami last spring, and even that was becoming depressing because there was a master plan were supposed to follow the master plan for the island. A lot of people fought for the master plan was passed unanimously by the city commission in July 2010.

But I can't tell you the number of times the city administration before went around, it didn't consult with us. They just threw the boat show in their you know I which is was nowhere in the plan, you know which, if it had been done in a thoughtful manner and brought before people, and so does this make sense, blah, blah, blah. It might be one thing, but they just did you know I they continue by and large to do that and not all. I'm not saying everybody's equally guilty or anything like that but there's not a good sense of deference to expertise and public interest in a lot of these public spaces, and certainly not to keep them as natural places. It's like, "What can we glum up here?" A new hotel, or they were about to have a huge mooring field in the center of the Marine Stadium now apparently that's off the table because a lot of pressure

So these battles, to be honest, for me, start to become old which is part of the reason that I decided to move out of Miami and to move to Maine. Although I love Maine—the coast of Maine is just beautiful. It's not that I dislike Miami or anything like that because it's a big part of me is here. My daughter was born here and brought up here. She's half Cuban-American and I

have a lot of friends out here, but I guess I wish that Miami would become more thoughtful place in a little less frenetic and really think longer term

**YM:** Do you think there's a future maybe a more environmentally and socially conscious generation that Miami can make a shift and maybe we can preserve what there is left of that public space and the natural bay?

**GB:** Maybe.

That's kind of what I would say because the Bay and the Everglades. You have to look at the entire system really, environmentally. I would say one thing that gives me hope is the young generation in terms of Marjory Stoneman Douglas School and what's going on around the country with younger people organizing for greater gun control. I wish and I actually wrote one of the teachers up there to make the connection between gun violence and environmental sensitivity and a sense of place. Guns obviously are critically important in their focus now so you can go in a number of different directions and you can lose focus, and yet I think you know an awakened generation can do wonders. And I do think it's a younger generation because I think most older folks my age or well into their 50s or whatever—how do I put it? Are either burned out or cynical or I don't know or they are clearly, this interests me a lot there's a lack of intergenerational communication between older folks, like myself with a good amount of experience dealing with the political process and younger people. I think finding better more effective forms of intergenerational cooperation is really critically important.

But I don't think I'll be here to find that much more.

**YM:** Well since you have mentioned all of this, well we see a lot of groups in the suburbs, what about the children in the school's in Liberty City and Overtown? What can be done with their teachers as a younger generation with this history of Virginia Key and [forging] new found interest or? What I grasp from you is that we need a Grass Roots right to preserve this.

**GB:** And mobility.

I think people, let's say from an inner-city area black or Hispanic or white or whatever need have experiences coming out to Virginia Key. So it would be some kind of regular bus and or transportation for events and then have things out there. You know, because it's you can walk along the beach and it's pretty and you see this and that but you need interpreters, you need something out there beyond what's there now as I'm concerned, so people go "Wow, that's really cool!". Which might include a place, swimming a little more safely, it's very dangerous to swim out there as you may be aware. So some more safety considerations for swimming and then I would say just so everybody take cars or maybe even have more organized bike events for health and stuff like that. Trying to be more creative in using that beautiful Barrier Island.

**YM:** Yoga

**GB:** Sure.



YM: Do you know if there's any grants for kids that are African American and their communities to go out to Virginia Key?

GB: I'm sure there are. I would try Michael Spring and the Division of Court Cultural Affairs of the County. They Give Grants for Mostly arts but you can make an arts project out of that. Seems to me without much difficulty. That's where there's some money.

The key would be in terms of grants and finding money is collaboration with various partners. In other words, if it's a disabled group collaborating with Shake A Leg Miami or different kinds of segments. I also thought of at one point actually, Mayor Suarez like This idea make it intergenerational out there. So in other words get elder residents from Robert King High Housing in Downtown Miami coming out with inner-city kids and plant gardens together on a somewhat regular basis.

YM: I just want to know if there's anything you really want to get out there.

GB: Well I guess my big passion these days is Nature Links for Life Long Learning. So to me it's almost, even though we have a long way to go, in terms of the Civil Rights of women, African Americans, Hispanics etc., there's a population of people with disabilities, intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities who are so often ignored in terms of their continuing education. My experience is that they have been dumped after high school and there's almost nothing for them to do. A lot of them. My daughter is in this category, but a lot of them are extremely unique and sharp in their own way. They may have autism, they may be downs or whatever, but they need continuing education.

And to me, one of the most useful models, even for the broader educational system is to use the natural world as a fulcrum. From gardening and cooking to learning about marine life, the sky, the earth, and building codes even, even getting into land. We had a session at Nature Links called 'Land Over Time' and another on the water and sea and stuff like that and so I guess I think it's their time for kind of the civil rights movement to focus on people with disabilities because in my case I've learned so much about the world through their eyes and their condition in one sense, and that there's this sort of yearning that is not being addressed.

I became a little almost, I shouldn't say this, almost, not jaded but I just didn't have the same passion, to put it very bluntly, about a number of well-to-do kids taking a history course for example at the University of Miami versus spending a lot of my time organizing activities for a population that was really overlooked because a lot of people don't want to read that much, they are just looking at their cell phones and stuff like that, and I think your problem is—Angie Giroux, who has written some very interesting stuff, and another media columnist now dead called Neil Postman, said that we are kind of amusing ourselves to death as a culture.

I mean look at the president we have. The endless distraction and banalities and stuff like that. So that worries me. We really are not very awake as a culture. And I think that's going to be a very long term (inaudible) consequence. That's a down note isn't it? (Laughter) I'm sorry.

**YM:** No I think you've expressed throughout the interview that there's hope and there's things you can do.

**GB:** Sure. I don't give up! I mean one thing I've learned too is perseverance. Absolutely critical. I mean I think Marjorie Stoneman Douglas said that in a quote in the paper I think this morning or whatever online. Preservice is something, I've never given up hope and stuff even though we've lost a whole bunch of battles with the Urban Environmental League, funding for Nature Links is always—seemingly we are going to have to shut down etc. But I think that's important to learn.

**YM:** Well, as you've stated from the beginning of your interview, I think you have definitely made dent or an impact on whatever the future holds for Miami or Virginia Key, it's definitely a part of it. So I want to thank you for your reflections and your expertise and your time.

**GB:** Thank you, thank you very much!