UNIT ONE: Background Synopsis [recording damaged] [00:00:33] - [00:02:06]

The first 15 minutes of the interview of Mr. Edgar Poree were inadvertently damaged. The following is a synopsis of Mr. Edgar Poree's recollections of his early life, up to his introduction to Pontchartrain Park.

Edgar Poree was born on October 5th, 1936 in a room behind the family's barber shop located on the corner of Lafitte and N. Prieur streets in New Orleans, Louisiana. He grew up in a segregated downtown community adjacent to the sprawling Lafitte housing project. After being detained in the third grade, he developed a life-long commitment to education, attending Craig Elementary School, Joseph S. Clark High School, and Xavier University. At Craig Elementary School he met Gloria Guichard whom he married in 1959. Both of the Porees became teachers in the New Orleans Public School System. In 1964, at 27 years of age, Poree and his young bride Gloria moved into Pontchartrain Park. The interview resumes with Edgar Poree explaining how he earned the money to purchase his new home.

UNIT TWO: Coming to Purchase Home in Pontchartrain Park [00:02:06] - [00:06:42]

[Interview resumes] EP: ...King's Simonize Shop [was] right around the corner from Mr. Dan's Grocery, two blocks from my house. I used to go to them, "Mrs. King, won't you let me do that?" Before you had the stuff that clean the windows like Windex, they put red compound on a potato sack that was wet, it would film up like white--that's what you did the bumpers with. That's how I learn how to do the floors because it's the same process. So your cars would go for $6 or $8 and $2.50 and $3 for a car wash. So, I wash the car, I picked up another three hours. So I'm up at $10 in that $5 house, right? Then when bourgeois moved around Dillard University and had picture windows, a fancy lamp sitting on a nice little table and you got the wooden Venetian blinds, okay? The wooden Venetian blind is 2 inches wide, it gathers dust. I just throw them over the line in the yard, take a bucket of water, let the sun dry. I got $12.50 in my $5 house. That's how I was able to buy the house and put that money down because while they were going to the boss, I was working around the clock.

I never used [the VA bill] because technically back then if you didn't go to war, you didn't get it. But they told me subsequent to that I could have had the same because I got discharged, but I never used it.

One of these guys, they didn't refer to theirelf as, "I live in Pontchartrain Park "-- "I live in the Park. The Park, P A R K, I live in Park." They were just some people who were in the high end of our community, who were in the social clubs that I've never belonged to. You were kind of on the outside. I was trying to figure out why the garbage men were literally fighting over picking up the garbage in Pontchartrain Park. Why are they having like a raffle to get the Pontchartrain Park? I've been a rebel, a long time. I was a Men's Day speaker at Bethany United Methodist
Church, and I was telling them the story I'm telling you, why everybody was fighting to get to pick up the garbage in Pontchartrain Park. Well, with the notes that they had on the mortgage, there wasn't much in the garbage can over the weekend. The pastor said, "You did not go there, Mr. Poree?" Yes, I did, I was bad, I always was a terror you hear me? But that was the only negative. Although you're living here, it was wonderful, you were still not really accepted in certain circles, okay?

UNIT THREE  Children and Family [00:06:42]-- [00:09:03]

Q: When you moved into the Park, did you and your wife have any children? EP: Yeah, my oldest daughter was born in '61. And I lost a daughter, Dana. Dana died in my arms. Back then, they just called it crib death, she lived 30 to 32 days. You know, God is good all the time, she probably would have been a handicapped kid. I was just rocking Dana in my arms, her little head just dropped to the side. I walked over to Dr. Breaux who lived across the street, her in my arms, and he said, "She's gone." And that was the most difficult time during my 54 years of marriage with my wife. But Lord, and when my son came...oh, I had time to do nothing but go to school. I was a PTA president for every school that my son attended. I said, I might as well make my time worthwhile, because I was gonna get a call from whatever teacher it was because he was just like his Pa. I was a character in school too. They went to Coghill and Dieter went to St. Mary's in seventh grade. Edgar went to Gregory School, after he got out of Coghill School.

UNIT FOUR  "Movin' on Up" To Pontchartrain Park [00:09:03] - [00:12:42]

Well, I saw the plans, you know, because the house wasn't built yet. Oh, man, I was just freaking out. This was the Cadillac houses of Pontchartrain Park. We had three bedrooms, ceramic tiled bath, you had a bath and a half, you have a 4x4 shower in the bathroom next to the bedroom. It had a built-in kitchen and it had central air conditioning. It was 1,685 square feet and it was $25,700. Can you imagine? Get $25,700 for a house? Oh, man, we were uptown, uptown.

Q: Now your houses in downtown, they didn't have built in kitchens? EP: What you mean? Bienville Street? No! The house on Bienville Street, the first three rooms had plaster in it, okay? Bienville Street was heavily traveled, those big trucks, and eventually that plaster would crack and a large chunk would fall out of it. Well, my daddy was in World War one, had over five hundred fifty books and read them from cover to cover so he was a man of knowledge. When the plaster would crack and fall and you have a big old hole, you know what we would do? Mr. Johnson used to work in a factory where they pack china dishes with cellulose and stuff. So my daddy said, "What are you doing with that cellulose? Don't throw it away, just bring it here." All right, my daddy would [demonstrates with his hands] pull the first three boards out, take the cellulose and he pulled in between. That was insulation back in the 40s. And then my dad would go to Schwinn bicycle on St. Peter and Claiborne, and we get the box they shipped the bikes in. Guess what size the box was? Six by four by one. Well, if you open up a six by four by one, you got 14 square feet. That was our drywall. He did a template of the the hole and he put that in
there. The plaster is like almost 3/4 of an inch, so he put two layers of the template and then we take that big 14 foot piece because we had the 12-foot ceilings, that was our drywall. And that's how I learned how to wallpaper, the other thing I was doing when I was married.

UNIT 5: Life in Pontchartrain Park-- and Getting Out of the Classroom [00:12:42] - [00:20:51]

Q: Now when you first moved into the Park, what was it like? EP: Serene. Driving in there, and seeing kids playing. Just the beauty, the serenity of it. And you were close to everything… you had the Maison Blanche, a Sears, Grants, and a theater in Gentilly Woods. Q: Now what was the address, and did you have any other friends and relatives in Pontchartrain Park? EP: 6219 Providence Place, right behind Southern. Doctor Walter Alston was not only my friend, he was my mentor. Dr. Walter Alston should have been the guy who took Dr. Bashful’s place. The man was brilliant, he set up the government structure in Nigeria. He was heavyweight. That was my next door neighbor.

I was a sixth grade teacher for those eight years, and he was instrumental in getting me out of the classroom... Dr. Carl Dolce was appointed the superintendent of all these Parish schools in 1966. The first thing he said was he wanted to do a one cent sales tax to raise revenue for teachers. I was sharp in math, and I told my wife, I am out of the classroom, your man is no longer a servant. She's always referred to me as the dreamer, she said, "What are you dreaming about?" It was Dr. Walter Alston, I went over there and got the statistics [on] the last sales tax passed for education. Did my research, and I put together a 72 page strategic plan for all these Parish schools. I called Dr. Dolce and said, I have the plan that will get you the money, and [we] had a two-hour and 30-minute meeting. He said, this is terrific young man, but, typical politician, he said we had to let the lawyers look at this to see whether it's not in violation for a school teacher to participate in a political process. "We'll get back to you." Well, I didn't give him my original, I gave him the copy, the secretary at the school typed the 72 pages. Two weeks, don't hear anything. The third week, a letter comes to the school, Edgar Poree, school coordinator. Hmm. The lady who typed them 72 pages said, "Edgar, they stole your work." So I went to the Western Union office and followed the courier because Dr. Carl Dolce had to sign it. When he saw me, he said, "Mr. Poree, did we have an appointment?" I said, "No, we didn't, but we better have one." So I go in his office and he said, "Nobody called you?" I said they didn't have to call me, they had the plan. Dr. Edwin Stone who later became the Dean of Graduate School of LSUNO, he was in there, he was associate superintendent of pupil placement. He says, "Carl, anybody who would put that together ought not be in a classroom." The next day I came out of the classroom. But guess what happened? Twelve black principals requested an emergency meeting with Dr. Carl Dolce; they wanted to know how this arrogant, egotistical, short-term teacher was working in the headquarters. And so we get the plan and we did a figure of 71.35. All of the political pundits said, “Dr. Dorsey might be good at math, but that's crazy.” Guess what? The score was 71.37 Bop, bop, bop. Okay, so bam! The guy who steals my work gets employed. Bob Walls, $25,000.

Dr. Henry Williams had just gotten his master's degree from Harvard, he's the first black
associate superintendent, he gets hired for 20,000. He reports to the high school guy who, when Chep Morrison was running for mayor this guy was a photographer and went around taking pictures at all of the rallies. And when Chep Morrison won, he gave him the album with all the pictures and he became an executive assistant to Chep Morrison. That's how he got the job to run the sales tax with my program and I didn't get anything. My wife had tears in her eyes and she said, "All that you did and they didn't even mention your name."

Well, it was Ed Stone who got me out of the classroom. He called me and said, "I'm embarrassed." He said, There's anti-poverty, ain't nothing guaranteed. They put a proposal in and I wrote myself in for $14,000, and it got funded. In 1966, I was making $4,400 teaching school. Bang. First thing I did, I went and bought that '66 Mustang for this beautiful lady, and I got a big red bow and tie it around and drove it to 6219 Providence Place. And when she came home with her girlfriends, she said, "Who's that for?" I say, "The dreamer has struck again."

UNIT 6 People and Life in Pontchartrain Park [00:20:51] - [00:30:32]
Q: You were probably one of them, but can you identify some of the legends, people who were VIPs, from the neighborhood? EP: Well, you had Dutch and his family, your family, from an educational standpoint, your dad and your mom. Leon Fulton with insurance, Steven Johnson with the insurance business, and Sterling Henry and the doctor who built the house on Press Drive. Q: Doctor Ford. RP: No, not Dr. Ford Q: Dr. Adams. EP: Not Dr. Adams. The one who has a swimming pool. Q: Dr. Pratt. EP: Dr. Pratt. Oh, that was another thing I used to do--I landscaped Dr. Pratt's house and his pool. He was a God-fearing man who, when they were operating this oversized lady, she was coming off of the operating table and he kept her from falling and he popped his spine, he was ruined for life. Dr. Pratt was class personified. He was genuine. He gave to his church, he gave to the neighborhood. He was a real Pioneer. And of course Mac Knox with all he did for young people in the Park. They were really the troopers.

Q: You mentioned earlier that there were some very early bourgeoisie who had moved into the community. Did your family see you as being any different as a result of moving into Pontchartrain Park? EP: Well, we had some folks in my family, "Oh, he lives in the Park." I said, "I live in Pontchartrain Park." I would never use "I live in the Park" because I keep it real, if you don't lose who you are and get caught up in the social stuff. I said, it ain't where you come from determines where you're going. My being a class clown I was also small enough that I wasn't going to be kept back anymore. Get back, stay back. I got on an accelerated roll, brother, that was just unbelievable.

Q: Were they any advantages and disadvantages to rearing your children in Pontchartrain Park? EP: Oh, yeah. You never have to bother about them after school because they had the extended family watching over them, your neighbors knew where you should have been at a certain time, it was just a healthy environment, they were safe. They had recreation there. The only disadvantage I would think is that when kids who lived in Pontchartrain Park went other places in the city, they were perceived as uppity and sometimes that caused some problems at schools outside of the district.
Q: Were your children involved in the NORD program? EP: Yeah, with Mac there. My son played USA ball and basketball for the Park. My daughter was more academically involved than my son. She was always in the books. Q: What did you and the family do in the neighborhood for recreation? EP: We were more in our blocks, you knew those persons within five blocks by name. You would converse with them and their children would be on the Park. You knew it was wholesome, and you knew that you could go off somewhere for hours and not bother about them being on the Park. Because it was that safety thing, man. And they had a golf course there. It was the golf course that was about to destroy the integrity of Pontchartrain Park. A lot of whites used to come in because it was convenient. Then somebody wanted to put a fence around the golf course. I was on the the Park and Parkway Commission at the time, and that's the one good thing that I did, I didn't do anything else on that board. I won't call the guy's name, he was a uppity guy, he did this long tirade about protecting the children, getting hit in the head. I said, I lived in a neighborhood that had nothing but fences and we ain't putting no damn fences out in Pontchartrain Park. And he said, "I'm a taxpayer!" I said, "But you don't live here, brother. You ain't in the neighborhood." The community was galvanized and we prevented that fence from getting up there. They wanted to put an 8 foot chain link fence around the entire golf course. Can you imagine? Then you can't get to the other side of the Park. And they were afraid that they might drown in the lagoon.

Q: Were you a member of the Pontchartrain Park booster club? EP: Yeah, we would fundraise for baseball and softball teams to be supportive of it. And when they had fish fries, the clubhouse was where that that took place, we used to serve for the various activities.

UNIT 7 Career Crossroads [00:30:32] - [00:34:07]
ep: Look, I knew that this place was well run, I spent time doing other things. I was at South Central Bell at that time, and I worked in the poverty program from '66 until 1970. I worked at a regional planning think tank called Goals Foundation for a year and a half. I did the handbook that was adopted by the US Department of Labor, the regional handbook for the Neighborhood Youth Corps, and they offered me a job in Dallas, Texas. Well, at the time, Mr. Morrow Finch, the president of South Central Bell, was chairman of the board in this think tank, I listed him as a reference. He said, why you want to go to Dallas Texas? I said, it's $6,500 more than what I'm making. And he said, the future is in New Orleans for you, the phone company is your future. And I say "Mr. Finch, the only thing I've seen at the phone company who look like me is the people who cook in the kitchen and mopped the floors." My wife said, "Well, Edgar, you know the phone company is going to be there a long time. But I say that $6,500 is different, corporate America can do anything that they want to do, they break the rules, okay? So I go to my office and I'm packing. The president asked the director, how long is it going to take to finish this project? He said about 11 months and I'm packing my bags, okay? He said, "Edgar, hold on." He calls the office, he says, "Edgar Poree is going to be a lone executive for 11 months." And so, I entered into the corporate world. And it was something, young man and young lady, that I knew that whatever transpired at 2115 Bienville Street was because of what God had blessed
UNIT 8  Protestant and Catholic Churches, Pontchartrain Park and Gentilly Woods  
[00:34:07] - [00:39:15]
Q: Did you attend church? EP: My wife was Catholic, she went to Saint Gabriel. I was Methodist, we were the ones who built the New Bethany Church. Let me tell you about Bethany. Protestants didn't gamble, but Catholics gamble, they had Bingo, right? My parishioners say they didn't gamble but every Thursday night they were over at St. Gabriel. So a little group of us, we say, well, why don't we have Bingo on Friday night at Bethany Church. A letter was written that there were sinners having gambling in the church. But we were paying for the electricity, we were paying for the furniture. I asked Reverend Kennedy, would you let me buy the communion glasses with the money that we raised from the Bingo? And he said, why do you want to do that? I said, After they taking communion, I want to say, "Those glasses that you drink God's blood out of was paid for by the Bingo people." He said Edgar, You gonna get me out of the church. Edgar was a bad boy, Dr. Robertson.

Q: Now your wife, she attended St. Gabriel, which was in Gentilly Woods, the white neighborhood with the Catholic church and the school attached. Did your wife experience any negative racism at St. Gabriel? EP: No, I don't think so, she just went to church to go to church. Q: Your children were Catholic and attended St. Gabriel's, did they experience any problems? EP: No. Q: Did you or your family members experience any negative experiences going to the stores you mentioned? EP: No, not really, even though Gentilly Woods was still predominantly white. Once they opened Press Drive and Congress, that ditch that separated us there, it was just you lived in Pontchartrain Park and you went to Gentilly Woods and you saw people and went Hi if you recognize them. When you went to Schwegmann's when it was payday, or you saw them at the Maison Blanche or what have you. So depending on where you lived, there was conversation. So unlike what Tureaud was concerned about.

UNIT 9  Hurricanes Betsy and Katrina  [00:39:15] - [00:47:07]
Q: You moved into Pontchartrain Park in 1964. In 1965, there was Hurricane Betsy. Was your home damaged at that point? EP: Not too much, because the house is brick. We went down to Bienville Street, to my deceased parents house because that's a high ridge, like the French Quarter. My parents were paying for flood insurance when in fact that was a no flood zone for years. My white coworker whose mother lived on Bienville Street near Carlton said, why is your mom paying all that money for flood insurance? He said, you go and get a $375 flood elevation, and they going to tell you that this is not a flood zone and my mother and them was paying 70% more than my white counterparts on my house on Bienville Street for years.

Q: In the 1970's, did you start seeing a change in Pontchartrain Park? EP: Well, I changed my house five times. I went from a Colonial House and to a modern contemporary house. And then I kept asking to let me just let me [build] a little huge den. She said, Man, I'm sick and tired of you with all that damn building, all of your change and stuff. And we went to California to a
wedding reception, we were dancing and I said, please let me build that. And I had already arranged with the contractor. We stayed another seven days, and when we got there it was already framed up and we had a den that was 35 by 22 with cathedral ceilings. It was off the chart.

Q: Were you in the Park when Hurricane Katrina struck? EP: We were still there and I called my daughter and I said, we leaving. Her husband was in Kuwait, and she said, "Troy say that's gonna blow over." I said, "I'll tell you what, you can stay here, die. I'm coming to get my two grandchildren." Five o'clock that morning, I said you bring those grandchildren and we drove to Baton Rouge, it took us eight hours and thirty seven minutes. And when we looked on the computer [for] my house, it was a rooftop. [It was only] because of Southern's plant that we knew where the house was.

Q: So did you move back to New Orleans post-Katrina at all? EP: We lived with my daughter in an apartment. And we eventually built a house in Prairieville. It took me three months, fifteen days, and five minutes trying to convince my wife that we want to live in the country after living in a city for 70 years.

For a woman who didn't want to live in the country at all-- I went to get gas at a Shell station and the clerk asked the sheriff, Is that Baby's husband? (You know, in New Orleans, everybody refers to people as baby. How you doing, baby? What's going on?) So I looked around and there wasn't anybody but me in the place. When I went home and I said Gish, that was my pet name for my wife, the clerk asked the sheriff whether I was Baby's husband. She laughed, because that's where she played the lottery every day. Two weeks later, I go in her car to get a smoothie on the other side of I-10, I got my grass cutting clothes on. So there's two Sheriffs, one of them is checking out the credentials on the car. When I came out he says, Mighty fine car you're driving. I said that's my wife car. Guess what he said---"Miss Gloria?" I said, for somebody who don't live in the country, she knows the sheriff and all the other goddamn people. We go to shopping center and they hiding hiding clothes for her. So she made the adjustment quickly. And I started introducing myself as, I'm Miss Gloria's husband, instead of Edgar Poree.

Q: Are you aware of Wendell Pierce's attempts at rebuilding homes? EP: Oh, yeah. It was a laudable effort, but you got to have financing, you know, you can have all of the plans in the world. It's unfortunate that we don't have the inside track that was done with the poverty program. And that's another story that we need to talk about another time, because that was the part of that infiltration of our neighborhood that destroyed our culture.

UNIT 10 Final Thoughts, Lessons, and a Family SUNO Story [00:47:07] - [00:58:42]
Q: Your wife passed, unfortunately, some two years ago. EP: It's five years on the 28th. After 54 years and two months of not being sick, she sprained her foot on the first of February, 2014, and in April, she was sitting in the house and she said, my leg--it was twice the size. We rushed her to the hospital and she was diagnosed with stage four uterine cancer and died on the 28th of June. But, young brother, we lived the American Dream.
Q: What are your most memorable moments in Pontchartrain Park? EP: Well, when my son was born, nine years after my daughter on August 4th, 1970. Now ask me about what I despised.
Q: What do you despise? EP: When Southern University did a disservice to Dr. Bashful by naming a street that didn't even have a damn building on one block. Instead, they should have taken the sixty four hundred block of Press Drive. They should have made it Dr. Emmett Bashful Boulevard to the end of the campus. I told the committee, before I die, we're gonna work on that, because that needs to be changed. You can say anything you want about Dr. Bashful, the reason this school is here today is because when he was fighting those animals downtown, they call him Uncle Tom.

But sometimes-- I used to see the waiters, I saw those black men, "How are you doing, Miss? How you doing?" And I'd sit there and you know I'm black and proud, okay? I said, "Look at that Uncle Tom." And then the guy next door hired me that one day, I waited at the Royal Orleans (Hotel), and I went out the wrong door, and knocked the 12 plates that was on my arm, and these men that I was calling Uncle Tom-- I felt guilty because you know what? They weren't Uncle Toms, they were Academy Award actors, when I saw them little white ladies taking that $5 out and $10 out and put it in their pocket. Do you know who owned property in the City of New Orleans? It wasn't the bourgeois, it was the ones who's working in Antoine's, the porters. The businessmen were talking about the sheriff's sale, and it was the brother who was cleaning up so-and-so's house, washing the dirty clothes and wearing second hand-me-downs, went home and told them what house was on sale at the sheriff's office and they got the neighbors to bring the $25, and they got there before me. And when we integrated and we had a attache case, when we went to Antoine's, white folks didn't talk when they saw brothers with three piece suits. But they were saying it when he was mopping the floor. So I found out my lesson that it ain't Uncle Tom. It's the man who's getting the money.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to cover in the interview, Mr. Porre? EP: I think what you're doing is a need. I would hope that we would have more folks sitting in our classrooms talking about the real side of New Orleans, because there's a whole lot that we don't talk about. They just did a piece on how the Times-Picayune had disparaging words for black people. But you know what they didn't talk about? How they robbed the poverty program, okay? I want to talk about that because I'm still alive, you'll see what they did to the poverty program. And we going to talk about the black banks when there weren't black banks. I'm doing some podcasts right now with a stipulation in my will to release them all on my death, so my family cannot get sued because it's too much.

Q: Are you still friends with any of the old liners in Pontchartrain Park, those who are still alive? EP: Yeah, the man across the street, Al Turnbull, he's 96, knew every birthday for my grandchildren, he's still there. My Mom was the manager of his parents' clothing store on Rampart. [She] was high yellow from Mandeville, her mother worked for a plantation owner who we suspect was my mom's daddy. And my dad was jet black, and used to go and pick up the clothes, they thought he was the house nigger. Q: Any other people that you're still in contact
with? EP: Well, you know, Elvira, not too many other folks. My neighbors in Prairieville think I already moved back to New Orleans now that my daughter and my grandkids are in college. I'm in my house maybe five days a month, my neighbors get my newspaper and my mail. My daughter said, Daddy, why are you still getting a paper in Baton Rouge, and you here? I said, Well, I'm not reading them.

Q: Again, Mr. Porre, this has been extremely informational. You've waxed eloquent not only about Pontchartrain Park but about your life as it impacted upon your family. We appreciate your time. And as I stated, this has been a tremendous contribution. We thank you, tremendously.

EP: Look, I appreciate what you're doing, young Robertson, on behalf of your parents, who were really the kind of person that I talked about before our neighborhood was infiltrated. They were the strong ones who made the difference in our lives. I'm convinced that we still have a chance. We ought to invite people who dropped out of SUNO to come back so that they can tell the young people sitting in those chairs why they ought to pay much more attention. The A students, they going to make it anyhow. What we ought to bring back is the ones who fail in school, to tell them what it's really like out here to survive in today's world.

Q: One closing question. What role did SUNO play and your family's life here? EP: Well my daughter went to St. Mary's Academy from seventh grade, she was third in her class. And the top ten got scholarships, okay? We were so excited about Deidre. And when they start calling names when they got to number two, we getting ready to boast out our chests. And they call number 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and didn't call her name. And the daddy was about to go from being intelligent to a strong nigga, excuse the expression. My wife said, leave it alone. And you know what we found out? My sister-in-law's sister-in-law, who was a nun-- when Deidre was third in class, said Deirdre's parents can afford to send her to college and that's why she didn't get what she earned. My daughter goes to Xavier, she never had a C. In her third year at Xavier she had a C in trigonometry and dropped out of school for nine years. She came to SUNO working full-time in the post office, had 22 hours and finished magna cum laude.

Q: Outstanding. Well again, Mr. Poree, thank you. You've been a stupendous contributor to this program and project. EP: We share and we share. We trace back to Reverend Skinner's portrayal of when we got to America. And that story needs to be told because we hear H-I-S-- HIS story, but we don't hear OUR story.
[00:58:42]
UNIT ONE: Personal Background and Coming to Pontchartrain Park
[00:01:45] - [00:16:34]

My name is Steven S. Johnson, III. Born in New Orleans, September 18, 1932, Charity Hospital, that would be Mid-City. I lived with my grandparents for a while, but then my mother and father separated and I lived with my mother, and then I went to live with my father. That was in the Uptown area. I attended McDonogh #6, McDonogh #35, Xavier University, and Southern University. I received my masters at Southern University in New Orleans because we did that in a pair, me and my wife, who passed 18 years ago. And when it was necessary, we would take the trip to Baton Rouge to finish off the necessary course work for our Masters.

Q: You spoke of your wife, what was her name? SJ: Boutine. B-O-U-T-I-N-E P. Johnson. Parker was her maiden name. We met at McDonogh 35 in high school, and eventually we did get together and thank God we did. I got married in 1951. She became pregnant at age 16, and we got married once it was determined that we were going to have an offspring. We were very fearful of what might happen, so I took what I considered to be the best route and went into the military for three years, at 18. Got out and finished my high school, I only needed a semester, then I started in at Xavier under the GI Bill of Rights, about 1958.

We temporarily lived with my mother-in-law and father-in-law and then we moved to my grandparents' home on Louisiana Avenue. And after we were situated, that's where we discovered Pontchartrain Park. It was in the news and we had a very efficient realtor, David Greenup, he was doing a magnificent job of inspiring folk to go there. He pursued it vigorously, and of course, he was successful in my mind because he lived there himself. Q: Are you familiar with the Urban League questionnaire? SJ: Back in the day? Yes, that's probably how I got introduced to it. It was something new, and Pontchartrain Park was one of the first for minorities. And we all were excited, but at the same time, we have to follow the procedure that was necessary to be a homeowner. We did have a VA loan which relieved us of the necessity to have more funding. Fortunately we were able to get in. Q: And what year was this? SJ: 1960. I had become a teacher in Orleans Parish School System and my wife became a teacher also, in the Orleans Parish School System. I taught at Valena C. Jones Elementary School and my wife taught at Coghill, which was really in the same neighborhood of our home.

Q: Are you familiar with any of the negative talk in the 1950s and 60s about Pontchartrain Park? SJ: I ignored that because I was more inclined to be accepted and have housing in that area. There was some negativity, that's the nature of the beast. Q: We know that, for example, the great attorney A.P. Tureaud, Mr. NAACP himself, advocated against the establishment of Pontchartrain Park because it was going to be segregated. He was supporting integration. Were you familiar with his focus? SJ: Yes, I knew about A. P. Tureaud and the Knights of Peter Claver building on Orleans Avenue
SUNO CAAAS
INTERVIEW WITH MR. STEPHEN JOHNSON: UNIT DIGESTS

but I wasn't necessarily accepting the idea because I was young and vigorous then and had dreams of things that might come into fruition.

Q: When you moved into your home, finally, what was your reaction? SJ: I was just ecstatic because I had achieved an objective, but I was also fearful of whether I was going to be successful at maintaining a home. We had to be about 22, and you have a house note that goes with owning property. So I had to move as best I could at my particular age and leverage. Q: All three of your children were already born before you moved into Pontchartrain Park? SJ: Correct. I have two living children and one deceased. Steven Sylvester Johnson IV, Roderick C. Johnson, and Stephanie Johnson Saberre.

SJ: I lived in the same house at 5725 Campus Boulevard. We took the floor plan that was in place, originally the home was only about a thousand square feet, it had two bedrooms. As the children got older, it wasn't adequate, you know. [After] about 10 years, we enlarged the size of the house, we had three individual rooms for our children. We added on a master bedroom, we took up some of the yard that was behind the car port.

UNIT TWO: PEOPLE, RAISING CHILDREN, AND LIFE IN PONTCHARTRAIN PARK [00:16:34] - [00:30: 55]

My partner in business moved in shortly after me, and his brother was in the house next door to me. We have some dear friends, the Turnleys who lived across the street from us. We [knew them since] high school, McDonogh 35. We lost a dear friend, Warren Honore, but we continued on after his passing. I knew your family, your dad, right? Wydell Misshore who had a large funeral home and they had a large house across from the golf course. And the Henrys, I went to school with Sterling and Elvira. Sterling passed a few years ago, they were dear friends.

Remember at that time I was a young man and we were going to the park and play touch football, we'd go to the court, play ping-pong. Everyone started having a relationship. They didn't have a golf course at that time, that came later. The golf course wasn't for blacks per se, although the blacks started to get into it but not like the other courses around New Orleans. We (African Americans) had one of the first Carnival clubs in the City that would parade on Carnival day. The name was High-Low Bidders, everybody liked to play Whist and that's how that name came into play..

Q: Were there any advantages to rearing your children in Pontchartrain Park? SJ: There were advantages because we had a better handle on their activities. Now as life goes on, you know, it doesn't always work out that way. But the opportunity was definitely there to rear children like children should have been reared. The schools--while we were there, Coghill was built up, the Elementary School within the district. And Southern came on the scene sometimes after. The disadvantage is the same disadvantage parents have right now. Making sure and hopeful that their children will
stay on the right path. Unfortunately, my son passed at a young age...I was so proud of him, you know? He got his Masters, his PE, his PhD.

Q: Let's talk about Gentilly Woods, that adjacent neighborhood which was white.

SJ: I think maybe the best and worst part of the experience was to go through the white section to get to Pontchartrain Park. But it ceased to become a great problem because we did have a Catholic Church, St. Gabriel, and I and all my children were Catholic. We were going through on Press Drive and it led straight to Pontchartrain Park. Q: Did your children, to your knowledge, experience racism going through Gentilly Woods or going to the school or church? SJ: It is possible because that's the nature of the beast when you're growing up, your children experience things they don't necessarily share with you. But it couldn't have been too terrible because everybody seems to have survived.

Q: By 1970, the Park was fully developed with football teams, baseball teams, track, softball. Did any of your children participate in NORD activities? SJ: Yeah, my boys. And my daughter wanted to be an athlete too (Laughter) football, basketball, softball.

Q: Were you a member of the Pontchartrain Park booster club? [Did] you participate in the effort to get the Park lights? SJ: Oh definitely. We had to write the request, and the city council to recognize us. Q: I can remember my parents participating in that effort, that was a major achievement. Were you a part of the Pontchartrain Park neighborhood association? SJ: Yes I was, we attempted to get the play areas up to speed at the basketball court for an example. And of course, we had dues that we used to pay on an annual basis, about $120 or something along those lines. They built a clubhouse on Press Drive, which was adjacent to what was the basketball court and of course, the kids just automatically went there.

I watched it grow up around me along with my children. We saw Pontchartrain Park after the fact and we knew it before the fact, and it was just a great thing to have. If you went through the Park, you would feel pride in the way the park was handled by the people who were responsible, the parents in particular. [00:20:35] I think the greatest legend was the fact that we could have a subdivision as a people, one that would be recognized throughout the country and the world for that matter. And it's still there. And we have a younger generation coming along and it's an opportunity to maybe help them to get their bearing and move on.

UNIT FOUR Hurricane Betsy, Moving from Pontchartrain Park, Hurricane Katrina

Q: Did Hurricane Betsy damage your home? SJ: Well, the flood more than anything else. And because I was in the insurance business, I was very cognizant of flood insurance. So we had it, you know, everyone didn't. We did not ride the storm out at home. We went first to St. Gabriel's, and then we went to my grandparents home on the other side of town on Louisiana Avenue. [We returned in] a couple of weeks.
The assistance you received again was through the insurance that you had acquired? SJ: Yes, that was my primary source of income. I heard my father say that the neighborhood actually changed for the better because folks were able to spruce up their property and you know, do some of the things that they hadn’t envisioned prior to.

Q: Did you experience a change to Pontchartrain Park? If so, when did it begin? SJ: Well, first of all, when I was there, it didn’t change. Now, I have to admit there are some things that look different. But initially it was what it was supposed to be: a community. We moved by 1979 because we wanted a different level of property ownership, not that there was anything wrong with Pontchartrain Park’s level. But I had gotten into the insurance business after teaching in school and I had a partner. We had an agency, and he moved and I moved. It was the thing that I wanted to do for my wife and my family. I will always always remember the property that I purchased in Pontchartrain Park, it was about as well kept and as good as it could be. Where I’m presently living, Lake Willow Drive, we appear to be surrounded by ambitious individuals who were striving and trying to raise their level and standards of living. It’s not integrated now, but it was then. They accepted us, you know? We were fortunate enough to have a piece of property that had a lake so it made our area seem a little more luxurious than some of the others.

Q: There's another horrible hurricane, Katrina. You and your family were already living in Lake Willow? Was Mrs. Johnson alive at that time? SJ: No, she passed in 2002. I had my granddaughter and my daughter, whom I was concerned about and we had to go move to Houston. Q: But you fixed the house up? SJ: Only after, and we’re there now. Turns out because of flood insurance, I was able to pay my house off.

UNIT FIVE: PONTCHARTRAIN PARK THEN AND NOW
[00:39:07] - [00:41:45]

[00:32:15] I will always always remember the property that I purchased in Pontchartrain Park, it was about as well kept and as good as it could be. The people were closer together, you know, we were all on the same page so to speak. My observation is that some group needs to restore the pride and the dignity that came with it originally. We can pass the word on how we had to do things when we were young, [but] the younger generation coming up now should take advantage of the opportunity. If they get the taste of being successful at building and getting their family where they want to be, Pontchartrain Park is the ideal place.
UNIT ONE DIGEST: COMING TO PONTCHARTRAIN PARK  01:51- 09:38

[00:01:51]


My husband had a drugstore in the Lower Nine, and Dr. Carter, he was a doctor in the area, he told him about the house that was built lately. Well, my brother-in-law, in the meantime, they had moved out here early '56, and we were looking for an established community that we could raise our children in. So he told us about the square that had just opened--it was from the Archdiocese, and once integration came about everyone had to go to St. Gabriel Catholic church, so they sold the Square that was designated for a black Catholic church. Rudy Barnes and Teddy Marchand bought the square and they subdivided it and built homes. But we didn't like the homes that they were building, so we made him an offer that he couldn't refuse to buy a lot, and that's how we got the lot.

Q: Now, let's travel back in time. Are you familiar with DeLesseps Morrison EH: He was the mayor Q: The mayor, during the time Pontchartrain Park was created. DeLesseps Morrison was a staunch segregationist, and so he supported the creation of Pontchartrain Park to keep black people separate from whites. Were you okay with that concept when you moved into an all black community? EH: Well, at that time, it was clear, integration was there. And we liked the community, yeah, so it was no problem for us.

Q: Now, you were not in Pontchartrain Park during Hurricane Betsy, you were still in the Lower Ninth Ward, which was devastated. EH: Oh yeah, it was wiped out. We had to tear out all the walls and rebuild. We stayed by my mama uptown, in the Seventh Ward. Q: So after you rebuilt that home in the Lower Nine, how long was it before you moved to Pontchartrain Park EH: Hurricane Betsy was...'65. So we built in '69, we started building '68 year, we moved in '69.

Q: You moved into what in 1969 was a new section of Pontchartrain Park EH: Right, the last section to have houses being sold. Our lot was just in the middle and nothing was on each side, so they were still building on that square. And we were just happy to have your own home, and space for the kids, because I had four by that time. Q: What was the floor plan Like? EH: It's two stories, and we had four bedrooms upstairs. Then, downstairs, we had the living room, dining room, den, kitchen, washroom, double garage. 3,082 square feet.
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ELVIRA HENRY: UNIT DIGESTS

UNIT TWO DIGEST: Living in Pontchartrain Park  09:38-20:49

[00:09:38]
EH: My neighbors, across the street, they welcomed us all and they had kids as well, so they played and you know, we mixed with the neighborhood. I was home all day, so I was a home mama. My husband was in a club and by being a pharmacist he knew a lot of people all around. Vikings, The Studs, professional clubs, yeah.

Kids always ended up at my house since I had a pool table in the den, and a basketball goal in the yard. With all the kids playing, we brought them out there for Mac Knox, he was the coach, that was a legend by itself. And by being home every day, I was out there with them every day and I helped coach too. So we had a good time. I met all of the parents, and by bringing children home I found out where all them little curves and corners were. The kids would tell me, "I live right there, Mrs. Henry, bring me here." Okay, I was the Mother Transporter. I used to bring my kids back and forth to school, I had to bring the kids after school, football, basketball, whatever practice, I had the whole station wagon full of them. And we stopped at Sears and I'd fill up with gas, looked like every other day, so the man asked me, "What's your worker's number?" [laughs]. I told him I didn't work here, I just use gas.

I did remember that they used to say about that little canal was the dividing line, The Ditch. My nephews would say how they would cross over that line, and how the white people would beat 'em up or run 'em or something like that. But my children never experienced it.

Q: Were you a part of the Pontchartrain Park Booster Club? EH: I was the secretary for years, and kept the roll for all the sports. Q: As a part of the Pontchartrain Park Association, do you remember what your role was, any of your activities? Q: Yeah--Coach, Concession, Transporter, Uniforms-- you name it, I did it. I was out there with the kids all of it. When [the Pontchartrain Park Association] became Pontilly, my kids were growing and I wasn't active, like I was when they were all younger. Q: Now St. Gabriel Church, which was in Gentilly Woods, were you a member of St. Gabriel Church? EH: Yeah, we became members of St. Gabriel Church. I'm still the Eucharistic Minister in the church.

Q: Before Hurricane Katrina, did Pontchartrain Park, in your eyes, begin to change demographically? Were people moving out? EH: Not in my area. Like, when Dave Bartholomew moved next to me, and on the other side, they had another young couple, a family. So David's still here, he's a hundred but he's hanging in there now. Q: You also had a New Orleans Saint who lived near EH: Richard Neal, which I christened him and his wife, and all their children, when they became Catholics.
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ELVIRA HENRY: UNIT DIGESTS

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UNIT THREE DIGEST: KATRINA AND AFTER 20:49-27:47

[00:20:49] Q: Did Hurricane Katrina, in 2005, impact upon your family and home? EH: My husband and I, at the time we were the only ones there. It wiped out the bottom level and we left and we went to Houston, my sister-in-law and them. When we came back, the whole first floor was up to five feet of the first floor. So we tore it all out, all the walls, and bleached it and whatever they had to do, and got it ready. And we had a handyman that used to work with him down at the drugstore, we were able to get him back here and, 'cause contractors was just--oh, that was just out of the box. So that was in September, we moved back to New Orleans in November and we moved back in my house in March. We were the only ones in Pontchartrain Park, and to work in the house, Troy, my son, was able to get a pole, and the lights. And once my neighbors found out we were back, "Y'all back?" So they started coming back and Dave and them moved back, and a whole lot of them came back. So we went back to our neighborhood, [but] so many of them didn't come back. So many houses were gone. Let's see.... one, two, three, four--four empty lots still there. But I understand they just auctioned them and sold them or something.

Pontchartrain, and in Gentilly Woods it's integrated almost totally, has changed tremendously. They renovated a lot of the homes. It seems as though they're keeping up the property. And we finally got a street paved, Congress Drive, we're still working on trying to get the side streets paved.

Q: Are you now, after Katrina, are you now a part of the Pontilly Association? EH: Every now and then, I go. But it interferes with my Casino (laughs), on that day. Q: So now, what are your leisure time activities? EH: Casino (laughs). The casino, playing cards, that's it. Whatever I want to do now.

Q: And are you aware of Wendell Pierce's post-Katrina efforts to provide people with new homes in Pontchartrain Park? EH: Yeah, he and my son went together, Troy. I thought they had a good idea. But so many things, red tape, and you know, I was the last to know-- I was Mama, so they tell me after everything's over. People come ask me. I said, "Well, I don't know, -- ask my son." The last I heard they don't have any affiliation with it anymore. Like I say, they don't tell Mama nothing, you know? "Oh Ma, you don't have to worry about that." As usual (laughs).

UNIT FOUR DIGEST: Returning Children, Community Connections, and...the Casino 27:27-35:23

[00:27:27] Q: Now, of course, you have three children, all three are college graduates, very successful, professional men. One ran for mayor, twice. Ruston runs the pharmacy now. EH: He has two, one on the east Bank, one on the west, and the prospects of opening two more, I think. He has the marijuana contract for the city and he's waiting on that to open.
Q: And in small or large measure, do you attribute their success to having grown up in Pontchartrain Park? EH: Right, a whole lot. The influence of people and the neighbors and the park, their friends, the school. So they knew better. It was a big milestone for them.

Q: What were your most memorable moments in Pontchartrain Park? EH: The time I jumped the fence get to my son Troy, on the field. He got hurt playing football. They say, "Oooh, Number 72" and by the time he says that, say what? I was gone. I beat the coach to him. He was just knocked down, knocked out, whatever. But it was all right, they enjoyed it. And those kids are lifelong friends, it's amazing.

Q: Mr. Henry, is he deceased? EH: Yeah, it will be three years, July 12.

Q: Now, is there anything else you wanted to talk about or add that we didn't address? EH: Living out here was has been very good and feels safe. You know your neighbor, I'd come and go, they keep eye on me, I keep an eye on them, each person. So we pretty much tightly-knit, even the new people that have come in since Katrina. Q: Now you're no longer an empty-nester. EH: Oh no, I got my son and his wife and his son. They moved back from Washington DC. So they here. I told them the house is theirs, I don't need it. Because we moved along with the time and the kids moved along. Now they're willing to come back, like Little Sterling came back home, he's living here, Troy came back, too. He figured there was no other school for his son to go to but St. Aug, so he moved back home. Ruston always was here, and those two came back home. Troy's at Stanford and Carnegie Mellon, Little Sterling, St. Augustine and Howard, and Ruston, St. Augustine and Xavier.

Q: There is also an Elder Center in the park EH: My husband used to go there, I didn't go. Q: Why didn't you? EH: I was too busy at the casino. I play poker at the table and the slot machines. And I got a group that comes by me, on Monday we play from 10 in the morning to 4:30 in the evening, poker. I'm 82, and they called me teenager, so you know how old they are, okay? I was young when I started with it, but it's been a good thing. Q: And do you all play for money? EH: Fifteen dollars, that's all, nothing more.

Q: Well, Mrs Henry, I certainly appreciate you coming out and participating in the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers project. EH: Well, I wasn't a Pioneer, but I was out here after that to start, and when they had the dedication for Mr. Mack, all them little children I remember, oh my God, they're big huge men, "Hey, Mrs. Henry!" And everywhere I go, I meet them and they remember. Well, I brought them enough home, and they were all in my house, because each one of them had their own set, each boy. That's it.
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. JOSIE LEWIS: UNIT DIGESTS

Unit One: BACKGROUND AND COMING TO PONTCHARTRAIN PARK [00:01:47] - [012:17]
JL: I'm Josie Young Lewis. [Born] October the 11th, 1932 at Flint Goodrich Hospital, in New Orleans. I lived in uptown New Orleans, on Calhoun Street, right near Tulane University and McAlister. I went to McDonogh 24 School on Adams Street where Connie Hill was the principal. I went to Booker T. Washington for one year because McDonogh 35 started with the 10th grade at that time. Lawrence Crocker was the principal at Booker T. Washington, and Lucien V. Alexis [was the principal at my high school, McDonogh 35. I went to Xavier University and finished in 1954 in sociology with a minor in library science. I married in 1955 to Philip Lewis, he was from Breaux Bridge. I was a teacher librarian in St. Martin Parish for four years and that is where I met [my husband]. Initially, we lived in Breaux Bridge until '58 and then we moved to Rocheblave Street across from McDonogh 42. And then in 1960, we moved into Pontchartrain Park.

[00:05:23]
Q: How did you find out about Pontchartrain Park? JL: Well, my daddy was a golfer, Clifford Young. He played out at the golf course there and we saw the park and we decided we wanted to live out here. Q: Who sold you your home? JL: He was there with Ross, one of the salespersons, I do remember him, but I can't remember his name. [We moved into Pontchartrain Park in] June, 1960, on [the corner of] Providence and Prentiss. They were in the process of building it and I wanted to get into it as soon as possible.

Q: Had you encountered any newspaper articles about the Park or any advertisements prior to that point? Do you remember the Urban League Questionnaire Survey of 1954? JL: No. Q: Are you familiar with the Sterns' and Rosa Keller's work to bring Pontchartrain Park into fruition? JL: Yes, Rosa Keller belonged to the Friends of Amistad which is the group that I served as president. I knew they had played a part in it. Q: Were you likewise familiar with Alexander Pierre Tureaud's efforts to stop Pontchartrain Park from being a segregated community? JL: Not really, but I knew of A.P. Tureaud and I knew his children.

Q: So when you purchased your home, were you an educator at that time in 1960? JL: Yes. Q: Do you remember where you worked at the time? JL: In 1960, I was at Frederick Junior High School, Rivers Frederick on Touro Street. Q: Was Mr. Lewis a teacher? JL: No, he worked as an orderly at Baptist Hospital, then he worked out at the Michoud facility.

Q: Was Mr. Lewis a veteran and did you use the VA Bill? JL: Yes. We had to make a small down payment and we paid our note to Crawford Homes. [We had a] Living room and three bedrooms. We later converted one of the bedrooms into a dining room, and we added a carport and another small room, a walk-in closet in the back. Q: So when you and Mr. Lewis moved in, you did not have children? JL: No. We adopted Tony afterwards.

UNIT TWO: LIFE IN PONTCHARTRAIN PARK [00:12:17] - [00:21:10]
JL: I think it was a very good environment. [00:09:04] I'm thinking John Roux may have lived over and he was one of my daddy's golf partners. I got to know [my neighbors], like your mom and dad, we lived next door to each other and Lillian Jones across the street and Floyd Wilson. The Dejoies lived down across by the golf course down there, they were my daddy's friends. Then we had Dr. Pratt, who was a Xavier graduate that I knew. Sybil and Dutch [Morial] lived down on Press Drive. There were a number of teachers living here, I felt comfortable around
them. I sent Tony to the Thibodeaux Nursery School, which was excellent. Miss Thibodeaux was like a mother to the children, we all loved her. It was spacious and convenient and she had them perform, it helped bring them out, you know? There were a lot of children and activities on the playground. Q: The NORD playground, New Orleans Recreation Department Playground. Were you involved? JL: Well, Tony went to the playground. And at least once a year around the Fourth of July, we had a big celebration with all the niceties. Q: Were there activities that you would sponsor at your home for the neighborhood children? JL: Yes. They were always welcome to come and play in my yard and I had this big birthday party. I always encouraged [Tony] to have people over. Q: Your mother Mrs. Young would come spend time at your home a great deal. JL: She always had a group of children in the yard with different activities and she enjoyed it and they did too. Q: I was one of them.

Q: What advantages were there to raising a child in Pontchartrain Park? JL: Well, one of the big advantages was the playground, there was always somewhere to go to play ball and I think Tony joined the football team or something. But the funniest thing, the time I went to see him play, he wasn't there, I found him on Providence Place down at one of his friend's house.

Q: What did you and your family do for recreation? JL: Yeah, I'm an avid bridge player, I had belonged to about three different bridge clubs. The Center was opened and I played bridge over there. It might have been pre-Hurricane Katrina and then they had to redo some things and got it started again. The director and her assistant there, they are great at planning things, so on Mondays and Wednesdays, I go there.

UNIT THREE [00:21:10] - [00:27:44]
Q: Down the street from Pontchartrain Park on Press Drive, there is a neighboring community, Gentilly Woods. For most of your life in Pontchartrain Park Gentilly Woods was similarly built but it was a white community. Did you experience any difficulty as you traversed Gentilly Woods? J: No. I attended St. Gabriel the Archangel Church, which at first everybody was white but then they redid the church and then it finally got to be mostly black. As a youngster I lived in an all-white neighborhood. They found us because my grandfather's house was [already] there, and his brothers had lived around the corner on Palmer Avenue. We knew we were colored and there were limits with some people and others were open-hearted. We accepted things as they were. Q: And you didn't experience any racial animus from those in Gentilly Woods? JL: No.

Q: Were you a part of the Pontchartrain Park Association? JL: Oh yeah. Well, I basically went to the meetings, you know? But now, I feel more a part of the group with Gretchen at the head and I do participate with them.

Q: 1965 we experienced Betsy. JL: Yeah. It flooded and we left, I stayed with my sister for maybe a month until it was ready--we had to redo the floors. I had homeowners insurance. Q: I have heard from many people that those homes in Pontchartrain Park that were flooded in 1965 were actually modernized when they were repaired. You did the floor-- did you get central air conditioning, for example? JL: I didn't get central air until after Katrina.

Q: Did you start seeing a change in Pontchartrain Park? JL: I know right along through here we have some undesirables moving in. Q: But you don't recall it changing prior to Hurricane Katrina. JL: Not really.
UNIT FOUR   [00:27:44] - [00:30:35]
Q: Let's talk about Hurricane Katrina. 2005. Did you evacuate before the storm? JL: Yes, I left before the storm. [We had water] up to the ceiling, I would say. I went to Georgia, a little place outside Alpharetta. We lived in an apartment, Tony and I. I didn't come back for a year. I was always thinking about coming back home. After a year I stayed at the Pontchartrain Oaks Apartment on Hayne and then I started trying to have a home built. Q: Did you have to tear down your home? JL: Oh, yes. I have a loose sketch of the new home [shows sketch]. Q: And that's in the place of the very same land. JL: Yes, it's turned to Providence whereas it faced Prentiss before.
UNIT ONE: Personal Background and Coming to Pontchartrain Park
[00:01:49] - [00:12:15]

Q: Please Mrs. Adams, tell me your name. MA: Margaret. Q: Mrs. Margaret Adams. Q: Where were you born? MA: New Orleans, 10/27/30. Q: And what part of the city were you born in? MA: I don't know all of that. I was an adopted child. Q: Your adopted parents' names were? MA: Viola and James Brown. Q: And in the background we will have Mrs. Adams' children, Paula [PA] and Terry [TA]


Q: When did you meet Mr. Adams? MA: God, that's a long time ago. Q: Did you meet him in college? MA: No, because he went to Grambling. Maybe at LSU. Q: Now, tell me if you remember this story because I could remember it, hearing it here in your home as a boy. Mr. Adams was known as 'Fleet of Foot.' And he ran track at Grambling. He was here, running a track meet and he saw you. Is that a figment of my imagination or did that happen? TA: I remember hearing this same story. MA: I don't remember that far back. I don't remember the year we got married. PA: I would say '54 because she conceived almost right away (I was born in '55) Q: Alright, you married Mr. Adams, in '54. 1954, the Korean War had just ended. Was Mr. Adams in the military? MA: No, he wasn't. TA/PA: Yes, he was. He was in the Marines. Q: He was a combat Korean War veteran. MA: I remember that now.

Q: When did you and Mr. Adams become aware of Pontchartrain Park? MA: I know I was living in Dillard at one of the Dillard Apartments. It was just a matter of, you know, advertisement. We moved to Pontchartrain Park early on I think, we were the first part of Pontchartrain Park. PA: They built this house in 1958, like January or February of '58. Q: Did Mr. Adams use his VA bill to purchase the home? MA: I'm sure he did. He took care of everything, took advantage of everything he could. Q: So in January, February of 1958, you purchased this house and moved in. Paula, your oldest child was two years old. Your youngest child Terry, was not born yet. Q: Were you the first family to move into the Prentiss Avenue block? Q: I think so. me and Delores. My next door neighbor and I moved into here together. Q: Describe your home's floor plan, when you moved in. MA: That part was added but this part was there. Q: So there was a living room, dining room area, a kitchen, three bedrooms, and a bath and also a front, two side, and a back yard. MA: Uh huh. Q: Do you remember how Pontchartrain Park was when you first moved into the park? MA: We had a lot of kids in our neighborhood, everybody on this block had at least two children. Q: Were they all
relatively the same age? Would you have been in your middle 20s? MA: Uh hmm. about the same age, yeah.

UNIT TWO: Pontchartrain Park--and Gentilly Woods
[00:12:16] - [00:23:33]

Q: You were directly across the street from the golf course and the park itself. What role did the golf course and the playground play in the life of your family? MA: Now the playground was very important. We used to spend a lot of time at the playground, we had a lot of activities there with the kids. Q: Were your children involved in the N.O.R.D. activities, there? The playground activities? MA: Paula? PA: Yeah I played softball and I ran track. TA: Yeah, I played football, ran track, baseball...it was year round. Q: When you talk about the park, what role did you and Mr. Adams play, were you a part of the booster club, for example? MA: Yes. Daddy might have been a president at one time, we were involved in activities. We were always involved with the kids, we used to almost live over there. Q: Any people in your mind and in your life that stand out? TA: Remember Mr. Kanye? Remember Mr. Mac? You remember Mr. Calhoun. Q: Well, these are all people who had major roles and I know your children's lives and also in your family as well as you and Mr. Adams.

Q: What were some advantages to raising your children here in Pontchartrain Park? MA: First of all, it was a wonderful neighborhood. I mean you didn't have to worry about anything. There was a good school in the neighborhood and it was close to church, I could walk to church and everything. Shopping wasn't too far, just far enough to keep me from spending all my money. Q: Were there disadvantages? MA: I can't think of one. Not one. I have loved living in Pontchartrain Park. Q: How did you get along with your neighbors? MA: My best friend and I moved in together. My cousin was just a couple of doors down, Frank Merrick. We were just like one big family in the neighborhood.

Q: Now adjacent to Pontchartrain Park was a neighborhood known as Gentilly Woods for many of the years that you lived here. Gentilly Woods was all white. Of course, we have three churches here, one right next door to you, but which church did you attend? MA: St. Gabriel's. Q: St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, [in Gentilly Woods]. And you were a major part of that church. MA: Well, I was active. Q: Yes. For many years you also directed the choir. In fact, you attempted to recruit me! MA: Well, I went over there just for mass. I'd go to church and I didn't have any problems. Q: What schools did your children attend? MA: Went to Saint Gabriel, didn't you? Q: Did you experience any difficulties? TA: Yes. PA: Yes.

Q: Mrs. Adams, do you remember the ditch? MA: It's not there anymore, it doesn't have any water. Q: It had water only once that I know of and it was Betsy. But it has more of a greater significance for many of the younger people because those of us who had to go back and forth to Gentilly Woods knew that that ditch was the point of demarcation between Pontchartrain Park and Gentilly Woods. MA: Well, that was understood but there are no problem(s) for me because I didn't want to live in Gentilly
Woods anyway. Q: Do you know if Mr. Adams had any knowledge about the problems that your children had in Gentilly Woods? TA: Dr. Robertson, I'll say this: he was probably more aware than my mother but certainly both of them were aware of incidents either within Gentilly Woods or within St. Gabriel's School. Because certainly, I wasn't necessarily a model student, that was, I believe, in Gentilly Woods specifically.

Q: Mrs. Adams there were certain legends, stories, urban myths that existed in Pontchartrain Park. One was right across the street in the playground, on the golf course. It was the lady in white. Do you remember the story of the lady in white? MA: You remember the story? TA: Yeah. PA: Tell me no! Q: The story of the lady in white permeated throughout Pontchartrain Park for at least 10 years. It was a story of a woman who might have had a breakdown. And was found wandering the park one evening during the summer wearing a long flowing gown and her gray hair blowing in the wind. A young child saw the woman and ran to the park screaming about a lady in white. Which cleared the park. And what eventually happened was that of course the benign story of a woman wandering the golf course became a horror story. And as the years progressed every Spring and Summer there were at least two or three sightings of the lady in white who then took on the character of child-consuming, murdering fiend [laughter]. The lady in white. MA: That's the first time I'm hearing anything about that.

UNIT THREE  Katrina and After, Final Thoughts on Pontchartrain Park
[00:23:34]- [00:35:40]

Q: Now you've lived in Pontchartrain Park nearly continuously since 1958. TA: Clyde, I just want to correct a couple things. They lived here until in Pontchartrain Park until 1984 when they moved to Grambling and lived with Grandma for 16 years and then moved back. So at the time of Katrina my mother was actually living in Gentilly in a house that I bought for her right off of Franklin Avenue. For Katrina she was spending time between here and that house. She's been back in this house since 2000. PA: We had to bring Daddy back home when he broke his neck in 2001 so... Q: So you were here in this house, 1965 for Hurricane Betsy. MA: Yes. Q: Was there any damage to the home? TA: Water got close. PA: Yeah it came up and was lapping at the front door.

Q: Why did you move to Grambling in 1986? MA: My husband was from Grambling and he just wanted to move to Grambling. Q: Mr. Adams became the police chief at the University. MA: I believe so. Q: You mentioned that Mr. Adams broke his neck. MA: Paula? PA: What he had was a blocked carotid artery, and he fell badly. He could move limbs, but he couldn't feel the movement and he couldn't control the movement. So, they eventually had to replace some of one or two discs in his neck. But that's what happened. He passed out and just fell badly. Easter Sunday, right before we buried Mama Mamie, remember? TA: Yeah.

Q: Now Mrs. Adams experienced Hurricane Katrina on Franklin. TA: That's where she was living at the time. Q: Were you happy Mrs. Adams to return back to your home here in Pontchartrain Park when you eventually returned? MA: This is home. There's
no place like it’s no place like home, but there’s no place like Pontchartrain Park either. Q: Have many of your neighbors returned? MA: Dolores is dead, huh? PA: Yeah. But she didn't come back after Katrina anyway. The Mitchell's didn't come back. The Merrick's didn't come back. The Kristoff's didn't come back. TA: The Henry's tore their house down. PA: Miss Yolanda? Yeah she didn't come back after the storm and she tore her house down. She's back now. Yeah, they kept the property. TA: Mr. Williams came back. Mr. Truly came back, and the Young's came back.

Q: Mrs. Adams, do you think the neighborhood has changed? MA: I don't know because you know, this is my neighborhood right here [gestures to the room]. Q: Are you aware of Wendell Pierce's post-hurricane Katrina efforts to provide people with new homes? Wendell Pierce, the big Hollywood actor who grew up here? MA: I remember Wendell but I don't remember any of that. I wouldn't have been involved in that anyway.

Q: Even though some of these people have not returned home, are you still in contact with many of them, MA: Not many, you know at my age this is my neighborhood right here [her home]. When I was young, I used to be involved in St. Gabriel. I would be involved in the park, involved in Pontchartrain Park Community Center but I don't do anything else. I really don't. I don't even know my neighbors. I don't know why you're interviewing me because I don't know anything. [laughter] Q: Believe me what you're saying is very important to the project.

Q: Do you miss your past life? MA: No. I'm satisfied with what's today. Thankful to the Lord to be here and I'll be thankful when He takes me away. Q: What are your most memorable moments in Pontchartrain Park? MA: The one thing I remember most about Pontchartrain Park besides playing bridge at the community center is working with the youngsters out at the playground. I was really active at the playground and that was important to me.

Q: Is there anything else that we haven't talked about Mrs. Adams that you'd like to share? MA: Nothing except that Pontchartrain Park was a wonderful neighborhood to live in and raise children, you know, because I mean we had everything we needed here. We had the church not far away. We had a playground, we had lovely neighbors and it was just wonderful living here. It really was.

Q: Well, Mrs. Adams this wraps up the interview. MA: I enjoyed it. Q: What you shared with us are things that are mightily important to the project, and when correlated with what the other elders contributed will help add some vision of Pontchartrain Park, that's going to be important when researchers start really putting the story of Pontchartrain Park together. So this is very important and we certainly appreciate you. MA: You're welcome. Q: Thank you very much.
UNION ONE DIGEST: COMING TO PONTCHARTRAIN PARK  01:37 - 06:12

RO: My name is Ruth Roussell Oubre. I was born March, the 13th, 1932. Born Edgard, Louisiana. Well, my mother was in Edgard because her mother died. Then, after I was born, she moved back to New Orleans. We lived on Fouche Street, uptown, and Holy Ghost Parish. Then we moved from there, downtown in the Seventh Ward in the Lafitte Project. Q: And where did you meet Mr. Oubre? In Edgard, Louisiana. We got married, 1953. He was a merchant seaman. Q: How many children did you and Mr. Oubre have? RO: Five, Bryan, Percy, Vanessa, Elise, and Hurby.

Well, we were looking for a house and someone told my husband about Pontchartrain Park. At that time, the office was on Canal Street. So he dropped in to see Mr. Greenup, and he looked at the house, at the pictures of the houses and all and he picked one out, then he came and he told me about it and I went and we decided what we wanted. After he picked the house out, then they discussing financing and all that. And it took about almost two years before we moved in the house because they had to put the streets and the drainage and everything. They were prefab houses. [00:35:13] When we first moved, Southern wasn't up. And then finally, they begin to put the pavement. That's where I learned how to drive. I used to go over there, drive up and down. Q: And when did you move into the home? RO: So, around 1955.

[00:08:01] We had three bedrooms, a living room, a little dinette kitchen, and a little kitchenette. And one or two bathrooms. One bath. And of course the front yard, back yard, two side yards. Q: Why did Mr. Oubre choose that particular model? RO: Guess, that's what we could afford. Q: Speaking of affordability, do you remember how much your home cost? RO: About 11,000?

UNIT TWO DIGEST: Living in Pontchartrain Park 06:16 - 19:48

RO: Everybody said, you know, how it was a nice area and it would be something we didn't have. It was a nice subdivision for the black people. Q: Now, when you moved into the park, how many children did you have? RO: Two, Bryan and Percy. Q: And you had three children while living in the park. How long did you actually live in Pontchartrain? RO: For 25 years. [00:35:13] RO: When we first moved back there, Southern wasn't up. In fact, it had streets back there then. And then finally, they begin to put the pavement. That's where I learned how to drive. I used to go over there, drive up and down.

It was really nice. Everybody was just like one big family, the whole block. Everybody got along together. In fact, today, we still get along. Oh yeah, the kids grew up together and they still friends. If my child did something you could correct it. They did something, I could correct it. [00:14:03] The elderly people when they do something wrong, they correct them. It was (...) let them know what they were doing and why they did it. [00:32:02] Q: Each parent parented
people in addition to their children. I can remember a lot of homemakers, ladies standing out as we would walk home from St. Gabriel. I never realized that then what they were doing but it was a gauntlet of parents from Gentilly Woods as I crossed the track (ditch) into Pontchartrain Park from Mendez all the way to Prentiss Avenue, there would be just ladies standing in the doorway or sitting and we speak to them all the way.

[00:17:31] RO: I used to help with the children, I wasn't working so I used to take the kids to the games. I had a station wagon, and I would just pile them all up in there and take them to the game. [00:14:48] I would always take them around the city and we would take them to the airport so they could sit by the window and watch the planes take off. We would take them out to dinner. I'll never forget, we took them to Dooky's. It was Percy, he wanted a steak and my father said, "Where did you all go?" "We went out to eat and I had a snake."

[00:18:27] Q: Did you attend church in Pontchartrain Park? RO: Yes, St. Gabriel. St. Gabriel was in Gentilly Woods) Q: Did you have positive experiences at St. Gabriel? RO: We had negative. When we would go to Mass, we had a certain section, we'd have to sit and then we couldn't go to communion until everybody was finished and they would bring the communion to us. Q: Where did you go from there? RO: St. Paul. It was really nice because the kids went to school there. Q: Was that integrated or was that black? RO: Black.

UNIT THREE DIGEST: HURRICANE BETSY, HURRICANE KATRINA, AND AFTER 19:53 - 27:40

Q: When did you move from Pontchartrain Park? RO: 1977 or so, because the kids was getting bigger and the house was small. They was going to college and we needed more room. Q: And where did you move? RO: On Lake Willow. Q: Were there other Pontchartrain Park residents moving to this area of the city? RO: Yeah. Q: And do you know why they were moving? RO: I guess the same reason, wanted a larger place, family was getting bigger. Really at first, I didn't care for it at all. I wanted to stay in Pontchartrain Park. That was my first home and the kids was brought up there. That was all my memories there.

Q: In 1965, you had been in Pontchartrain Park roughly 10 years. Hurricane Betsy. Could you discuss your memories of Betsy? RO: Well, Betsy, we left and went to my mom. Water in the street didn't come in the house or didn't have any damage.

Q: Now you moved in 1978. What did you do with your home? RO: One of my sons moved in. Then after he bought a house and moved out the other son moved in, and he's there now. Q: Has the neighborhood changed [after Hurricane Katrina]? RO: Well, most of the people didn't come back and it's just empty lots. The street is terrible. When you go there you have to just crawl in your car, there's these big holes. Not too many people on the block. A lot of empty lots.

Q: Are you aware of Wendell Pierce's post-Katrina efforts to provide people with new homes in
Interview with Mrs. Ruth Oubre: Unit Digests

Pontchartrain Park? RO: Yeah. I think they're nice. Because the houses the people needed, and he was helping them because that's the type of person he is. He's just like my son, Hurby.

[00:33:55] Q: I applaud Wendell. He experienced some difficulties that I think were born out of, quite possibly, him not knowing the system and the system’s desire not to see things come back the way that he had envisioned them. I think those houses that he did build successfully are tremendous additions. If he had been able to continue that, I think the Park would look a little differently than it does.

Q: Let us talk about the people you met early on and your experience with Pontchartrain Park, your most memorable moments in Pontchartrain Park? RO: My neighbor on one side was very very nice. When he would get off of work he would always come over to the fence and tease the kids, "What y'all did today? What did your mama cook today for y'all? His last name was Auguillard, Alphonse.

Unit Four Digest: Children and Success Stories 27:49 - 36:01

RO: When the kids was little teenagers, they went to parade and the police was nagging them about “move back this that.” And one of the Morris', he came back crying and he said, “That's why I'm going and get my education. I want to be a lawyer because I'm tired of these police treating us like this.” And he did. He became a lawyer.

[00:29:09]
RO: I just want to tell you my two daughters, just got back from London to see Wendell's play. She said it was wonderful. She said it was real good. Q: Why do you think many of the young people who were with your children in Pontchartrain Park are successful today? RO: Because of the parents. Wendell's other brother, he worked for Obama, he didn't want to go to St Aug so he went to Holy Cross. Yeah. Ron went to West Point. And then Dejoie went to the Naval Academy.
UNIT ONE: Growing Up in a Mixed Neighborhood

SM: I'm Sybil Haydel Morial. I was born November 26th, 1932 in Gert Town, the neighborhood near Xavier University, and only lived there four years when my parents bought a home downtown on Miro Street, closer to my father's medical office. My mother was a teacher before she married but back in those days when a teacher married they had to resign. They thought wives and mothers should be home, taking care of the house and the kids.

I have wonderful memories of my childhood on Miro Street. We had a huge backyard and it was a big house. It was very diverse. There were whites and blacks, there were grand homes and rentals and medium-sized homes. So it was a mix of what America is. I played with these children with no regard that we were different, except we went to different schools. And then of course, high school, and that's when the distance came. I went to Xavier Prep and we went on the bus, three transfers. We rode in the back and our white friends rode the front of the bus.

Q: So when you returned downtown to your neighborhood while in high school, your relationship with your white neighbors and friends changed? SM: Yes, we were still friendly, but we did not interact the way we did when we were younger. We played circle games, jacks and jumped rope, and girls even played marbles. No difference because we were of different races. Our big backyard became the neighborhood playground and my mother not only allowed but encouraged it. And some days she fed everybody when she cooked red beans. She'd open the screen door in the back and call "Plates!" That means come get your plate, get your beans. And we go back outside and sit on the lawn, slapping away the mosquitoes while we ate our midday meal. Except we could not go to public places together. There was a movie house within walking distance, but there was a white entrance and a black entrance. We had to pass the white entrance to get around the corner to the black entrance and we'd shyly wave to them who were standing in line. And the next day we'd get together and talk about the movie. It was so strange, but it was our reality. So we accepted it.

UNIT TWO: Xavier, Boston University, Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King

I went to Xavier University for two years. [But] I wanted to know a northern city [where] you didn't have to think. Oh, can I go here? Are they gonna humiliate me? I was fascinated with Boston, I knew it was an art City. I applied and was accepted with full credits and Junior status and spent my last two years in Boston. I attended Boston University. I could go wherever I wanted to go, to the museums and to live theater. And I just love the freedom of a northern city.

In those days, all of the black students in all of the universities in the Boston area, MIT and Harvard, and Boston College, and Boston University and several others, we all knew each other through sororities and fraternities and we socialized together. This was the 1950's, we were on the cusp of the Civil Rights Movement. And so we talked all the time about the possibilities, especially those of us who were from the segregated South. Martin Luther King was a dear
friend. He was working on his doctorate at Boston University and I was an undergraduate.

We had to go to the black neighborhood in Boston, Roxbury, to get the Negro newspapers, to read what was happening in the courts. When the Brown decision came, we were thrilled and we wondered what this meant. How would change come? And all of the students who came from Southern cities, we love the freedoms of the North but we all wanted to go back South to be a part of the change. Martin was our leader then, he would preach in churches where the minister had to be out of town. The buzz in the dormitory was Martin speaking at such-and-such a church. Okay, we going. So he was our leader. We had no idea he would be on the world stage leading all of us.

He hit the stage when he led the Montgomery Bus Boycott, he was speaking all over the country. When I found out he was coming to New Orleans, I wrote him a letter. I said, “When you come, if you have time come to dinner,” I was living with my mother then. He said, I will call you when I get there. So I went to hear him, his wife was expecting one of their children and I was expecting my first. I went backstage and he said, I am so sorry. I was going to tell you that I'll be free for dinner tomorrow, but the ministers have called me in for a meeting. And guess what happened at that meeting? The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was born in New Orleans at Reverend A.L. Davis's church with Martin Luther King as the leader. So I said, I don't want to use this word, but that trumps Sybil Morial. [laughter]

UNIT THREE: Teaching, Marriage, and Coming to Pontchartrain Park [00:12:00] - [00:23:43]
I got a job teaching in Newton, Massachusetts, which was one of the premier excellent public school districts in the country. My advisor said, Sybil, you need to give this some thought. For you to teach in Newton that's great on any level, but you will be the only black teaching, and I don't know that there are many black students in that neighborhood. So I taught school and I went to graduate school in the evening and on Saturday. In 1955, I finished my Graduate Studies.

And in the meantime my husband Ernest Morial and I were dating and we decided to marry. Mr. Morial attended law school before we got together. He finished Law School in 1954, at LSU, the first black. He was in Army intelligence, the spy group of the army. It was during the Korean War, but things were going on in Vietnam and men who were trained at the Army intelligence school after they graduated, they sent them to Vietnam. So Dutch said, "I'm not gonna leave you and go to Vietnam." So we married in Boston, and he went to Fort Howard in Baltimore. I joined him after at the end of the school year and we lived in Baltimore for two years. I taught in public schools, they were five blacks in this faculty of 30, 35 teachers in the school. When his term was up, 1955, we returned to New Orleans. He had been practicing law with A.P. Tureaud who was the dean of black lawyers in Louisiana. And then he resumed his practice with A.P. Tureaud. Pontchartrain Park was being built. Young families were moving in, and we rented a house in Pontchartrain Park, on New York Circle and we lived there for four years. And began to look to buy a house in the Park.
We were sold on raising our children there, we didn't consider any other place. There was no question that we would not buy a house in Pontchartrain Park.

He got a VA loan, that's why so many young people were buying houses because many of them were veterans and they could get the GI loan, and my husband did. I was teaching with your mother, my dear friend, Dolores Robertson, at Henderson H. Dunn in the Desire Housing Development. One additional appeal was that the house was across the street from the park, from the golf course, and I could look out my windows and see my children playing over there. I also loved that there were many children their age to play with. The parents, the homeowners, took care of their property, you know? They kept the grass cut, they planted plants, and they kept everything clean and they were so proud to own a home, as Dutch and I were.

UNIT FOUR - Pontchartrain Park as a Segregated Black Community, Gentilly Woods as White

Q: Now, were you familiar with the wranglings about Pontchartrain Park being segregated? Attorney A.P. Tureaud was opposed to the creation of Pontchartrain Park. Mr. Morial, at the time, worked very closely with Mr. Tureaud, but lived in Pontchartrain Park and was accepting of the segregated status. Did that create a conflict? SM: Well, friends of my parents knew we grew up in a mixed neighborhood, and they said, Do you want your children to grow up in an all-black neighborhood? Don't you want them to have a more diverse experience? We were all young families, homeowners, many of them were veterans, and I thought it was healthy and that outweighed my concern about them being separated from white people who they would have to get along with eventually. I thought living in a segregated neighborhood might be healthy for the development of their self-esteem.

They eventually went to the Catholic School in the white neighborhood, Gentilly Woods. The first year that the schools were integrated, we registered my two oldest, Julie and Marc. There were not many blacks in the first years. They got along for the most part and the teachers were willing. It was a Catholic school and they knew that this was the Christian thing to do, besides it was following the law. I was glad that they did go to the Catholic integrated school, Saint Gabriel, to have that experience even though some of it was negative. It wasn't overt, but it was there. You know what those subtleties can do to young people. My children had to navigate getting back to the Park because there was some resistance to integrating the Catholic schools. There was a ditch that separated Gentilly Woods from Pontchartrain Park, and when you got over the ditch you were safe. Years later, [my children] told the stories--Jacques about how he had to run home because the same boy would chase him and call him the N word. I said, Well, why didn't you tell me? He said, Well, I handled it. Look, what were you going to do? So they learn to handle that adversity without coming to us.

Q: In Gentilly Woods, there was also the shopping district that we called the Front, two big box stores Maison Blanche on one end, Sears on the other, and in between grocery store, restaurants and the like. You had to interface with people at the Front. Did you encounter any
experiences? SM: I guess there were maybe snubs but nothing verbal that upset me. Sometimes white people spoke to me, just Good morning, Hello, talk about the weather. They didn't know me from Adam and I didn't know them, but they knew I probably came from Pontchartrain Park.

I had one friend, early on, Claire Katner, who had a lot of children at St. Gabriel. She invited our family to dinner, she had six children and at the time I had three. And so we went into Gentilly Woods. She said, I just want to kind of prep you, I'm not responsible for what my neighbors say or do. I'm welcoming you to my house. She said the neighbor down the street told her children, Now you be nice to those little colored children but don't play with them. And [Clare] said, How can she teach that negative thing to our own children? She was Christian enough and brave enough to invite all of us to dinner. And so we were lifelong friends. She lives right up the street in that apartment building, and sometimes we go to Church together. So there were good people willing to take risks. And by risks I mean snubs from their neighbors with whom they had been friendly. But she didn't mind that. She did what her conscience told her.

UNIT FIVE  Life and Recreation in Pontchartrain Park [00:30:23] - [00:35:37]
Q: Right across the street from your home was the playground, a NORD, New Orleans Recreation Department site where structured, organized athletics occurred. Did any of your children participate in the NORD program at Pontchartrain Park. SM: Yes, that's another reason why I loved the Park so much. Marc was on the NORD basketball team, and he was also on the football team. He was a placekicker and when he was in Middle School, he would come home from school, drop his books, get his football and his T, and go across the street and practice kicking, until came in, ate, and then he was ready to do his homework.

Q: Where are you a booster club member? No, I was not and I regret that, and Dutch, my husband, was so busy during the Civil Rights Movement, he was president of the NAACP and he was a practicing attorney. And because he was with A.P. Tureaud, he was involved in much of the legislative change when Thurgood Marshall and Constance Baker Motley and the team from the NAACP legal defense fund came down, strategizing how to get the state to conform to national mandate to desegregate the schools. He was gone all the time and of course, I was home. We've talked about it now because [Marc's] son is a really great basketball player in New Jersey where they live. He's a freshman in college but Marc went to every single game. He said, I'll arrange my schedule, because I remember dad was too busy to make all of my games.

UNIT FIVE  Civil Rights Activism, and Creation of LLOGG (Louisiana League of Good Government) [00:35:37] - [00:49:27]
Q: While you were living in Pontchartrain Park, Mr. Morial made history by becoming the first African American elected to the State House of Representative since Reconstruction. There was Dr. Adams, the podiatrist, who was a major Civil Rights stalwart. Dr. Mitchell, the optometrist, was a Civil Rights stalwart. What was it about Pontchartrain Park, do you think, that
gave rise to these activists? SM: I think they were all professional people who were aware of what was happening, not only in the country, but what was happening in our state, and in our city. Many young black women and men were involved in some small way because this was a life-changer for them and their families. Q: Coming out of Pontchartrain Park were several young women who were audacious enough to create [LLOGG, Louisiana League of Good Government] a political organization which served to educate other black women and men around the city.

SM: You know that well, because your mother was a charter member. I think that's what accelerated the Civil Rights Movement, everyone was seeing what was happening all over the country and this motivated many of them to become involved. So I belonged to a women's group. There were eight of us, and we would have a rummage sale and give it to the orphanage, we were do-gooders. And then I couldn't wait for my husband to come home because he was in the courts, to tell me the real skinny on what was going on. And I was home with two toddlers. And I said, Well, I want to do something, so I went to my seven friends and said, You know, we could really make a contribution.

I had a white friend from Gentilly Woods who belonged to the League of Women Voters and they had just gotten a grant to do voter registration. So I said, Well, let me think about joining so I can be a part of the voter registration drive. No. They couldn't take me because it was a state law that said white and black people could not meet together or eat together. So we got together at my house and talked about what we would do. There were eight of us, and your mother was one of the charter members. We educated ourselves to what the registration process was, the intent was to keep as many black people off the rolls. So then we selected places to do voter registration workshops. Black churches always welcomed us and we went to the Guste Homes, the first senior citizens federally funded apartment complex. This is what you had to do to become a registered voter back then--you had to pass a citizenship test, a literacy test, you had to figure your age in years, months, weeks and days. It was an intimidating experience to have to face all that to get the right to vote. But we were loyal to our areas and we did that for several years. We had speakers to come and talk about the structure of state legislatures and what their responsibilities were. The city council and what their responsibilities were. How do you get from presenting a law and getting it enacted? We were educating ourselves so we could in turn educate others.

Then we had a brilliant idea of having a Meet the Candidates session. Moon Landrieu was running for mayor, there were actually a hundred and one people running in this election, there's a lot of little parochial positions. So after we set it up to have it in a labor union hall I said, What's the point, there were no black candidates, suppose they don't come? Dutch and Moon knew each other during the early years, I said Moon this is what my organization did, you think they'll come? He said, Sybil, I don't know, but I'll be there. So that was good enough, we could ask him some questions, like are you going to appoint blacks to City commissions? Almost everybody turned out, curious about these young women who had the nerve to have this big Meet the Candidates session in a big union hall. That really gave us the exposure that we were serious.
And we were young women who had children and jobs. So, our organization thrived all through the years. Your mama [was] with me every step of the way.

And guess what happened? Katrina came. And all of our members dispersed, left to go to other cities. I said, do you think we can bring this together? We need to find young live wires because this should not die. We just couldn't pull it off. But guess what? Right before Katrina, we had gotten a big grant from the city to do more voter registration and voter education, and that money was sitting in the bank, I think it was $20,000. One of our past presidents was a successful businesswoman, she said, Well, it's been eight years since Katrina, I'm going to get our interest on that and make it grow. And we ended up getting close to thirty thousand dollars. And since we couldn't pull the organization back together, we decided to do two scholarships, one at Dillard and one at Xavier. And the only restriction we had on it was that it would go to a woman. I had talked to Dr. Norman Francis, who was president of Xavier, to see if this little money was worth it. He said absolutely, three thousand dollars can make the difference. We thought with twenty thousand dollars we would only spend interest, could do maybe $5,000 if the market was good. So all was not lost. Some of our original members are gone, like your mother, but they left a great legacy.

Q: What year did you create LLOGG, the Louisiana League of Good Government? SM: 1963, right in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. We were not thirty yet, had little children and this is what we say: Well, we get a babysitter to go to a party or to go out to dinner. We could get a babysitter once a week to go do this. Three hours. Q: LLOGG is still in existence, from 1963 to 2001 and beyond? SM: 2021

UNIT SIX  Hurricane Betsy, and Leaving Pontchartrain Park [00:49:27] - [00:55:42]
SM: We remained in Pontchartrain Park until 1972. We left because we had a fifth child, and we didn't have any room. I was saddened to leave Pontchartrain Park because I still had two young girls and I would have loved for them to grow up in that very healthy and nourishing neighborhood. [Our home was] on the fringe of Gentilly in the Seventh Ward, we were on the Bayou. This area was just being developed, they were just putting in a sewer line and the water line, there were no houses yet. We bought this [lot] and just held it until we could get our money together. [My parents] lived three doors down. My husband told my father there's a lot right up the street that's for sale. They built before we did because they had money and we were still gathering our assets to build. So it was wonderful to have them down the street. My children could, you know, just go down the street to see their grandmother and grandfather.

Q: Before you moved in '73, right after you helped create LLOGG, the Louisiana League for Good Government in '63, there was in 1965, Hurricane Betsy. You lived through Betsy in Pontchartrain Park, how did Betsy impact you and the neighborhood? SM: The whole neighborhood flooded out. We had about 10 inches of water in our house. After things had settled down, we had to get a boat to go to the flooded street to see what Betsy had done. We did have flood insurance, but it was not enough. Well, we restored the house enough to be able to live there. Happily. Because my children had friends because they loved it so much. Because
it was beautiful and peaceful. And there were children like you who were good students and who were good children to their parents. It was just such a healthy place, socially until then.

UNIT SEVEN  The Lady in White Myth, and Memories of Pontchartrain Park [00:55:42] - [01:00:53]
Q: There was this mythical story about the Lady in White? Do you recall? SM: I don't know that story. Q: Marc spent a lot of his time on the playground, I'm sure he's familiar with the Lady in White. Supposedly there was a lady somewhere on the other side of the park near the golf course. She would be seen at dusk, with a white flowing gown and white hair blowing in the wind, and she would frighten children. I think that this was actually a person who might have had dementia at the time, or might have had a breakdown, not as menacing a character as the children let on. [But] for years, just the mentioning of the Lady in White in the spring and summer would clear the Park. SM: You know there was there was a tale like that in the Seventh Ward where if you didn't come in right at dark, that the lady was going to get you. Remember, Clyde, all the parents said, Soon as the street lights go on, you better be home. Well, soon as a street light went on I could see kids running all over to make it home before it got dark.

Q: Can you recall at this moment your lasting memories about Pontchartrain Park? SM: I think I've shared all of that. Just young families with children were able to do it because of the GI Bill. Proud of their homes, proud of the neighborhood because there were people just like they were who kept their property up and who were happy that the children could play outside with little fear that anything would happen to them. It was an idyllic place to raise children. And the fact that it was all black turned out to be an asset because it raised self-esteem. They did not get the taunting that you're not as good as the rest of them. Even though I loved that I grew up in a very diverse neighborhood, I think that Pontchartrain Park was very healthy for my children. Q: Did you notice the Park beginning to change? SM: No. I did not notice a change because Marc was just was still very active on the playground. And I want to remember a legend Mac Knox, McBurnett Knox, the coach not just teaching them sports, but passing on good character to them.

UNIT 8  Hurricane Katrina, and After [01:00:53] - [01:08:40]
Q: Now, you moved in '73 and of course in 2005, Katrina hit. What was that experience like? SM: Oh, it was horrible. All of my children were flooded. I was flooded. Monique was flooded, Julie had just come back to New Orleans, she flooded and Jacques's roof was almost ripped off. We all evacuated to my daughter Cheri’s house in Baton Rouge, seven of us and a big dog. And she and her husband took us in. She had a huge house and she had a little carriage house in the back. She could accommodate us and they were wonderful and Cheri’s mother-in-law offered us her credit card to buy clothes because we only had three changes of clothes. She brought us cooked food and fresh food. The neighbors sent towels and sheets and all of that. It was just a very Christian attitude, at that time. I was there five years, I decided, these people need to get back to their routine, your house had become a hotel and so I rented a house.

I had just retired from Xavier University, two months before Katrina. So I had no reason to come
back here to get my house back together. [But] I did want to restore it. This is a family homestead that has so many happy memories. All five of my children, the older ones during the teen years, the younger ones most of their lives. So, I was commuting back and forth dealing with the contract. Jacques and Monique got boots and masks and had to wade here to get into the house. They pulled up all the carpets and rugs and emptied the refrigerators and put it out front. When I came to meet with my insurance agent, when I walked in the side door, I said I need a minute, I can't talk right now. The insurance was what I expected, I didn't have any trouble getting it. That was not nearly enough, [but] I had no mortgage on this house, so in Baton Rouge I was thinking how I could recover. And I did. I was coming every week to meet with the contractor. But then a month into the restoration, fire took with the water hadn't. The water took the first floor and mildew crawled up the walls. The fire took the second floor and everything in it. So I was just intent on getting the house back together. I do not regret having a big mortgage. I do not regret restoring it because every holiday they come, you know, even Fourth of July, I'll have something. We eat outside, it's wonderful.

Q: Do you have any reason to go back through Pontchartrain Park? SM: I do because I have my hair done in Pontchartrain Park. That's once a week and I have such happy reminiscences each time I go. I got a good look at what used to be my house. And all the memories come back, so it's still a wonderful neighborhood.

Q: Are you familiar with Wendell Pierce's efforts to rebuild the Park one house at a time? SM: I think that's a great idea, because it was one of the first all black neighborhoods. Q: Well, certainly in Louisiana, it was the first subdivision style neighborhood for African Americans. Pontchartrain Park is the first of its kind in the state of Louisiana. SM: Well, I'm glad to know that history. Q: Thank you. Mrs. Morial for your participation in this oral history project. Your contribution is tremendously appreciated. SM: It's been my pleasure to share these wonderful memories with you, especially because you are a part of our Pontchartrain Park family, because your mother and I were very close. Q: Thank you.

[01:08:40]
UNIT ONE: Personal Background and Coming to Pontchartrain Park
[00:01:50]-[00:09:34]

Q: Please tell me your name? VW: Velez Bluain White. Q: And where were you born, Mrs. White? VW: New Orleans, Louisiana. Uptown around Fourth Street. Q: How many siblings did you have? VW: Four, [we were] five girls. Q: What schools did you attend? VW: I attended Holy Ghost until the third grade and in the fifth grade I went to Ricard 'til seventh grade. Then in eighth grade, I went to Hoffman, on Claiborne Avenue, then I went to Booker T. for ninth grade and then on to 35 and that's where I finished in June 1946.

[I was] married to Phil White June 12, 1948, and he died January 26, 1968. He was in the Navy. Seaman. Q: Seaman First Class, VW: Right. He served in Korea and Vietnam and in the World War. He wasn't a career man, but he was at Xavier and they called him back and they had the Korean War and they had the Vietnam War and they called him back for that. Transferred him to San Diego and I lived in San Diego with him. I had Philip and my daughter and then we came back. Q: Now, how many children did you all have? VW: I have five, four boys and a girl. They were all born while he was in the service.

Q: And when you were in New Orleans, after you returned from San Diego, where did you live? VW: I lived on Second Street and then I lived in the Uptown Magnolia Projects on Washington Avenue. I moved downtown in the sixties on Saint Ferdinand Street right off of Old Gentilly Road, in Gentilly.

Q: When did you start hearing about Pontchartrain Park? VW: Well, you knew Joe Bradford? Mr. Bradford was the guy who enticed [my husband] to come and look at the house, on Providence Place. Q: And what year was that? VW: 1962. We thought about it when they first built on the old side. And after Mr. Bradford, that's when we started looking into it. We moved December the 1st 1962. Q: Did Mr. White use his VA Bill to purchase the home? VW: Yes, yes he did. Q: Can you describe your floor plan when you moved into your home? VW: A kitchen, living room, and three bedrooms and one bath. Front yard, back yard. Q: Were there any other young couples, young families on Providence when you moved in? VW: Yeah, Brian Johnson and his family and the Davidson's and the Valerie's, and the Edward's. Q: When you moved into Pontchartrain Park, what was your profession? VW: I was teaching at Holy Ghost, 2nd grade. Q: And your husband? VW: Teaching at Hoffman, fourth grade, and working at the post office at night.

UNIT TWO: Living in Pontchartrain Park
[00:09:34] - [0013:47]

Q: What were some of the positive aspects of living in the park? VW: Well, positive aspect was the children each had a room to themselves. They wasn't all crowded in
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. VELEZ WHITE: UNIT DIGESTS

one room. And the neighborhood was nice. I was happy. I had our own place. We were a neighborhood, it was like family, family oriented, you know. Q: Other than the neighbors that you mentioned, do you remember any other people in Pontchartrain Park? VW: The Pierce’s, Brenda's mama, Lydia, and the Adam’s. I know a lot of them on the other side of the park, Margaret Adams and all of them.

Q: Let's talk about the recreation component of Pontchartrain Park. You mentioned that Philip and Leonce played on the playground. VW: Right. Leonce played it all, he was on the All-Star team for the Lakeshore District. What I really remember was, when they played the football game in Gatlinburg, and I went there with three other black families. Philip didn't play like Leonce played but he used to be on the park all the time. A coach I remember is Mr. Calhoun, Mr. Mac, Mr. Holmes.

Q: Did you know any children who might have died swimming the lagoons? VW: Yeah, that little guy, he used to live on Prentiss, Edwards was his last name, lived right across from Joe Jackson, he drowned. And another little guy on the track, the Johnson boy, Barnett Johnson, and the train hit him. And there was another little guy, lived out with Miss Barnes. Her grandson died sometime like that too, think it had something to do with the train. Q: Now, let's get back to some of the great stories and legends, I would say urban myths. Are you familiar with the story about the Lady in White? Q: No. Q: I would suggest that your children would know. VW: Yeah, right (laughter).

UNIT THREE: Gentilly Woods and St. Gabriel Church

[00:13:47] - [00:20:22]

Q: Were there any disadvantages to rearing your children in the park? VW: Well, the only disadvantage, I think, was when I first moved out here I went to Holy Ghost but then I changed to St. Gabriel. I had to sit in the back of the church. I just accepted it. There wasn't much you could do then or I didn't have the courage to do anything more. I just wanted to go to church and that was the only one they had so I had to go there. Q: Gentilly Woods was the Caucasian community that was down Press Drive. Gentilly Woods had the Catholic Church. VW: Gregory and Leonce went to St. Gabriel's school and they weren't treated the way they were supposed to be treated. They were altar boys and of course they weren't treated like the white boys were. I know they had the ditch, you used to have to cross it. Q: So at Saint Gabriel School and Church, there were disparities with how they were treated? VW: Yes, disparities with the children. That's why St. Gabriel's [school] closed, because there weren't too many of us coming. [My older children] went to Holy Ghost and Sterling went to Coghill Q: Coghill is the Pontchartrain Park neighborhood public school. VW: Philip and them was still going to Holy Ghost, on Toledano between Danneel and Saratoga, right off Louisiana Avenue behind Holy Ghost Church.

UNIT FOUR: Hurricanes Betsy and Katrina

[00:20:22] - [00:31:29]

Q: Now you moved in in 1962, three years later, 1965 was Hurricane Betsy. What do you remember about that? VW: Well, I remember that water came in the house and
that we had to go to my mother's to stay. I lost some stuff, not like it was for Katrina. We had water in the house but we didn't have it seven feet. We just had it to the baseboard. I had to re-sheet rock, I got a SBA loan.

Q: So, Hurricane Katrina happens in late August, very early September, 2005. Who was at home with you at that time? VW: Myself and my dad, he was like 100 and we left with Miss Jones and went to Houston. I went to Georgia, and then my daughter-in-law was transferred to Nashville and I lived in Nashville for 6 months. And then I went back to Georgia with them, then I came home and lived in Algiers with my sister and then I got a trailer and I stayed in a trailer for about a year, the trailer in front of my house. And then I got my house built and I moved in my house in 2009. And that's where I am now. I got these different grants that helped me. I couldn't have done it if I hadn't got the grants. I used to have a kitchen by itself, but now it's a living room and dining room, altogether, and the kitchen is one big open space now. I have more room now. My daughter lives with me.

Q: What's the difference between the neighborhood coming back after Hurricane Betsy and after Hurricane Katrina? VW: Big difference, big difference. Still family oriented after Betsy, everybody came back. But everything's tear down now. I got a house next door to me that grows grass taller than you, and squatters in one of those brand new houses. [00:32:39] Q: Is there any assistance you could possibly get from the church, from the community center, in terms of the vacant home next door? VW: Well, you go to those Pontchartrain Park meetings, they say that they working on it and that's all I could do, you know. Nobody cares about the grass being high like that, you know?

VW: Started to change before Katrina, for the worst, not for the better. The Section Eight people came and a lady live next door to me she moved out saying because it was getting to be the ghetto. Q: Now you mentioned that the home next to you that's abandoned is one of the newer homes, was that one of the homes from Wendell Pierce? VW: Yeah. First they had up for sale and Greenup had it, they would come and check on it. But all the signs are gone now. Nobody's in the house. Q: And that's the same Greenup family that helped bring Pontchartrain Park into fruition. VW: Right, the same family, that's his son. Q: So, what do you think about Mr. Pierce's attempts at providing people with new homes in Pontchartrain Park? VW: I'm sorry it didn't work out for him, but it was a good idea.

Q: Are any of your old neighbors still on the block? VW: I have four of them still came back. and my immediate part, four of them back. Q: Have you resumed your membership in the Pontchartrain Park Association, are you a part of the Pontchartrain Park Elders Center? VW: Yeah, I can play bingo every Monday (laughter). I belong to the St. Gabriel's Trumpeteers. St. Gabriel's, it's all mostly black now, I'm comfortable there.

UNIT FIVE: Final Reflections
[00:31:29] - [00:33:55]
SUNO CAAAS
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. VELEZ WHITE: UNIT DIGESTS

VW: When I moved to Pontchartrain Park I was happy I was able to have my own and the children were happy. The children and I got along well together and it's still, you know, be family orientated but it's just I was happy that I had my own place. The people are not as friendly [now] as they used to be. Everybody fighting. And you're afraid now to go out because at five o'clock, I don't leave out any more. I'm content to be to be where I am. And life just goes on, you just go with the flow, you know?

VW: I just want to thank you all for interviewing me. Hope I did everything right (laughter). Q: Well, you told your story, so in essence you did everything right. VW: Well, that's all I wanted. Thank you for taking the time to talk to this old lady.
My full name is Velma Lee Wilson Slack, I was born April the 28th 1931 in Franklinton, Louisiana. After I graduated from high school, I came to New Orleans to attend Dillard University. I was living with a relative, Reverend Julius Burrell, in the St. Bernard project in New Orleans.

My husband was born in New Orleans. We are Pentecostal and he played an electric guitar at church, he came out there for a Revival meeting and I met him then two years before I finished high school. I graduated from high school in 1948, and I married in 1951.Q: And so you got married, while you were attending Dillard? VS: Yes. We lived at 1900 New Orleans Street. His parents owned a double house there and we lived in a half house, next door to his parents for about five years and we had children. So we got a larger place at 4141 Gibson Street, one block on the other side of the St. Bernard project.

Q: How did you hear about Pontchartrain Park? VS: Someone told my husband there was a house for sale in the 4200 block of Mithra Street. So he went and looked into buying the house. My husband took care of all of that. [He] was not in the service but our loan was a VA loan, I don't even remember how we got it. But I paid the house notes after a hundred and forty dollars a month. Q: How long did it take you to pay off your home? VS: About 20 some years, I guess. Q: How much was your home? VS: It was in the teens, I don't have the paperwork because after Katrina all of that was lost.

We moved from Gibson St. to Pontchartrain Park in 1963. I must have been about 32 years old. I had five children when I moved into my home, one born since then. I went to Dillard in the evenings after that and finally finished at Southern University at New Orleans, in Secretary Science or something. I had children and I didn't even march with my graduating class. I just got my degree.

Q: Can you remember your original floor plan? VS: When you walked in the front door there was a living room and just beyond that was the kitchen. And then up the hall, there was a bathroom to the right and I guess three bedrooms because my husband and I had a room at the end of the hall and the boys saw in that corner there, and the girls were in a room that's now the dining room. So it was three bedrooms. Q: Did you choose the floor plan, or was that just the floor plan of the home you were able to purchase? VS: That was what it was, and we were so glad to own our own home, so we weren't too choosy.

Q: What had you heard about Pontchartrain Park prior to your moving in? VS: We knew that there was an area where colored people were buying homes, nice homes, so we were interested in it. Q: Were you familiar with Rosa Keller, and her involvement in creating Pontchartrain Park? VS: I do remember that name, but I don't remember what she did. Q: Miss Keller and the Stearns were wealthy, white businesspersons and
Interview with Mrs. Velma Slack: Unit Digests

Socialites who helped contribute to the creation of Pontchartrain Park financially. They worked very closely with the Urban League.

Unit Two: Living in Pontchartrain Park: Neighbors
[00:12:51] - [00:18:28]

Q: What was it like when you first moved into Pontchartrain Park were there a lot of families that lived adjacent to you? VS: There were no other empty houses. Mr. Dicks lived on the corner, there was a Mr. and Mrs. James, across the street live next door to him. And the Motens lived next door to Mr. And Mrs. James. Then the Bradford’s lived next door to the Moten’s and I don't remember their name, but Miss Teresa and her husband lived next door to the Bradford’s. Q: Would that be Mr. George? VS: Mr. George, that's who it was. Then on our side on the corner, it was the Collins', next door to them was Mr. Octave Smith, next door to them we live there, and then the Coleman’s lived next door to us, and Mr. and Mrs. Turner lived on the corner. So I knew everybody in my block. Once a week, Miss Coleman and them had breakfast, coffee or something, if you wanted to come by before you went to work. So we got to know everybody in your block. Q: The reason I know Teresa, Miss Teresa and Mr. George is because Miss Teresa, if you could remember, was the candy lady. And as I walked from school on many occasions, I would stop over there, purchase some wine candy or some other other items. I remember Mr. George and Miss Teresa quite well.

Q: I know you remember many of your neighbors, but do you remember some of the legendary people who might have lived in Pontchartrain Park at the time? VS: I knew that the Haydel’s lived in Pontchartrain Park, not real close to me but some of them lived on Mithra Street, two or three blocks on the other side of the school. Q: That would be Dr. Haydel, one of the younger Haydel’s, and then Mrs. Morial, who’s a Haydel, lived on Press Drive.

[00:26:56] Q: Were you a part of the Pontchartrain Park Association? VS: Yes, we just paid dues to support, because I know they were doing different things to build up. I didn't have a lot of extra time. I had the children and I worked full-time. There was shopping to do in the evening, there was homework to help with.

Unit Three: Living in Pontchartrain Park: Children
[00:15:16] - [00:28:00]

Q: Did those families have children of the same age as your children? VS: I know the Moten's had children the same age, the Collins', then Mr. Smith and Mrs. Smith had one son. The Bradford's had children the same age. The Coleman’s had children the same age. And Miss Teresa, I don't know if they were her children or nieces and nephews but she had children that lived there that went along with my children. [00:22:17] One year they had an Easter egg hunt and I remember Kenneth won the Easter egg hunt, [he] was five years old at that time. They played ball in the street in...
the afternoon. I don't think they played in an organized Pontchartrain Park setup, just in the street and after a while they would come in and make their own Kool-Aid and hot dogs. [00:24:30] Q: In the street, do you remember them playing a game called cool cans? VS: Yes, they would stack them up, I remember them playing that. Q: The cool cans was a game that was played all over Pontchartrain Park. Nearly every block had a cool cans set up in the street and that is unique because cool cans is related to the British game known as Cricket.

Q: Coghill Elementary School was right down the block, did your children attend Coghill? VS: They did. When we lived on Gibson Street, they were near the St. Bernard project that had a name that people were bad. So I would drive the children to Philips School and then go to work. But when I moved to Pontchartrain Park, then I felt comfortable with my children walking to school just a few blocks up the street. They went to school, they did well, and they played football and whatever, and they were always on the honor roll. We went to PTA meetings, and whatever the school did we participated in because the children were happy. They all went to Junior High at Rivers Frederick. High schools, the girls went to 35 and Kenneth went to Ben Franklin, up on Carrollton Avenue, but Rosario went to Kennedy because he wanted to play ball. He didn't like for me to come to his games. He was a receiver and when he'd catch the ball, everybody fell on him, and I would holler 'get up off my child', and he said he was embarrassed. Same thing with Kenneth with basketball when he was at Ben Franklin, he was the only black one on the team and we would just holler, you know--they didn't like for me to come to their games.

[00:20:11] College, Kenneth went to Tulane because he wanted to go into law. Rosario went back to Southeastern one semester and he dropped out and he worked at Dillard. He has a doctorate now, but he got it on his own. Valda was a dean of students at Dillard. And Thelma Lee got married.

Q: Did you all go to St. Gabriel's Church? VS: No, we were Pentecostal Q: Did your children have any incidents with the people in Gentilly Woods? VS: I don't think they did because if they had to go somewhere, they very seldom walked out front. Q: You all lived so close to the ditch which means so close to Gentilly Woods, and for many years of your life in the Park, Gentilly Woods was all white. Did you have any experiences positive or negative with the people in Gentilly Woods? VS: No, I didn't have any problems because I worked at the time and then on the weekends, you know, there was church, so we never had any problems.

UNIT FOUR: Hurricane Betsy and Hurricane Katrina  
[00:28:00] - [00:40:52]

Q: You all moved in 1963. In 1965 Hurricane Betsy hit. Was your property and belongings damaged? VS: No, we didn't have any problem with Betsy. There was water on the corner of Mithra and Press, but we didn't have any water inside the house, we stayed there. It wasn't to where anybody had to move out, our area was pretty good.
Q: Prior to Hurricane Katrina, in some areas of Pontchartrain Park, there were a number of people moving to larger homes in New Orleans East. So you stayed in the Park because you were very satisfied and happy with the surroundings? VS: Yeah. My husband added on to our house, my house is twice as large as it was when we bought it. It's a four-bedroom house with three full baths. So we would have never left if Katrina had not come.

Q: Did you evacuate for Hurricane Katrina? VS: Yes. I was not going to because we had never had any problems, no flooding or nothing. But my daughter lived in Florida and they had so much stuff on the news about it, so she got a room in Jackson Mississippi, that was the closest room she could find, and she told me if we didn't go, they were not going to give her her money back. That's the only reason we left because we had never flooded. So we went to Jackson. Then Velma and her husband lived in Atlanta. So we went to Atlanta and we stayed there until we tried to get back home.

Q: Was your home on Mithra Street damaged? VS: Yes, the house itself is pretty sound, but the inside, all the walls, and all the furniture was ruined, all the clothes, all my fur coats. The second floors were not damaged, but the entirety of the bottom floors were damaged, we had to get rid of everything in there. As soon as they told us we could come home, we came and our neighbors was just like us-- nowhere to stay. [00:34:38] So a minister that we knew, Clayton Neil, he had dated my daughter, and he had a big house in Mandeville. So, we went there because we couldn't find anything to rent. And that's how we ended up buying a house in Covington, in North Park Subdivision, in 2007. The children saw us as being old and they wanted us to live in a gated community, so we bought that house, it's the same size as the house I have in New Orleans, four bedrooms and three full baths, large backyard about three times the size of the one here and then the front yard.

[00:36:48] Q: Did you sell or abandon your home in Pontchartrain Park? VS: Road Home gave us some money and we were going to fix the house. We had rental property but they wouldn't give us anything to help with the rental property. My husband would wake me up at night talking about how, I mean, "it's just like, I never worked. I don't have anything." And he worried about that until he had a stroke, so there I was with these two rental houses and Pontchartrain Park house and a husband. I was really challenged, you know? Then the city condemned those houses because they weren't fixed quick enough, so I was able to sell the two of them for less than $50,000. I still had the Pontchartrain Park house. We had to hire somebody to clean it out, it was a long time trying to get the house finished. So my husband had another stroke, then he had a heart attack, he was having seizures from all those aspirins that he had been taking, and in the meantime, he had glaucoma and he went blind. So now he's in a wheelchair. And you know, he's challenged. I didn't want to put him in a nursing home, so I just take care of him. The house in New Orleans is about finished but it's not as furnished as I would do it. We come down sometime and stay, but you know, I went through a lot with my husband being challenged.
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. VELMA SLACK: UNIT DIGESTS

UNIT FIVE: SINCE KATRINA  
[00:40:52] - [00:54:52]

Q: I have a son, Theron, the youngest one, that lives in Maine. He's home right now and I wish he would stay but he just comes to help me some with his dad, he has an itchiness to leave. Q: Have your neighbors returned to Mithra? VS: Mr. Dix is there but I believe his wife is deceased. James's family didn't come back after the hurricane. The Moten's didn't come back. And Gretchen lives next door to me, the Smith's are gone, and Collin's people are gone. Q: What other differences do you see on the Block? VS: The houses are not the caliber of houses that we had, the neighborhood is not kept up like we did. So it's really changed.

[00:43:28] Q: Do you think that the new home constructions inspired by Wendell Pierce are actually good additions to Pontchartrain Park? VS: My children know him, I am aware of that [but] I don't know which homes he really dealt with. Q: We know that he was thwarted in his effort to continue to build homes because of red tape and other hindrances.

Q: You have maintained your home and Pontchartrain Park. Do you have any regrets? VS: You know, I'm never going to sell this house. My daughter went back to Philips School and told her classmates that we were moving to Pontchartrain Park, Louisiana. Since we have another house, there's no reason to really get rid of it. As my husband gets stabilized, I want an iron gate and the driveway needs to be replaced, a few things I want done. But the children will have to sell it after both of us are gone. I'm never going to sell it, because that's the first house we bought.

Q: Are you familiar with the efforts being launched by Gretchen Bradford and other current members of the Pontchartrain Park Association? [00:46:24] VS: I know that Gretchen is involved and I don't know exactly what she does because we live in Covington most of the time. Q: What Gretchen's organization is trying to do is registering Pontchartrain Park as an official historical neighborhood. Are you supportive of that effort? VS: I will be.

Q: Do you continue your friendship with anyone from those earlier years? VS: Well, of course Gretchen, you know, my children and theirs was always in and out. But if you drive through it's not the same Pontchartrain Park, it looks like there's a lot of rental property. People just write me and want to buy my house so I don't even answer them, because I'm not interested.

Q: So in your opinion, the neighborhood has changed for the worse. VS: Yes, that's what I think. I've found that the crime in New Orleans is different than when my children lived here. I don't think the crime is real bad in Pontchartrain Park, it is just bad in New Orleans, so you're not as comfortable, you know, with living in the city as
you would be. So we are more involved in the house in Covington, where I'm living. Security drives up and down all the time, that's what I'm accustomed to now.

Q: When you think of the Park, what do you remember fondly? VS: Well, when the children could just get dressed and walk to school, they didn't have to wait for brothers and sisters because I felt nobody was going to bother them. And I was right because I never had anybody attack my daughters nor my sons. [00:50:30] When they lived near the St. Bernard project I had to take them and they had to stay at school until I got out of school to go get them.

Being affiliated with the church, sometimes the Ladies Auxiliary would do things at my house, luncheons and meetings. I was proud of the way my house looked, and we just had a kind of family relationship in the whole block. It's all different for me now. All of my children are grown and nobody really lives in Louisiana. The children were little and grew up and now I don't even have baby pictures, you know. Everything is so different.

[00:41:25] Q: And I don't know if we actually got your husband's name? VS: David Lee Slack. You've mentioned that Mr. Slack was a longshoreman. There were several longshoremen in Pontchartrain Park, for example, Chink Henry. Did you know any of the other longshoremen in the neighborhood? VS: He would know them. Sometimes if he was cutting the grass, some of them would drive by and they would talk for hours outside. He worked as a longshoreman for 35 years. Then I worked with the school system for 32 years. That's how we educated the children.
UNIT ONE DIGEST: Background and Coming to Pontchartrain Park 01:48 - 08:02

[00:01:48]
YH: My name is Yolanda Kay Henry. My date of birth is February 4th, 1933. I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio and Los Angeles, California.

Q: How did you hear about owning a house in Pontchartrain Park? YH: That was all taken care of by my husband, Clarence Henry Jr. He came down to New Orleans from California before I did to get a house for his family. At that time we had three children, and he came first. He was from New Orleans, in the Ninth Ward. His dad was President of Local 1419, Longshoreman’s Union. When I came back to New Orleans, I was almost 25 years old. We came back in ’57, and we moved in Pontchartrain Park in April of 1958. And I was expecting another child. And he was born in July of 1958.

Q: Can you recall the process of obtaining your home? YH: He did not include me in that at all. All I knew was, I was waiting for my house. Lived on Treasure Street, across the street from Dillard University. As a matter of fact, Judge Israel Augustine’s parents were my next-door neighbors. I stayed a housewife until my baby, which I had in 1958, until he went to school, the first grade. So I did not look for a job or anything until he was in school.

UNIT TWO DIGEST: Living in Pontchartrain Park 08:01 - 19:26

[00:08:01]
Q: So, were they any negative talk, or positive talk, or discussion about obtaining a home in Pontchartrain Park? YH: If it was, I didn't hear it. I was home, not out in the public like most people. I was a housewife at home with my children. I enjoyed my home, I enjoyed getting my yard together. Even though I had four children, I handled it all. Three boys and one girl.

I lived in Pontchartrain Park from 1958 until Katrina in 2005. We had three bedrooms, one bathroom, living room, and a kitchen. I lived on Prentiss Avenue, and my house was in the last block. If you came down my street, you had to turn around to go back to Congress Street to get off the Park. At that time, Ed Adams was the last house. From his house on was like, it looked like a forest. Seven, I think it's seven houses. And a little later on, they built a church on the corner from my house on Prentiss and Piety. We had a nice group of people on our block. The children got along fine. We didn't have to run out for the kids to stop fussing. We didn't have that problem. The one thing I liked about that area where my house was because, every time I walked out my front door, I didn't have to look in somebody else's front door. I loved looking out onto that Golf Course, and that's where I still am today.

Q: So what are some of the, some of the great personalities from Pontchartrain Park? YH: The
Greenups, because he was in that real estate, he was very much interested in the development of Pontchartrain Park. And Mr. John Roux was the golf pro, he lived down the street from me.

Q: Were there any advantages to raising your children in Pontchartrain Park? YH: Well, coming from California, and right into Pontchartrain Park, I didn't have a problem of saying advantage or disadvantage for my children. It was like, this is how it is. I thought everybody was just like that.

Q: So what did you and your family do for recreation? Did your husband go to the golf course? No, he was not a golfer But he did belong to a social & pleasure club, The Vikings. They already had Original Illinois, Bunch, and Studs. But this was like a relatively new club. And then the wives and significant others of the club members, they formed a club I joined, and as a matter of fact, Leah Chase, Chef Leah Chase, was a member of the club. Her husband was a Viking.

[00:18:25] Q: What was your husband's profession? YH: He was a longshoreman for a while. And then he left there and worked at Michaud when Michaud opened up.


[00:19:28] Q: So did you have any negative experiences with people in Gentilly Woods? YH: No, I never. Because being just a housewife I was home all the time, I didn't have to interact with them one way or the other. And then we went to St. Gabriel's Church which was in Gentilly Woods, and had no problem there-- go right to church and right back home. So there was no interaction except--well, my oldest son, he never was accepted in St. Gabriel School. They always claimed they didn't have a space. At that time, you know, the whites, they didn't want to do it, Segregation--they just took little bitty ones, I guess they figured they'd have more control over it.

Q: What was your experience at the church? Was it gratifying? YH: It was nothing special, to me. Having grown up in Cincinnati Ohio and Los Angeles, California, it's like that's how it should be. People just go and come, without incidents. I've always had to entwine with white people. Because I've been going to school with whites since I was in the third grade.

Q: Before Hurricane Katrina, did Pontchartrain park begin to change? YH: I don't think it changed before Katrina but definitely after Katrina. Q: And did you perceive when Section 8 was open to the park, any type of problems from Section 8 residents? YH: I couldn't tell you who was a Section 8, I don't even know if there's a Section 8 on my block.

UNIT FOUR DIGEST: Hurricane Betsy (1965) and Hurricane Katrina (2005) 25:59 - 37:00

[00:27:19] Q: So before we get a little bit more in depth about Hurricane Katrina, let's reflect on Hurricane Betsy in September, 1965. YH: When Hurricane Betsy struck, well, before it struck, we bundled up and went to my mother-in-law's house. She was also in the Ninth Ward but her house was up
off the ground, you had to walk up like five or six steps to get on her porch. That next morning I put my feet on the floor in water, what it was, her house had four furnaces and the water had come up through the four furnaces. And then we came back, my house was totally dry, my house was totally dry, not a drop of water, and we rode a skiff up to the door.

[00:25:58]
YH: Well, Katrina--I stayed in Pontchartrain Park until the mayor say, evacuate. I was the only one left in the house because my oldest son was in Africa, my other son was already in Washington, DC. My daughter and my youngest son was here in New Orleans. Marvin, my youngest son, he and his family, they went to Dallas. But we went to Houston. My daughter and her husband said we got to leave. She picked me up, and she picked her daddy up from his house and we met another family who Cherylyn consider her a sister, so we like tailgated out of the city. It took us, look like six hours to get from New Orleans to Baton Rouge.

Q: So when you returned, what was the state of your house? YH: It was still standing and everything. But you could see where the water had been in it all the way up to the ceiling, and everything that was there you could still have that smell, I can still remember that smell. Driving back, it was like a window curtain or something. Soon as you're on this side coming from Texas, and soon as you cross through this curtain, that smell hit you. My old house had to be torn down, completely torn down. They came and they gutted it. They had an organization, young college kids who came in and they was taking everything out the houses. Q: And were are you able to salvage anything from your home? YH: No furniture, no clothes. No utensils, no apparatus, pots or pans and stuff like that. I mean, I got a few little whatnots, just a very few. All the photos gone, neither college degrees, I had my high school diploma-- that's gone.

00:34:39
YH: I really got used to Houston. I was in Texas eleven and a half years, and I loved it. The reason I'm back is my children felt like I didn't need to be over there by myself. Houston is 365 miles from here. They felt that at my age I didn't need to be over there by myself. Q: So how has the neighborhood changed since Hurricane Katrina? YH: Well, I don't see a change because I don't go around the neighborhood. But on my particular block it's changed because I don't even see the neighbors. Now, we have three houses in the street-- the Taylor’s, the Roux's, the Williams’s. And my house. And the Mitchell’s The original Mitchell’s, Dr. Mitchell is deceased, but his wife is living further east but their son, one of his sons, is living in their house.

UNIT FIVE DIGEST: Pontchartrain Park Pre- and Post-Katrina 36:54 - 47:08

[00:36:54]
Q: Are you aware of Wendell Pierce's Post-Katrina efforts to provide people with new homes in Pontchartrain Park? YH: He is a very good friend of one of my nephews, Troy Henry, who is very well known in the city, ran for mayor a couple of times. He and Wendell Pierce offered it. But that's all I know about Wendell Pierce. I can tell you where his house is, but that's it.
Q: Are you still friends with anyone and your earliest years of Pontchartrain Park's history? YH: The Adams’s, Mrs. Margaret Adams. Since she still there in her house which is in my block, with her daughter, and her grandson. Also, the Roux's, the original Roux's, both are deceased, but their daughter and son is living in their house. The Taylor’s, Mrs. Taylor is still living, her husband is deceased and she’s in her house with her daughter. Everybody else is gone. And the houses are either sold or being rented, I couldn't tell you. Q: So what do you miss most about Pontchartrain Park? YH: I'm sorry, there's nothing I can't say I that I missed because in the early days after I started working at SUNO, I went to work, I went home. And took care of my family and that was it. I belong to the black social workers organization. I belong to the Alumni Association so I did a lot of traveling and that was it. I can think of some times when I was working at SUNO, I'd go to the education building and go up on that third floor, and look out over the golf course, that was beautiful. That was a beautiful golf course. And it still is.

[00:42:52]  
Q: Did your living in Pontchartrain Park persuade you to work at SUNO, Southern University at New Orleans? YH: We went to school for secretarial training. It was a funded program for disadvantaged, even though I was not disadvantaged. Everybody in the program was like single mothers with no husbands, or very low income. Well, anyway, I got into that program, and they set up for job interviews, since I lived in the Park, and I got the job. 00:40:57 I started working at SUNO as a secretary in June of 1966. I left in the 70s, the year the Hyatt Regency opened in New Orleans, working at the Hyatt Regency. I was a supervisor in housekeeping. I had three floors, 54 rooms on a floor. And I had like 15 maids, and each of those maids had to do 15 rooms. And that was really a lot for one person to cover. So they cut it to two floors.

[00:45:10]  
Q: So [on your pre-Katrina home] did you change the floor plan? YH: Yeah after we split and were separated and everything, I continued working and so I added a den onto my house. Then I also took out all that tile and put in hardwood floors and Terrazzo Tile in my kitchen and my bathroom and in the den, it was very nice. But guess what? Katrina wiped it all away. After Katrina, there was nothing but the piece of land, because the house had to be torn down completely.

[00:35:04]  
Moving back. I'm in a new house, the same address but a newly built house. And it had to be elevated. You know they said if you rebuild, you gotta elevate. If you remodel what you have, you don't have to elevate. I don't understand that at all. 00:44:15 I am back in my house. And I enjoy my house, it has a porch, which it didn't have before, so I can sit on my porch and look out to the golf course. I enjoy that. My oldest son, he and his wife will be living with me. He'll be retiring from his job and he's coming back in November.