

**SUNO-CAAAS PONTCHARTRAIN PARK PIONEERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT -
INTERVIEW WITH MR. EDGAR POREE**

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The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project is presented by the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors: The National Park Service, the United States Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

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The first 15 minutes of the interview featuring Mr. Edgar Poree were inadvertently damaged. The following is a synopsis of Mr. Edgar Poree's recollections of his early life and 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. Poree was instilled with a strong work ethic as a child. Moreover, after being detained in the third grade. He developed a life-long commitment to education and the accumulation of knowledge. He attended Craig Elementary School Joseph S Clark High School, and Xavier University. It was at Craig Elementary School where he met Gloria Guichard to whom he would become married in 1959. Soon afterwards, 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, would move into Pontchartrain Park. The interview resumes with Edgar Poree explaining how he earned the money to purchase his new home.

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[Interview resumes] EP: At King's Simonize Shop, right around the corner from Mr. Dan's Grocery, two blocks from my house. I used to go to them, "Mr. King, why don't you let me do that? Won't you let me do that? And guess what they used to do. Before you had the stuff that clean the windows like Windex. They used to put red compound on a potato sack that was wet. And then it would film up like white. You wipe it and that's what you did the bumpers with. That's how I learn how to do the floors because it's the same process, all you're doing is doing that, right? So your cars would go for \$6 or \$8 and 2.50 and three dollars for a car wash. So, if you had a car wash, right? I see your car. I go there wash the car. I picked up another \$3. So I'm up at \$10 in that five dollar house, right?

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Then when bourgeois are moved around Dillard University, and had picture windows, you know, before you had everything closed, but now you got the square windows, got a fancy lamp sitting on a nice little table and you're opening up and you got the wooden Venetian blinds, okay? The wooden Venetian blind is 2 inches wide, right? It gathers dust. If you got Venetian blinds, I just take them, I'll go throw them over the line in the yard, take a bucket of water. Let the sun dryer. I got 12 dollars and fifty cents in

Mr. Edgar Poree Transcript, CORRECTED Paragraph-TimeCode Consolidation

my five dollar house. That's how I was able to buy the house and put that money down because while they were going to the balls, I was slaving. Working around the clock. And my wife used to always get upset when I said, you know that Poree guy's a lucky son of a gun and he working his...off.

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Q: Wow, you just described the process as to how you purchased your home. Are you a veteran? Did you use the VA Bill? EP: I've never used it 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 did. I never used it. Q: At the time you purchased your house you and your wife were both teachers? EP: Right. At Coghill Q: Your eight-hour job. EP: Right. Q: Then you had...did your wife have other jobs that she... EP: No. She just taught school.

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Q: Now, you knew about and you had heard a lot of positive things about Pontchartrain Park when you moved in. Were there any negatives that you had heard? EP: No, I didn't hear negatives. But you know one of these guys who believe in keeping it real, okay? They didn't refer to their self as, "I live in Pontchartrain Park." You'd say, "I live in the Park. The Park, P A R K, I live in Park." And I never forget after I move in there. They were just some people who were in the kind of 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. You were kind of on the outside.

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EP: And I was the Men's Day speaker at Bethany United Methodist Church, and I was trying, Dr. Robertson, I was trying to figure out why the garbage men were literally fighting over picking up the garbage in Pontchartrain Park and I couldn't figure it out. I just couldn't figure out. Why are they like having like a raffle to get the Pontchartrain Park? And I was the Men's Day speaker and I'ma tell you you I've been a rebel, a long time. I was a Men's Day speaker. And I was telling them the story I'm telling you, and I said, I couldn't figure out why everybody was fighting to get to pick up the garbage in Pontchartrain Park. Well, I knew with the notes that they had on the mortgage, there wasn't much in the garbage can over the weekend. And the pastor said, "You did not go there, Mr. Poree?" Yes. I did. I was bad. Dr. Robertson. I was a terror. You hear me? I was a little terror but that that was the only negative. It was just that, although you're living here, it was wonderful. You were still not really excepted in certain circles, okay?

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Q: When you moved into the Park, did you and your wife have any children? EP: Yeah, we had my oldest daughter who was born in 61, in 61. And I lost a daughter. Dana, Dana died in my arms. And back then, they just call it crib death. She lived 30 to 32 days and we noticed that she, you know, like it was jumping like that, her body. And when they did the...did the scan, the young lady that was doing a brain scan. And, you know, God is good all the time. When the technician saw, when they were scanning the

left side, I could see it in her face that there was something. So she probably would have been a handicapped kid. and it was Dr. Breaux who lived across the street. When I was just rocking Dana in my arms, her little head just dropped to the side. And I just walked over to the Breaux's house 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. That was just difficulty and she'd wake up in the middle of the night and say the baby is crying. Let me tell you, that used to go through me.

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EP: But Lord, and when my son came...oh, Lord the day. I had time to do nothing but go to school. I was a PTA president for every school that my son attended. Every school. 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. Q: Now did your children attend school in the Park? Did they go to Coghill? EP: Coghill. Yep. Yeah. They went to Coghill and Deidra went to St. Mary's in seventh grade. Edgar went to, where was it, Gregory School, after he got out of Coghill School. Q: Now, your son was born while you and your wife lived in Pontchartrain Park? EP: Right, yes. Q: And your child who passed was born? EP: Yes, while we were in Pontchartrain Park.

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Q: Now, describe your home's floor plan. The one that you... EP: I had three bedrooms. I had...this was interesting. This was the Cadillac houses in 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 twenty five thousand seven hundred dollars. Can you imagine? Get \$25,700 for a house? Oh, man. Oh, we were...we were uptown.

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Q: So you actually designed your home? EP: Well, I saw the plans, you know, they had the plans and because the house wasn't built yet. And I said, "Well, what is this?" And he said, "That's built-in." I said, a built-in kitchen and, you know, and I said air condition? Oh, man, I was just I was freaking out. Q: Now your houses in downtown, they didn't have built-in kitchens? EP: What you mean? Beyond Bienville Street? No. The house on Bienville Street, the first three rooms had plaster in it, okay? And Bienville Street was a heavily traveled, what you call it. It was a major street to those big trucks and eventually that plaster would crack, right? And then a large chunk would fall out of it, all right? Well, my daddy, my daddy was in World War one and my dad had over five hundred fifty books during his lifetime and read them from cover to cover so he was a man of knowledge. Okay, and then when we...when the plaster would crack and fall and you have a big old hole there, you know, we would do for that? You know, we were doing? Mr. Brown, you remember Mr. Brown I was telling you about? Mr. Brown's friend was Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson used to work in a factory where they pack china dishes and stuff, and he used to pack them with cellulose and stuff. So, my daddy said, "What are you doing with that cellulose?" Oh, we throw it away. He said

don't throw it away. Just bring it here. Okay. All right, when the plaster would crack or big patch would fall my daddy would take the lattice at the top [demonstrates with his hands] Pull the first three boards out, and he take the cellulose and he pulled in between. Guess what? That was, that was insulation. That was insulation back in the 40s.

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Okay. All right. And then what my dad would do, we would go to Schwinn bicycle (shop) 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. Guess what that was? That was our drywall. And so what my dad did, he did a template of the side of the hole and he put that in there because you know, the plaster is like almost 3/4 of an inch. Okay, so he put two layers of the template in there and then we take that big 14 foot piece there because we had the 12-foot ceilings at the time. That was our drywall. And that's how I learned how to wallpaper. So that other one I was telling you. The other thing I was doing when I was married. I was wallpapering and at the same time. All right?

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Q: Now when you, that's very interesting...when you first moved into the Park, what was it like? EP: Serene. It was, it was simply beautiful. It was...driving in there, and seeing kids playing. Well, you know you're in the neighborhood, you know, you are all crouched in there... just the beauty, the serenity of it. And you were close to everything... you had the Maison Blanche, has a Sears, the other stores right out there in Gentilly Woods. You had Grants. And you had a theater there in Gentilly Woods.

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Q: Now what was the address? EP: 6219 Providence Place right behind Southern (Southern University at New Orleans). Right behind Southern. Q: In addition to your sister and cousin, did you have any other friends and relatives in Pontchartrain Park? EP: 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 (Former Chancellor at Southern University at New Orleans) place. The man was brilliant. He was, he was sharp as he could be, he was sharp. He was a guy who set up the government structure in Nigeria. He was heavyweight. That was my next door neighbor. He proceeded, Larry McKinley who became a next door neighbor and he was instrumental in getting me out of the classroom. Q: When he got you out of a classroom where'd you go? EP: 1966, I was a sixth grade teacher for those eight years. Okay. Q: When he got you out of the classroom... EP: and he got me out of the classroom, Dr. Carl Dolce was appointed the superintendent of all these Parish schools in 1966. And the first thing he said was he wanted new revenue. I was sharp in math. And I told my wife, I am out of the classroom. I am out of doing these jobs. Your man is no longer a servant and she's always refer to me as the dreamer. She said, "What are you dreaming about?"

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EP: This man said he wanted to do a one cent sales tax to raise revenue for teachers and to bring more money to, what you call them. I said I'm out of here and it was Dr. Walter Alston. I went over there and got the statistics. When was the last sales tax passed for education? Did my research, okay? And I put together a 72 page strategic plan for all these Parish schools and called Dr. Dolce up and said, I have the plan that will get you the money and I had a two-hour and 30-minute meeting with Dr. Carl Dolce. And he said this is terrific young man but a typical politician. He said, we had to let the lawyers look at this to see whether or not it's not in violation for a school teacher to participate in a political process. Okay? We'll get back to you. Well, I didn't give him my original, I gave him the copy. That was done on a mimeograph machine, okay? Because the secretary at the school typed the 72 pages, all right? Two weeks don't hear anything. In 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 ask them how could I send a telegram and ensure that the person I was sending it to had the sign it and I didn't know that. You had to send a registered telegram. And guess what I did? I followed the courier because Mr. Carl Dolce, Dr. Carl Dolce had to sign it. All right? So 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 and it was Dr. Stone. Edwin Stone who later, became the Dean of Graduate School of LSUNO. He was in there. He was associate superintendent of pupil placement. He say, "Carl, I don't know what political ramification, but anybody would put that together ought not be in a classroom. And guess what? The next day. I came out of the classroom!

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EP: Okay, but guess what? Guess what happened? 12, black principals requested an emergency meeting with Dr. Carl Dolce because they wanted to know how this arrogant, egotistical, short-term teacher was working in the headquarters. And they said, "He had a plan." And so we did the plan and it was Dr. Alston who gave me the strategy for taking the polls. And we did a figure of 71.35. We're gonna get a 70.25 Yes vote. And all of the political pundits said, "Dr. Dolce might be good at math, but that's crazy." Guess what? 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. He gets hired by Orleans Parish Schools.

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Dr. Everrette Williams had just gotten his master's degree from Xavier University. He comes back and he's the first black associate superintendent. He gets hired for 20,000. He reports to the high school guy who is a high school guy, who when Chep Morrison (Former Mayor of New Orleans), that's why I'm going to tell you about Chep Morrison, when Chep Morrison was running for mayor. This guy was a photographer and all he went around is 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. And we went to the rally and my wife had tears in her eyes and she said, "All that you did and they didn't even mention your name."

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EP: 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. It's for 12 weeks. You make \$135 a week and then they have two weeks that you wrap up the program. So I make, I'm almost making at 4400 that I was making teaching school over that period of time. Well, he didn't know whether or not he was going to be funded, all right? So they put a proposal in and I wrote myself in for 14,000, I was making 4400 dollars. In 1966, I was making \$4,400 teaching school and they said what's that salary going to be? I said, 14,000 and it got funded. 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 it and, and drove it 6219 Providence Place. And when she came home with her girlfriends, she said, "Who's that for?" I say, "The dreamer has struck again."

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EP: I didn't mean to deviate and get off the track but it's all a part of the story. Q: It is a very important part of the story. You were probably one of them but...identify some of the legends from the neighborhood? Some of the people who were VIPs? EP: Well, you had a Dutch and his family, your family, your family, from an educational standpoint, your dad and your mom. Leon Fulton with insurance, Steven Johnson with insurance business. And Sterling Henry when they Sterling was there and...Dr. Pratt. I landscaped, oh that was another thing I used to do, I landscaped Dr. Pratt's house and his pool and he was, 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 was ruined for life. Popped his spine. Dr. Pratt, Dr. Pratt was class personified. He was genuine. He gave to his church, he gave to the neighborhood. He was really a real Pioneer, a real Pioneer. Those are the ones that I...And of course Mac Knox with all he did for young people in the Park. They were really the Troopers.

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Q: You mentioned earlier that there were some very early bourgeoisie who had moved into the the community. Did your family see you as being any different as a result of moving into Pontchartrain Park? EP: Well, we had some, we have 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 that was just like...(gestures a cut throat sign) with me, you know? I keep it real, Dr. Robertson. You know, it's just that if you don't lose who you are and you get caught up in the social stuff. You know, it's just like my wife would say, why you have to tell everyone that you got kept back (academically detained)?" I said, because it ain't where you come from determines where you're going. I said, my being a class clown I was also smart enough that I wasn't going to be kept back anymore. You know, to say, get back, stay back. I got on an accelerated roll brother that was just unbelievable.

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Q: Let's go back to talking about your children. Were there any advantages to rearing your children and Pontchartrain Park? EP: Oh, yeah. You never have to bother about them after school because it was safe. You knew that they had the extended family watching over them and when you walked in the Park to go home, and as I said earlier, your neighbors knew where you should have been at a certain time, you know, and it was just a healthy environment. You knew when they went on the Park. You didn't bother about anybody doing anything to him. They were safe. They had recreation there. And then they had golf. They had a golf course there.

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EP: It was the golf course that was about to do something to destroy the integrity of Pontchartrain Park. A lot of whites used to come in because it was convenient. Okay, but then somebody wanted to put a fence around the golf course. A picket fence. I was on the the Park and Parkway Commission at the time and that's the one good thing that I did because I didn't do anything else on that board. When they wanted to place a fence to protect the children who may get hit by a golf ball, okay? I won't call the guy's name, but he didn't even live in the Park. But he was an uppity guy but he played golf and in the Park, okay? He was one of the pushers for the fence and he did this long tirade about protecting the children, with the gold balls, getting hit in the head. I said, I lived in a neighborhood that had nothing but fences and then we got liberated for open space. 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. You're not in the neighborhood." And the community was galvanized and we prevent it that fence from getting up there. Q: Very interesting. It's a story I'm not familiar with. EP: Yeah, that they wanted to put 8 foot chain link fence around the entire golf course. Can you imagine the aesthetics would just go away? And then you can't, then you can't get to the other side of the Park. And, oh, the other thing was, they were afraid that they might drown in the lagoon. Boy, they had so much shhhh (laughter).

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Q: We know some of the advantages of rearing children in Pontchartrain Park. Were there some disadvantages to rearing your children in Pontchartrain Park? EP: No, the only disadvantage I would think is that when kids who lived in Pontchartrain Park, went other places in the city, you know, they were like they were perceived as uppity and they weren't and sometimes that caused some problems at schools when they went outside of the district that they normally would go outside. Did the children...we talked about the Park, we talked about the recreational opportunities, were your children involved in the NORD program? EP: Yeah. Yeah, with Mac there. Yeah, you're my son played, you know, bitty ball, USA ball and, and basketball for the Park. My daughter was more academically involved than my son. She was always in the books.

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Q: Let's talk about general family recreation. What did you and the family do in the neighborhood for recreation? I know in certain communities, certain blocks people

would get together for fish fries and.... EP: Naw, we wouldn't do too much of that but we were more in our blocks, you know, you knew you knew, the people, the Billy Willis's and the Gillmat's and all those that you knew those persons within five blocks. You knew them by name. You would converse with them. You'd have conversation with them and their children would be on the Park. Like you kids were on the Park, okay? So you knew people because you went on the Park when they had all of those activities there so you were you having the conversations and you all had the same purpose out there. 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 they were, it was that it was that safety thing man.

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Q: Were you a member of the booster club? The Pontchartrain Park booster club? EP: Yeah. At that time. Yep. Q: Do you remember any of the activities that you participated in? EP: Well, they had, we had, we used to serve in the clubhouse there for the various activities. We would fundraise for, you know, baseball and softball teams to support, be supportive of it. And when they had fish fries, the other thing we would participate in and it would do the clubhouse was really the kind of the place where that that took place.

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Q: What about the Pontchartrain Park Association? EP: We belonged to that. Q: Do you remember some of your experiences with that organization? EP: Well, we would go, I would...Look, I had so many other activities that was going on that I knew that this place was well run. I spent time doing other things because at that point, I was then I was at South Central Bell at that time and I worked in the poverty program until '71. From '66 until to 1970, I worked at a regional planning think tank, which was called Goals Foundation for a year and a half and I had a job offer with the Department of Labor in Dallas, Texas, because I did the handbook for the neighborhood Youth Corps that was adopted by the US Department of Labor for the regional handbook for youngsters for the neighborhood Youth Corps. And they offered me a job in Dallas, Texas. Well, at the time, Mr. Morrow Fincher who was the president of South Central Bell. He was a chairman of the board that I work for in this Think Tank and I listed him as a reference. He said, why you want to go to Dallas Texas? He said the future is in New Orleans for you. I said that it's \$6,500 is what they offered me more than what I'm making. And he said the phone company is your future. And I say Mr. Fincher the only thing I've seen at the phone company who look like me is the people who cook in the kitchen and the one who mopped the floors. He said, oh no.

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EP: So my wife said, well, Edgar, you know, the phone company is going to be there a long time, you know? I know you like your job. But I say that \$6,500 difference. Corporate America can do anything that they want to do. They break the rules, okay? So my wife said, you need to go with the phone company. I said, all right, I'll go to the phone company. So I come back to New Orleans and I go to my office and I'm packing. And the president asked the director, how long is it going to take to finish this project?

And then he said about 11 months and I'm packing my bags, okay? He said, "Edgar, hold on." And he calls the office. He says, "Edgar, Edgar Poree is going to be a loan executive for 11 months." For 11 months, I was on the payroll working in the same job that I was working in for two years. Corporate can do what they want to do, okay? And so, I entered into the corporate world and when I went there, it was an incredible experience. 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 us in the aftermath.

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Q: Pontchartrain Park has two churches. One is Bethany United Methodist Church. The other is Holy Cross Lutheran. EP: Which was right here on the corner. Q: On the corner of Press, Press and Bashful. EP: Don't don't mention that word to me, please because it gets me upset, you know? Q: Okay. What church did you...did you attend church? EP: No Bethany. My wife was Catholic. She went to Saint Gabriel. I was, I was Methodist and we were the ones who actually built the new Bethany Church because it was in that little building in the back. And then, let me tell you about Bethany. You know, Bethany... Protestants didn't gamble. Okay, but Catholics, you know Catholics gamble. They had Bingo, right? But my parishioners say they didn't gamble, but every Thursday night, they were over at St. Gabriel. So we decided at Bethany, a little group of us, like a little offspring like, Casio with the Democrats, the three of us up in this little ole crib...We say, well, we understand that, a lot of our non-gambling people over there St. Gabriel on Thursday, so why don't we have Bingo on Friday night at Bethany Church? Well, we started having Bingo. And now our...a letter was written to the superintendent saying that there was a group of sinners having gambling in the church, but we were paying for the electricity, we were paying for the furniture in the north annex. And I asked Reverend Kennedy, I asked Reverend Kennedy, would you let me do one thing? Would you let me buy the communion glasses with the money that we raised from the lot, from the Bingo? And he said, why do you want to do that? I said after they taking communion, I want to say I just want to let you know that 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: I'm familiar with Betheny. That was my father's. EP: Yeah.

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Q: Now your wife, she attended St. Gabriel, which was in Gentilly Woods. EP: Right but that was the Catholic Church. Q: There was the white neighborhood with the Catholic church and the school attached and there was also a public school there Claiborne. Did your wife experience any negative racism at St. Gabriel? EP: No, I don't think so. Because she just went to church to go to church. Q: Were your children Catholic? EP: They were Catholic. Yes. Q: And they attended St. Gabriel's. EP: Right. Q: Did they experience any problems? EP: No.

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Q: Now, of course, we know that there's Gentilly Woods and there's Pontchartrain Park. Did you or your family members experience any negative experiences

going to the front, being at one of the stores you mentioned, Maison Blanche? EP: Not really. No, not really, but, but by that time even though Gentilly Woods was still predominantly white, you just drove down. Once they opened Press Drive and Congress, you know, it was like that ditch that separated us there. It was just you lived in Pontchartrain Park and you went to Gentilly Woods and what you call it. You saw people. You went Hi if you recognize them. When you went to Schwegmann's (Grocery Store) when it was payday. Everybody who taught school, you saw them when it was a payday at Schwegmann's so that was a conversation piece. Or you saw them at the Maison Blanche or what have you. So the people that lived depending on where you lived, there was conversation because they began to see. So unlike what Tureaud was concerned about, there was what you call it. Because there was... There was a Jewish family that lived on Press Drive. The leaders, the leaders when... I did the school tax thing, they recommended me for Lehigh University as a, as a recruiter. And I went up there and it was a great experience, but they hired somebody who was more inclined for that, but they were really, really because they were the ones who had knowledge [of] my drafting the Strategic Plan.

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Q: Now. You moved into Pontchartrain Park in 1964. In 1965, there was Hurricane Betsy. EP: Yeah. Q: Was your home damaged at that point? EP: Not too much. No, not we had we... you know, because the house is brick, we didn't we didn't have..we did, we did we did we had a window, I think, that was cracked? But we didn't have anything really bad. Q: Any flooding? EP: No. Q: So did you evacuate your home? EP: Yeah, we yeah, yeah. Q: Where did you go? EP: We went out on down to Bienville Street, to my deceased parents house because that's a high ridge, like the French Quarters. My parents were paying for flood insurance when in fact that was a no flood zone for years. And it wasn't until my white coworker whose mother lived on Bienville Street near Carrollton, said why is your mom and them paying all that money for flood insurance? I say that's because that's what they told us we had to pay. He said you go and get a \$375 flood elevation. And they are 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 near Carrollton for years.

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Q: You moved back to the park in 1965. In the 1970's, did you start seeing a change in Pontchartrain Park? EP: Well, there was. I changed my house five times. I went from a Colonial House and to a modern contemporary house and then my wife and I went to California and I kept asking to let me just let me just go on and be a little huge den. She said, man, I'm sick and tired of you with all of your change and stuff. And we went to California. And we went to a wedding reception and we were dancing. And I said, please let me build that. And I had already arranged with the contractor. If I made a phone call the back of my house would be torn out and the concrete would need to be pulled and I didn't have any backyard. And when she said, man, I'm sick of you at all that damn building and I called him up, and when we got there, we stayed another seven days. It was already framed up and we had a, we had a, we had a, we had a den that was 35 by 22 with cathedral ceilings. It was off the chart.

[00:42:19]

Q: Were you in the Park when Hurricane Katrina struck or had you moved? EP: No? No, we were still there and we were still there and I called my daughter and I said we leaving and her husband was in Kuwait, but he wasn't in the service. He was working with one of those paid people over there and he told you all, you know, that's going to blow over. And she said, you know, 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. Okay. So four, five o'clock that morning, I said you and bring those grandchildren and we left our cars there, and we drove to Baton Rouge and it took us eight hours, eight hours and 37 minutes. And I built a house in Prairieville. And because You know, when I looked on the computer in my house, we saw that the water had exceeded. It was on a roof top because you see because of Southern's plant that we knew where the house was.

[00:43:27]

Q: So did you move back to New Orleans post-Katrina at all? Did you move into your know? EP: I moved into the house. We lived with my daughter in an apartment. And we moved to she. We eventually bought and built the house. And it took me three months, took me three months, 15 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 and you know what, you know, what a mother and a boy is and a daughter and her daddy. I only become the financier at my age then and the son is the husband. The boy was in the house for four minutes. He said, this is the bomb mama. This is it. She said, Mango build the goddamn house the next day, you know, and we built the house and for a woman who didn't want to live in the country at all after the grass, start to germinate and I went to get gas at a Shell station and I went in there to get gas in the clerk asked the sheriff. Is that Baby's husband? And you know, in New Orleans, everybody refers to people as baby, baby. How you doing, baby? What's going on? So I looked around and there wasn't anybody else in there, but me in the place. So when I went home and I said Gish, that was my pet name for my wife. I said Gish , something happened. I said I was in there and the clerk asked the sheriff whether or not I was Baby's husband and she laughed because that's where she played a lottery every day every day. Every day, okay? Two weeks later, I go in her car to get a smoothie on the other side of I-10 and I got my grass cutting clothes on, but I'm riding this car, okay? So there's two criminal Sheriffs in the place and I go in and I got my grass cutting clothes. One of them is checking out the credentials on the car and he stays out there. And I said, whatcha looking at man? And when I came out there, he says, mighty fine car you're driving. I said that's my wife's car, guess what he said? Miss Gloria? I said for somebody who don't live in the goddamn country, she knows the sheriff and all the other goddamn people. We go to the shopping center and they hiding the clothes and telling her don't come back. They got an unpublished thing and they 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.

[00:46:15]

Q: Are you aware of Wendell Pierce's attempts at rebuilding homes? EP: Oh, yeah. Q: What do you think about that? EP: I think it was laudable effort, but you gotta have money. You got to have financing, you know, you can have all of the plans in the world. But if you don't have capital to initiate that and 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 maybe another time because that was the part of that infiltration of our neighborhood that destroyed our culture. Q: We're closing up because really...EP: you're running out of tape. Sorry about that. Q: Hey, this has been great Mr. Poree. Your wife passed, unfortunately, some two years ago. EP: Naw it's five years on 28th. And after 54 years, and two months of not being sick, one day, and when she sprained her foot on the first of February, 2014, and in April, she was sitting in the theater at the house and she hollered and she said, my leg. And I looked at her 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.

[00:47:51]

Q: What are your most memorable moments in Pontchartrain Park? EP: Well, when we, when my son was born because I, you know, my dad was 50 when I was born and he was, he was born nine years after my my daughter and, and on, August, 4th 1970. Now ask me about what I, 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, if they didn't want to take Press Drive, they should have taken the sixty four hundred block of Press Drive, which was nothing but a railroad. That's what the street was named after, after Press Railroad and they should have made it Dr. Emmett Bashful Lane or boulevard to the end of the campus. And I know that people who had Press traditionally for 40 years. I can understand it and want to change the address, but the building itself and I told the committee before I die, we're going to work on that. Because that needs to be changed because 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. He was on, they call him Uncle Tom, but sometimes I learn about, you know, about Uncle Tom. I used to see the waiters. I did waiting at the Royal Orleans (Hotel). One day I saw those black men and I saw them "how are you doing Miss? How you doing this? And I'll sit there and I'll said, you know, black and proud, okay? I said look at Tom. And then I went in the wrong door with it out the wrong door. And knocked the 12 plates that was on my arm which go and these little men and I was calling Uncle Tom. I felt guilty because the guy next door hired me that one day. He said, may we go now I feel and I waited and you know what? They weren't Uncle Tom's. They were Academy Award actors. When I saw them, little white lady's taking that \$5 out and \$10 out and put it in a pocket. Do you know who owned property in the City of New Orleans? It wasn't the bourgeoisie. It was the ones who's working at Antoine's and all of the different restaurants, the porters and the what you call it? And the businessmen were talking about selling the house, you know, the sheriff's sale and then it was the people who is working in so-and-so's house and she drank the tea at nine o'clock. So the brother who was cleaning up the house

and washing the dirty clothes and wearing, second hand me downs, went home and told him what house was on sale at the sheriff's office and they talk. They're not on the telephone, but they got the neighbors to bring the \$25, and they got there before me. Sarah got there by the house and and and then when we integrated, and we had not a briefcase, we had an attached case at that time. And when we went to Antoine's and white folks didn't talk when they saw the Brothers with them three piece suits and which were going, 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.

[00:51:32]

Q: Do you have any last statements Mr. Porre it, did we cover... is there anything else you would like to cover in the interview? 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 because it upsets some things. And I'm doing some podcasts right now with a stipulation in my will that you're going to release them all on my death so my family cannot get sued because it's too much. You know, that they just did a piece on a Times-Picayune. okay? With the merger of The Advocate, okay? And they talked about how Times-Picayune had disparaging words for black people. But you know what they didn't talk about? How they robbed the poverty program, okay? And I won't talk on this about that because I'm still alive. But the podcast, you'll be able to see what they did to the poverty program. And we going to talk about the black banks when they weren't black banks.

[00:52:57]

Q: Well, 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 Al Turnbull knew every birthday for my grandchildren, my babies and grandchildren. He was a, he was a great, he was a tremendous neighbor across the street. Q: Is he still there? EP: Yeah. He's still there and not only that, my Mom, Mom was the manager of his parents clothing store on Rampart between Canal Street and my dad who was jet black and my mama was you know, high yellow from Mandeville Etc. I don't know. She doesn't know her grandfather. Her mother worked for a plantation owner who we suspect was my mom's Daddy. And my daddy 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 Elvis, Elvis and Elvira, and not too many other folks. You know, my neighbors and Prairieville think that we have already moved back to New Orleans now that my daughter and my grandkids are in college. I'm pretty much in my house maybe five days a month. And my neighbors get my newspaper and my mail. And I said, why I, my daughter said Daddy, why are you still getting a habit of a paper in Baton Rouge and you here? I said, well, I'm not reading them.

[00:54:40]

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, your current 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 and 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 and I'm convinced that we still have a chance. And, and we ought to begin to invite people who dropped out of SUNO to come back so that they can tell the young people who are sitting in those chairs why they ought to pay much more attention to what's being articulated from behind the desk. Because sometimes we bring all of the A students back to the school, they going to make it anyhow. What we ought to bring back are the ones who fail in school to come back and tell them what it's really like out here to survive in today's world.

[00:56:19]

Q: There's one closing question. What role did SUNO play and your family's life here? EP: Well my daughter, my daughter went to St. Mary's Academy from seventh grade to which she was third in her class. And the top ten got scholarships, okay? And I think the Bennett girl was number one in our class. And we were so excited about Deidre. And when they start calling names when they got to number two...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. Okay, My wife said, leave it alone. And so, we went to find out, you know, 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 had never had a C on a card. In a third year at Xavier she had a C in trigonometry and dropped out of school for nine years. Couldn't handle it. And my mother told me, my mother was 90 years old, and said you got too much in between and she came to SUNO working full-time, in the post office at 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: Well, you can get me back into place and you don't need the cameras. That's right. We share and we share. We do the thing that we trace back to Reverend Skinner's betrayal of when we got to America. And that story needs to be told because we hear HIS story, but we don't hear our story.

[00:58:42]

This has been a presentation of the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans, and the following sponsors, the National Park Service, the United States, Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

**SUNO CAAAS PONTCHARTRAIN PARK PIONEERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH MR. STEPHEN JOHNSON**

June 12, 2019

[00:00:01]

The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project is presented by the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors: The National Park Service, the United States Department of the Interior through the Louisiana Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

[00:00:32]

My name is Dr. Clyde Robertson. I'm the director of the Center for African and African American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans. I am also the director, co-researcher, co-interviewer for the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project. This oral history project examines the lives and experiences of the original home owners and residents of Pontchartrain Park. The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project team consists of Connie Abdul-Salaam, assistant professor of history at Southern University at New Orleans; Dr. Mike Meehan director of Satellite Communications at Southern University of New Orleans and Miss Francis Helena, senior Psychology major at Southern University at New Orleans. Today's interview is taking place in the Millie Charles Social Work building at Southern University at New Orleans. Today's date is June 12, 2019 and the time is 4:30 p.m.

[00:01:45]

Q: Please tell us your name. SJ: My name is Steven S. Johnson, III. Q: What is your birth date Mr. Johnson? SJ: September 18, 1932. Q: And where were you? SJ: Born in New Orleans. Q: In what part of the city were you born? SJ: I would think Charity Hospital Q: And what part geographically, uptown? SJ: That would be Mid-City. Q: Where did you live as a small child? SJ: I lived with my grandparents for a while, but then with my mother and father. Then my mother and father, of course, separated and I lived with my mother for a while. And then I went to live with my father. Q: In what part of the city? SJ: That was in the Uptown area. Q: What schools did you attend? I attended McDonogh #6, McDonogh #35, Xavier University, and Southern University. Q: And that would be Southern University in New Orleans? SJ: Right. Q: At Southern University at New Orleans, did you get your Masters? SJ: 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, but we did that together. And when it was necessary, we would take the trip to Baton Rouge to finish off the necessary course work for our masters.

[00:03:35]

Q: You spoke of your wife. What was her name? Boutine. B-O-U-T-I-N-E, P. Johnson. Parker was her maiden name. Q: And where did you all meet? SJ: We met at McDonogh 35 in high school and we became friends and we weren't necessarily too close together at that time, but

eventually we did get together and thank God we did. Q: When did you get married? SJ: I got married in 1951. Q: And do you have children? SJ: Yes, I have two living children and one deceased. Q: And what are their names? SJ: Steven Sylvester Johnson IV, Roderick C. Johnson, and Stephanie Saberre, Stephanie Johnson Saberre.

[00:04:46]

Q: When did, where did you and Mrs. Johnson first live when you were married? SJ: When we were first married, we lived with her parents which was on Broadway Street. And as fate would have it, we became very close and a little out of sync so she became pregnant at age 16 and this was a time when we were very fearful of what might happen. So needless to say, I took what I considered to be the best route and went into the military for three years. I volunteered and stayed there and came back and went and finished my high school which I only needed about a semester. Then I started in at Xavier under the GI Bill of Rights. Q: And what year was this? SJ: About 1958. Q: 1958. So you went into the service. SJ: Yeah at 18. Q: At 18. SJ: Got out of around 22 or 21. Q: Did you marry Mrs. Johnson before you went to the service or after you were discharged? SJ: No. We got married once it was determined, you know, that we were going to have an offspring. Q: So it was before? SJ: Like before it surfaced. Q: All right.

[00:06:16]

Q: When you returned from the service, you had a child. SJ: Yeah. Q: Where did you all live? SJ: Then, at that time, we temporarily lived with my mother-in-law and father-in-law and then we eventually moved to my grandparents home on Louisiana Avenue which was for a short period of time because they had quite a bit of real estate that it so happens. But there was a flood, I think....No, the house, our house on Broadway Street burned down and we wound up... That's how I wound up by my grandparents and after we were situated, and then we saw fit to seek housing elsewhere and that's where we discovered Pontchartrain Park.

[00:07:20]

Q: How did you discover Pontchartrain Park? SJ: Because it was in the news and we had a very efficient, shall I say, realtor. David Greenup and he was doing a magnificent job of inspiring folk to go there. Of course, it was to his advantage but it was still a good thing and we saw fit to do that. Q: And what year was this? SJ: 1960. Q: Okay, now you mentioned that you and Mrs. Johnson were at Southern University at New Orleans together pursuing a master's. SJ: Correct. Q: When you moved into Pontchartrain Park, what were your professions? SJ: I had become a teacher in Orleans Parish School System and my wife became a teacher also, in Orleans Parish School System.

[00:08:15]

Q: So in 1960, both you and Mrs. Johnson were teaching SJ: Right. Q: Now you said that you were in the military and you were separated from the military by 1960. SJ: Yes. Q: How did you finance your home in Pontchartrain Park? Was it through the VA bill? Was it through other federal agencies? SJ: Well we did have a VA, you know, loan of sorts, which relieved us of the necessity to have more funding and quite frankly, it worked out fine. Q: What were... if you could

describe the other process of pursuing your home, for example, whether interviews that you had to tolerate? Was there other paperwork that you had to pursue? SJ: Yes, of course because it was something new, quite frankly. And remember, Pontchartrain Park was one of the first for minorities. And we all were excited, but at the same time, we have to follow the dictates of the procedure that was necessary to be a homeowner. And we did just that and fortunately we were able to get in. Q: Were there any other Realtors, other than Mr. Greenup, that you're familiar with? SJ: He was the main person as far as Pontchartrain Park was concerned.

[00:09:56]

Q: The Urban League is a part... SJ: Of course, Straughter was a big realtor during that time, you know, in the city when Greenup was avidly and strongly involved in getting Pontchartrain Park off the ground and he pursued it vigorously. And of course, he was successful in my mind because he lived there himself. Q: What about the Urban League? Are you familiar with the Urban League questionnaire? The document? SJ: Not really I mean I was familiar back in the day if I can use that expression. That I was very conscious and cognizant of what was going on around me and in the country and in how Society in general. But I wasn't tied to the Urban League in what I would consider a specific manner. Q: Were you familiar with the Urban League questionnaire concerning Pontchartrain Park? SJ: Back in the day? Yes. That's probably how I got introduced to it. I mean it's coming back to me now. Q: Yeah. SJ: But that had a great significance in mind thinking that that would be a good idea for me and my family.

[00:11:25]

Q: Well, I know there was a lot of positive talk about Pontchartrain Park. Are you familiar with any of the negative talk in the 1950s and 60s about Pontchartrain Park? SJ: That's the nature of the Beast. I'm sure they had some negativity out there, but I somewhat ignored that because I was more inclined to try and be accepted and have housing in that area. So, there was some negativity, I don't know specifically what it was but it was there. Q: We know that, for example, the great attorney A.P. Tureaud, Mr. NAACP himself actually 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: I was somewhat. Yes, definitely I knew about A. P. Tureaud and the Knights of Peter Claver building on Orleans Avenue but I wasn't necessarily accepting the idea because I thought we needed to do something and I was kind of young and vigorous then and had dreams of things that might come into fruition. But that there was some folks that didn't think it would work out.

[00:13:05]

Q: At the time you moved in you and Mrs. Johnson were teachers. Where did you and Mrs. Johnson teach? SJ: I taught at Valena C. Jones Elementary School and my wife taught at Coghill. She started at Coghill, which was really in the same neighborhood of our home. Q: When you moved into your home, finally, what was your reaction? What? Were you ecstatic? Were you overjoyed? What was your reaction when you moved into your home, finally, in Pontchartrain Park? SJ: I was just ecstatic because I had achieved an objective, but I was also fearful of whether or not I was going to be successful at maintaining a home because at that

time you know you have a house note, the kind of thing that goes with owning property. So I had to kind of move through that as best I could at my particular age and leverage. Q: And how old were you when you purchased your home? SJ: We had to be 20...about 22.

[00:14:23]

Q: We know that you financed at least partially your home through the VA when you moved into Pontchartrain Park, how many children did you have? SJ: All three. Q: All three of your children were already born before you moved into Pontchartrain Park? SJ: Correct. Q: And while in the Park, how long did you live in your home in Pontchartrain Park? Did you have multiple homes in the park or did you live in...? SJ: I lived in the same house at 5725 Campus Boulevard?

[00:14:57]

Q: Can you describe your floor plan? How many bedrooms? How many bathrooms? SJ: Originally, the home in Pontchartrain Park only had two bedrooms. And we, of course, saw the need because of the size of our family that we needed to get another bedroom. So we added on and and in adding on, we built what was to be considered a master bedroom and out... we took up some of the yard that was behind the car port. And then we had three individual rooms for our children. Q: How soon after you moved in did you add on? SJ: About 10 years. Q: And you moved... did you also expand other aspects of the house, the car port and...? SJ: Well, that, that was the addition that that was when we enlarged the size of the house because it wasn't adequate, you know, as the children got older and as we, you know, got on. Q: Did you actually choose your floor plan or did Mr. Greenup? SJ: I think, I think we took the floor plan that was in place. It's just that we did something about it later on when we increased the size of the house, but originally it was only about a thousand square feet.

[00:16:34]

Q: What was it like when you moved into the Park? SJ: It was a challenge and it was something that was new to me and to many of the people that were there. And I think maybe the best and worst part of the experience was to go through the white section to get to Pontchartrain Park because that's the way it was done back in the old days. But it ceased to become a great problem because being a Catholic, you know, and we did have a Catholic Church, St. Gabriel, and all my children were Catholic, my wife, who originally was Protestant but she went the Catholic way as far as our children were concerned.

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Q: Well, let's go back to your discussion about Gentilly Woods which was the white section. SJ: Correct. Q: What kind of problems very early on did you experience going through Gentilly Woods to get to your home? SJ: To be honest, I don't think we had, I didn't have any problem because it's all we were doing going through and was on Press Drive and it led straight to Pontchartrain Park. And once we got into Pontchartrain Park, then we were able to go in whatever direction we needed to, wherever we lived. Q: I may get back to that portion of the interview soon.

[00:18:06]

Q: Now when you first moved to Pontchartrain Park, you moved on Campus Boulevard? SJ: Correct. How many families were there when you moved in? SJ: When did I move to Pontchartrain Park? Three, about three. Q: Three families? SJ: Right. Q: Did you know them prior to moving into the block? SJ: Not really. I knew some that moved in after. My partner in business, you know, moved in shortly after me and his brother moved in the house next door to me and of course we have some dear friends, the Turnley's who lived across the street from us. Q: Did you know them before moving into Pontchartrain Park? SJ: We did well because of high school. We knew them from McDonogh 35. And so did they have children the same age around the same age as your children? SJ: I would think so. Yes.

[00:19:13]

Q: Now, what kinds of activities did you involve yourself with on the Block, for example, cookouts, regular gatherings? SJ: Well, ironically you should ask that question because we had a group of men in that. Remember that time I was a young man and we were going to the park and play touch football and we would go around, and we'd go to the court, and have a ping pong table and play ping-pong and guys just moved in. It just happened, you know, and everyone started having a relationship of a sort. We lost a dear friend, Warren Honore, but we continued on after his passing.

[00:20:02]

Q: Now, there was Campus Boulevard. Were there other people you knew around Campus, on Prentiss, on Press Drive and the like? SJ: You know I knew your family and I knew your dad, right? And then yes, there were other people that I knew. I may not be able to pull them up at this moment, but I can pull you up and I remember, that's right. Q: Do you remember any great stories about Pontchartrain Park? Any great legends? SJ: Well, I think the greatest legend was the fact that we could have a subdivision as a people. And one that would be recognized throughout the country and the world for that matter. And it turned out that it's still there. And of course, it's going to serve its purpose because we have a younger generation coming along and it's an opportunity for us to maybe help them to get their bearing and move on.

[00:21:06]

Q: You mentioned playing touch football on the Park with the other young men... SJ: Right. Q: ...around the community. Pontchartrain Park also had a golf course. SJ: Well they didn't have a golf course at that time. The golf course came later. That was just an area that was available and then the golf course came into existence but the golf course wasn't for blacks per se. Was just a golf course, you know. Although the blacks started to get into it, but not like it was already established in the other courses around the country and around New Orleans. Q: Did you ever take advantage of the golf course? SJ: Never. No. No, that's just something I didn't take a dire interest in.

[00:21:55]

Q: Personalities in Pontchartrain Park. Are you familiar with any grand personalities? Any people of measure, if you will? SJ: Wydell, Wydell Misshore who had a large funeral home and they had a large house, you know, was across from the golf course at that time. And the Turnley's which were neighbors across the street and the Henry's who I went to school with Sterling and Elvira. Of course Sterling passed a few years ago. They were dear friends.

[00:22:32]

Q: You mentioned your children. SJ: Yeah. Q: Were there any advantages to rearing your children in Pontchartrain Park? SJ: I thought there were advantages because we had a, we had what you might consider a better handle on their activities. Now as life goes on, you know, it doesn't always work out for you that way. But the opportunity was definitely there for folk to rear children, like children should have been reared. Q: What were some of the advantages? We've established the fact that there were advantages, what were some of the advantages? SJ: Well, the schools schools. But while we were there, Coghill was built up, the Elementary School within the district more or less, And, of course, Southern. Southern came on the scene sometimes after. Q: And of course, many of the children from Pontchartrain Park took advantage of SUNO as I did in terms of using the library for research sometimes.

[00:23:51]

Q: Were there disadvantages to rearing your children in Pontchartrain Park? SJ: Well the disadvantage is the same disadvantage parents have right now. Making sure and hopeful that their children will stay on the right path and you always had to keep your eyes open to because that may be your responsibility that is gone astray or awry, but it worked out fine of course. Unfortunately, my son passed at a young age but, other than that...And he had...I was so proud of him, but she doesn't want to talk about it. But I was, you know? He got his Masters, his PE, his PhD.

[00:24:42]

Q: You were a part of a neighborhood group that...you were part of a neighborhood group that participated in carnival activities. SJ: Exactly. We (African Americans) had one of the first Carnival clubs in the City that would parade on Carnival day. Of course others followed but I'm sure to think...the name was High-Low Bidders just kind of... Everybody like to play Whist and it turned out that that's how that type that name came into play.

[00:25:20]

Q: Let's talk about Gentilly Woods again. Of course, we know that Gentilly Woods was that adjacent neighborhood. SJ: Right. Q: Which was white. SJ: Correct. SJ: We also know that your children went to St. Gabriel School and church. We know that you personally did not have any problems traversing Gentilly, Woods. SJ: Not really. No. Q: Did your children, to your knowledge, experience racism going through Gentilly Woods or going to the school or church? SJ: I really don't recall to be honest. Now it is possible because that's the nature of the beast when you're growing up. Things happen and your children, you know, experience things that they don't necessarily want to share with you. So I'm but I'm assuming that it couldn't have been too

terrible because everybody seems to have survived.

[00:26:20]

Q: Now, you mentioned Pontchartrain Park. Now, when you first moved in 1960, the Park hadn't developed fully? SJ: Correct. Q: But by 1970, the Park was fully developed with football teams, baseball teams, track, softball, SJ: Right. Q: Did any of your children participate in NORD activities? SJ: Yeah, my boys. And my daughter. Q: Did she? SJ: She wanted to be an athlete too **(Laughter)** Q: Okay what activities did they participate in? Do you remember? SJ: Football, basketball, softball. That was my daughter's.

[00:27:07]

Q: Were you a member of the booster club? SJ: Yeah. Q: The Pontchartrain Park booster club? So you participated in the effort to get the Park lights? SJ: Oh definitely. Q: What, for example, did you have to do in order for Pontchartrain Park to receive lights? Because that was a major achievement. SJ: Exactly. But we had to write the request, you know, and the coun city council to observe and recognize us as a product that was in the city and they needed to be adjus (addressed). Q: I am sensitive to that because I can remember my parents participating in that effort. SJ: Oh Yeah. Q: That was a major achievement, although it may not seem that way now. SJ: Correct.

[00:28:02]

Q: Were you a part of the Pontchartrain Park neighborhood association? I know you were a booster member. Were you a part of the association? SJ: Yes I was. Q: What kinds of things did you do..did that organization do in the neighborhood? SJ: Well, we attempted to get the play areas up to speed at the basketball court for an example. And of course, we had a dues that we used to pay on an annual basis. About (\$) 120 or something along those lines. Q: And what success did you see occurring as a result of your advocacy as a member of the Pontchartrain Park Association? SJ: That's a lot of success because I watched it grow up around me along with my children. I mean we saw the Pontchartrain Park after the fact and we knew it before the fact and it was just a great thing to have.

[00:29:14]

Q: How did Pontchartrain Park during, for example, the late 60s and 70s... SJ: Okay. Q: How did Pontchartrain Park look in terms of each home and the lawns and the gardens? SJ: Everyone was prime in concern and if you went through the Park, you would be able to see that you could feel that there was a certain amount of pride and that was expressed in the form of the activities and a way that the park was handled by the people who were responsible, the parents in particular.

[00:29:59]

Q: When we talk about Pontchartrain Park and the playground, the types of beautification which occurred there. What are some of your most vivid memories? SJ: I think my most vivid was the

fact that 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 and took advantage of it. As you walked around the Park, you can see that.... Well, we had nice lawns, of course (**laughter**)

[00:30:55]

Q: When did Pontchartrain Park begin to change? Did you experience a change to Pontchartrain Park? If so, when did it begin? SJ: Well, first of all, I don't think it changed. Now, when I was there, it didn't change. Now, I have to admit that it looks, there are some things that look different, but that's because the people that were there, have either died off or moved on to different areas. But, initially it was, it was what it was supposed to be: a community.

[00:31:37]

Q: When did you all move from Pontchartrain Park? SJ: I think we moved by 1979. Q: And what were the reasons why you moved from Pontchartrain Park? SJ: It was because we wanted to move to a higher, a different level of property ownership. And not that there was anything wrong with Pontchartrain Park's level, but as you get older and as your with you business progresses, and of course, I had gotten into the insurance business after teaching in school and I had a partner and we had an agency and we were able to kind of do things that we wanted to. He went. He moved and I moved and a lot of other people moved, but for reasons of their own I can't exactly why. I know why I moved because it looked like it was the thing that I wanted to do for my wife in my family. And I will always always remember the property that I purchased in Pontchartrain Park. You know, it was about as well kept and as good as it could be. And when we moved out of Pontchartrain Park, my wife complimented me on the fact that I was able to move her into another situation that she was comfortable in.

[00:33:25]

Q: Now you mentioned you had a business. You went from a teaching school to... SJ: Insurance. Q: Acquiring a business. SJ: Right. Q: What year was that? 19 years in Pontchartrain Park, but with the business came before so it was 1968. Q: 1968. SJ: When we went into the business Q: And the business grew in 10 years so by 1979, you have enough capital to move. Where did you move? From Pontchartrain Park to where to where? SJ: To where I'm presently living, Lake Willow Drive. Q: Were there appreciable differences between Pontchartrain Park, your home on Campus and Lake Willow Drive? SJ: I would think so. Q: In what areas? SJ: Appreciable in the sense that we appear to be surrounded by ambitious individuals who were striving and trying to raise their level and standards of living. Q: So, simply put, your home was bigger. SJ: Yes. Q: Was that an integrated neighborhood into which you moved? SJ: Yes, when we moved in, it's not integrated now, but it was then. Q: When you moved, how were you accepted by the neighborhood and the neighbors? SJ: They accepted us, you know? So so, but of course, we were fortunate enough to have a piece of property that had a lake that, you know, there so it made our area seem a little more luxurious than some of the others.

[00:35:37]

Q: Now, let us go back in time. 1965 Hurricane Betsy. You were in Pontchartrain Park and had been there for five years. SJ: Right. Q: Did you...did Hurricane Betsy damage your home? SJ: Yes, yes, yes. Yes, partial. Well, the flood more than anything else. Q: Right. SJ: And because I was in the insurance business, you know, I was very cognizant of flood insurance. So we had it, you know, everyone didn't. But eventually, they started having it because they realized that they could have disasters of that nature. Q: For Hurricane Betsy did your family, you and your family, evacuate or did you ride the storm out at home? SJ: No, we did not ride the storm out at home. We went first to St. Gabriel's area, and then we went to my grandparents home which is on the other side of town, on Louisiana Avenue for that matter.

[00:36:49]

Q: How long was it before you returned home? SJ: A couple of weeks? Q: And when you returned home, your neighbors returned. SJ: Exactly. Everybody got busy trying to do the things that needed to be done. Q: The assistance you received again was through the insurance that you had acquired. SJ: Yes. Q: That was my primary source of income. Well, financial relief at that time. Q: After Betsy, did the neighborhood change for the better? I heard my father say that the neighborhood actually changed for the better. SJ: I think so. Q: How was that? SJ: Well, because folks were able to spruce up their property and you know, do some of the things that they hadn't envisioned prior to.

[00:37:47]

Q: There's another horrible hurricane... SJ: Katrina Q: That impacts upon Pontchartrain Park that's Hurricane Katrina. SJ: That was bad. Q: That's right. You were on Lake Willow, you and your family were already living in Lake Willow. SJ: Correct. Q: Was Mrs. Johnson alive at that time? SJ: No, she passed in 2002. Q: So, when Hurricane Katrina hit, in 2005, you were in Lake Willow. Were you damaged? Was your property damaged? SJ: Yes. We had to move out and it turns out, I had my granddaughter that I was concerned with and my daughter, whom I was concerned with, concerned about rather and we saw fit, you know, to move on. Q: But you fixed the house up? SJ: Only after. Because remember we left town and had to go move to Houston, you know? Q: And subsequently did you repair the home? SJ: Sure did. Q: And you're there now. SJ: There now and had good flood insurance. Turns out because of flood insurance, I was able to play my house off.

[00:39:07]

Q: Now do you have any reason to pass through Pontchartrain Park now that you've been gone so many years? SJ: Sure. Sure I do I do. Q: What are your observations about Pontchartrain Park today? SJ: My observation is that someone or some group needs to get together to try and restore the pride and the dignity that came with it originally. And I think it's because we can pass the word on how we had to get up and do things when we were young. So the younger folks are going to have that responsibility now. Q: Are you still friends with any of the Pontchartrain Park neighbors? SJ: Sure. Yeah. As I say, my partner. You know, we are good friends. You know, we're not still in the business because I am retired and he is trying to retire. Q: What are your

most... What do you miss most about Pontchartrain Park? SJ: That was more closely knit but you know, the people were closer together, you know, in Pontchartrain Park. We were all on the same page so to speak.

[00:40:37]

Q: Are there any closing thoughts that you'd like to share with us? SJ: Well, I think I alluded to it a few seconds ago, a few minutes ago that the younger generation that is coming up now, should take advantage of the opportunity to get in there and do the kinds of things that would have to be done when it was originally a Park, in the living area and if maybe they would get the taste of being successful at building and getting their family where they want to be.

Pontchartrain Park is the ideal place, Q: Well, Mr. Johnson, we'd like to thank you for participating in this oral history project. Your reminiscences will tremendously add to the breadth of this oral history project. Again, thank you very much. SJ: My pleasure.

[00:41:45]

This has been a presentation of the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors: The National Park Service, the United States Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

SUNO CAAAS PONTCHARTRAIN PARK PIONEERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ELVIRA HENRY

June 10, 2019

[00:00:02]

The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project is presented by the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans, and the following sponsors: The National Park Service; the United States Department of the Interior through the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism; the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

[00:00:33]

Q: My name is Dr. Clyde Robertson. I'm the Director for the Center for African and African American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans. I am also the Director, Co-Researcher, and Co-Interviewer for the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project. This oral history project examines the lives and experiences of the original home-owners and residents of Pontchartrain Park. The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project's team consists of Connie Abdul-Salaam, Assistant Professor of History at Southern University at New Orleans; Dr. Mike Meehan, Director of Satellite Communications at Southern University at New Orleans; Ms. Helena Francis, senior psychology major, Southern University at New Orleans. Today's interview is taking place in the Millie Charles College of Social Work building. Today's date is June 20th, 2019 and the time is 4:25.

[00:01:51]

Q: Please tell me your name and your birthday EH: Elvira D. Henry, September 22nd 1936. Q: Where were you born, Mrs. Henry? EH: In New Orleans Q: And what part of New Orleans were you born and raised? EH: Lower Ninth Ward. Q: Were you in the military? EH: No. Q: Was Mr. Henry in the military? EH: No. Q: Where did you meet Mr. Henry? EH: At Xavier University. Q: In what year? EH: 1956. We graduated in 1958.

[00:02:36]

Q: Now when you were in the Lower 9th Ward, what high school did you attend? EH: Clark, Joseph S. Clark High School. Q: And elementary School? EH: McCarty, Q: And you are a graduate of Xavier EH: University.

[00:02:52]

Q: When you and Mr. Henry were married, what year was it? EH: 1958. Q: And

where did you live? EH: We lived in the Seventh Ward then, on Allen Street.

[00:03:05]

Q: How did you hear about owning a house in Pontchartrain Park? EH: Well, my husband had a drugstore in the Lower Ninth, 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, I think, and we saw the progress of the area and we were looking for an established community that, you know, we could raise our children in. So he told us about the square that had just opened that Dr. Carter had a home on, and he said it was from the Archdiocese, and once integration came about, they sold that Square that was designated for a black Catholic church. And so everyone had to go to Saint Gabriel Catholic church, so that Square was up, so 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, one of the lots, and that's how we got the lot.

[00:04:22]

Q: And what year was that? EH: 1969 Q: Now you mentioned that Mr. Henry had a drugstore. What was his profession? EH: Pharmacy Q: At the time were you working? EH: No, I was home, I was a housewife for 19 years, raising children.

[00:04:46]

Q: And you moved into Pontchartrain Park in 19.... EH: 1969, June of 1969 Q: Was Dr. Carter the only person, and your in-laws, the only people you knew in Pontchartrain Park at the time? EH: Oh no, we knew other people. But in that particular Square, Dr. Carter was the only one we know.

[00:05:14]

Q: Now, let's travel back in time, even before you met your husband in 1956. In 1954, the Urban League, which was one of the organizations responsible for Pontchartrain Park's existence, developed a housing questionnaire and Survey. Are you familiar with that? EH: No, I was in high school. Q: Are you familiar with the Sterns and the work that Rosa Keller did to bring Pontchartrain Park into fruition? EH: No

[00:05:52]

Q: 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 EH: separate Q: 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 I like, we liked the community, yeah, so it was no problem for us.

[00:06:35]

Now, let's talk about the process of obtaining your home again. You moved into what in 1969 was a new section of Pontchartrain Park EH: Right, the last section to have houses being sold Q: And it was initially purchased by the Archdiocese as you stated in order to put a black Catholic Church there. EH: right. Q: But by the time you moved in, of course, Saint Gabriel had been fully integrated EH: right?

[00:07:10]

Q: What kinds of paperwork did you and Mr. Henry have to sign? EH: In regard to Q: purchasing your home EH: Just signing a lease out, we bought it from Rudy Barnes and Teddy Marchand, that's all we did and then we had our contractor. Q: Without the VA bill, you went through the regular home purchasing process. EH: Right, and my husband handled all that, the money deal--it wasn't mine, it was his.

[00:07:48]

Q: Had you heard--we know that you'd heard some positive things from Dr. Carter, your in-laws and others. Had you heard any negative stories about Pontchartrain Park? EH: Nothing, other than it was all black. WAS all black.

[00:08:10]

Q: And when you moved in, what was your immediate reaction? Were you pleased, excited?

EH: Oh, very much. To have our home, the kids had--they was still in the process of building more homes, on both sides of us, our lot was just in the middle and nothing was on each side. So they were building homes, 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: So we had four children when you moved into Pontchartrain Park. EH: Right, three boys and one girl. She died two years after. Q: I remember. EH: Yeah.

[00:09:02]

Q: What was your floor plan? You said that you had a specially designed home? EH: Yeah. 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. Q: And it was how many square feet EH: 3082 square feet, 3082 square feet, yeah.

[00:09:38]

Q: What was it like when you first moved into the park? We know that they were just building houses in your section. Most of the other parts of the park were well developed. And it was after Hurricane Betsy, so many of the homes had been remodeled. EH: Yes, added on Q: But what were the social events like?

[00:10:06]

EH: My neighbors, across the street, they were old established--the **Perkin's** and the **Bradford's** and all of the **Ely's**. They welcomed us all and by having kids, they had kids as well, so they played and then from one thing to another, you know, we mixed with the neighborhood. I was home all day, so I was a home mama. A lot of kids would always end up at my house since I had a pool table in the den, and a basketball goal in the yard. So it was always the house of shock.

[00:10:45]

Q: So there were many families already established around the park, and they welcomed you in. EH: Oh, yeah, across the street, that square was new, but the people around that square were old folks.

[00:10:59]

Q: Now you had, as you stated, in-laws, Mrs. Yolanda Henry and her family. Did they provide any assistance in your coming into the neighborhood?

[00:11:13]

EH: No, we knew-- my husband was in a club and then him, by being a pharmacist he knew a lot of people all around, *and Xavierites...we knew people all around...they'd be--* you had people from everywhere.

[00:11:27]

Q: Was your husband a member of the Vikings? EH: Vikings, The Studs, what else it was, something else... Some of them clubs, professional clubs, yeah. Q:

Were there many people in the neighborhood part and parcel of those clubs?

EH: No. I know, oh yeah, my brother-in-law, and then Ed Adams, they were ones that was in the Vikings, I don't know who else was out there. Q: In fact, your

brother-in-law, EH: Clarence Henry, Q: and Mr. Adams lived on Prentiss Avenue,

EH: Right, they were over there, long time.

[00:12:09]

Q: Do you remember any great stories or legends about the neighborhood during the time that you lived in the neighborhood?

[00:12:18]

Legends? Hmm.. Pontchartrain, the park, when we established the kids, with all the kids playing, we brought them out there for Mac Knox. He was the coach, that was a legend by itself. Yeah. And by being home every day, I was out there with them every day and I helped coach too. So I was with Mack and all the other mothers from around the park. So we had a good time.

[00:12:51]

Q: What about Some of the legends, the stories, for example, do you remember anything about the Lady in White?

[00:13:02]

EH: Never heard about that. I did remember that they used to say about that little canal was the dividing line Q: The Ditch. EH: Yeah, The Ditch. My nephews and them 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 we never, my children, never experienced it.

[00:13:27]

Q: Now did your children, did they go to St. Gabriel?

[00:13:32]

EH: Only one, Ruston, the youngest one. And my daughter was supposed to go the year she died, she was registered there but she never attended. But they finished up, Ruston came, I think, over in fourth or fifth grade, after Troy and Sterling finished, **from** St. David, then I transferred Ruston and Monica to Saint Gabriel. I said, I didn't have to bring them back and forth

[00:14:00]

Q: Eventually, I would say in the '70s, didn't you become the Principal of St. Gabriel? EH: No [laughs], I was a teacher! Q: At St. Gabriel's, that was long after I had left, I remember. EH: It was only for five or six years. Q: But I could remember you being there. EH: I taught Fourth Grade.

[00:14:20]

Q: Now, were there any other stories about Gentilly Woods and experiences like at The Front, and of course, remember The Front was where all of the stores were? **EH: Yeah.** Q: Were there any experiences that you had as an adult shopping at The Front?

[00:14:38]

EH: No, I'd pick pick up, I used to bring my kids back and forth to school and every evening we stopped at Sears. In fact, I stopped so often people thought I worked there. And fill up with gas, 'cause I had to bring the kids after school, football, basketball, whatever practice, I had the whole station wagon full of them. 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 (**laughs**). Anyway we would commute back and forth.

[00:15:23]

Q: Now, you suggested that your sons played on the park. What sports did they play, again? EH: All of them. Q: All of the sports. And of course, that was one of the advantages of having children in Pontchartrain Park, EH: Right. Q: the playground. Were there any other advantages of rearing children in Pontchartrain

Park?

[00:15:53]

EH: The neighbors, the friends. We made friends....They met everybody, out here. I met all of the parents going, and I found out all the streets in the park by bringing children home because I didn't know where everything was, but I found out where all them little curves and corners were. And the kids would tell me, "I live right there, Mrs. Henry, bring me here." Okay, I was the Mother Transporter.

[00:16:28]

Were there any disadvantages of rearing your children in Pontchartrain Park?

EH: I don't think so. If they did, they didn't show it to me.

[00:16:46]

Q: Were you a part of the Pontchartrain Park Booster Club? Q: Definitely Q: What was your role through the years? EH: I was the secretary, I think for years, and kept the roll for all the sports, all the sports. Q: What about being a member of the Pontchartrain Park Association and then eventually Pontilly. EH: I was a member of that for a while, when it became Pontilly. My kids were growing, and it was not the same. So I would go every now and then, but I wasn't active, like I was when they were all younger. 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.

[00:17:57]

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. Q: Before St. Gabriel EH: St. David. Q: And were you satisfied with the services you received at St. Gabriel Gabriel? EH: Yes. Q: Are you still there? EH: Yes, and I'm still the Eucharistic Minister in the church.

[00:18:30]

Q: Now, you were not in Pontchartrain Park during Hurricane Betsy, you were still in the Lower Ninth Ward. EH: The Lower Ninth Ward. Q: When in the Lower Ninth Ward, we know just like with Hurricane Katrina, the Lower Ninth Ward was

devastated, right? Did you and Mr. Henry sustain any serious damage at your home in the Lower Ninth? EH: Oh yeah, it was wiped out. You know, we had to rebuild inside! It was brick, but 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: that was in...Hurricane Betsy was Q: '65, EH: '65. So we built in '69, we started building '68 year, we moved in '69.

[00:19:34]

Q: Before Hurricane Katrina, did Pontchartrain Park, in your eyes, begin to change demographically. Were people moving out? EH: Not in my area. They were established a lot of-- like, next door to me when Dave Bartholomew (*famous bandleader and musician*) 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: And they're still in the neighborhood. EH: They're right next door. Q: You also had a New Orleans Saint who lived near EH: Richard Neal Q: Richard Neal EH: which I christened him, and his wife, and all their children, my husband and I christened them when they became Catholics. He died in...'83. Q: Suddenly, in a hotel room, from a massive coronary. EH: Somewhere away from here, I forgot where it was. Q: He had finished his career with the New York Jets. EH: And he was with the Saints. He was working for Popeyes, then, I think.

[00:20:49]

Q: Hurricane Katrina. Of course, Hurricane. Katrina impacted upon the city in 2005. Did it impact upon your family and home? EH: My husband and I, at that time we were the only ones there. It wiped out the bottom level and we left Troy, my second boy, they came and got us right before that Saturday, and we left and we went to Houston, *by* his sister-in-law and them. And when we came back, well the whole first floor was up to five feet of the first floor. So we tore it all out, my husband had somebody came, took everything out and all the walls and all that, 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...keep everything at the drugstore. He moved to Lafayette, but we were able to get him back here and, 'cause contractors was just--oh, that was just out the box. So he was able to do everything. So that was in September. We moved back here, we got moved back

to New Orleans in November and we moved back in my house in March. Because we were the only ones in Pontchartrain Park, and in order to get lights for them to work in the house, Troy, my son, called called the President of Entergy, and he was able to get a pole, and the lights. And once my neighbors found out we were back, "Y'all back?" "So we coming 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, so many of them didn't come back. So many houses were gone.

[00:23:05]

Q: So your block, which is EH: 4740 Odin, Odin Street. Q: So your block, the new Odin, is EH: **Yeah right, the new Odin (laughs) between** Congress and Desire Dr. Q: So it's practically all back. EH: On my side. The other side, the old homes--No, more empty lots. Let's see.... one, two, three, four--four empty lots still there. But I understand they just auctioned them and sold them or something. But anyway, the other homes, they move back, people move back and then, since have moved out, but they're there.

[00:23:48]

Q: Of course, needless to say before Hurricane Katrina, you all were still in your home. EH: Oh yeah Q: A number of people were moving out of Pontchartrain Park prior to that, so what made you stay? EH: Before Katrina? Q: Yes. EH: Knowing that it was coming? Q: No, actually before the storm, years before the storm, some people were EH: Oh, that was home. I mean, we built that home, that was home. That's still home. Q: And you were happy to have stayed in the Park? EH: Oh yeah, still happy. (laughs). Still happy.

[00:24:36]

Q: After Hurricane Katrina, around Pontchartrain park outside of your neighborhood, have you noticed a change in certain areas? EH: Oh yeah. Now, Gentilly Woods has changed completely. It's integrated almost totally, and the homes that, well they renovated a lot of the homes and everything, and all over. Pontchartrain and in Gentilly Woods, it has changed tremendously. Q: So are those changes for the better? EH: Seems so. It seems as though they're keeping up the property. And we finally got a street paved, Congress Drive, that looked like Rocky Hill before. We're still working on trying to get the side streets paved.

[00:25:29]

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.

[00:26:01]

Q: And post-Hurricane Katrina, 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. Q: Wendell and Troy Henry, that's right. What do you think of the new home construction? EH: Well, I thought they had a good idea with those things. In fact, I was telling a whole lot of people in there. But so many things, red tape, I don't know what actually happened with it. Q: How many homes were actually constructed? EH: I have no idea. Q: There were five I think, `if not more. EH: I know, I don't know. Q: So to your knowledge, it was political wranglings and administrative red tape that watered down the activity. EH: And you know, I was the last to know-- I was Mama, so they tell me after everything's over. So I didn't know what, people come ask me. I said, "Well, I don't know, I can just tell-- ask my son." But those things went about, and the last I heard they don't have any affiliation with it anymore, I don't know. Like I say, they don't tell Mama nothing, you know? "Oh Ma, you don't have to worry about that." As usual (laughs).

[00:27:27]

Q: Now, of course, you have three children. Now, all three are college graduates, very successful, professional men. One ran for mayor, twice. The other, **Rustin (be consistent with spelling of his name)**, actually runs the pharmacy now.

EH: The pharmacy. Now 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 come in, waiting on that to open, and I think he has another one, he's getting ready to open up in one of Troy's gas stations up on Tchoupitoulas Street. Like, I say, I'm the last to know.

[00:28:17]

EH: 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.

[00:28:49]

Q: And are you still friends with anyone from the earlier years of Pontchartrain Park history? EH: Oh yeah, those who left. We got a few of us left. Q: What were your most memorable moments in Pontchartrain Park? EH: The time I jumped the fence to get to my son on the field. He got hurt playing football. Q: Troy? EH: Troy, and they say, "Oo, number 72" and by the time he says that, say what? I was gone, I was cooked, I beat the coach to him. Mac say, "I got him, Elvira, I got him." I said, "Okay." Q: Was he seriously injured? EH: No, 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. They meet **everywhere**, all kind of ways.

[00:29:52]

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

[00:30:02]

Q: Now, is there anything else you wanted to talk about or add that we didn't address? EH: Living out here has been very good and feels safe, the safety. You know your neighbor, I'd come and go, they keep an 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, **they know**. 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. Thank goodness. I told them the house is theirs, I don't need it.

[00:30:55]

Q: How long, it occurs to me we didn't actually determine this, how long have you lived in Pontchartrain Park? EH: Since 69, how many years **that** is? Q: That's 50 years. EH: Fifty years? That's right, this is [says 1919 but means] 2019. Q: Of course, things have changed over the years. What do you miss? If anything at all, about the way it used to be?

[00:31:38]

EH: Well, nothing. Because we moved along with the time and the kids moved along. Now they come back, they're willing to come back, like Little Sterling came back home, he's living here. Q: As well as Troy, re-developing homes EH: 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. And Ruston always was here, and those two came back home. Q: Of course, your sons are graduates of St. Augustine. EH: St. Augustine, Troy's at Stanford and Carnegie Mellon, Little Sterling, St. Augustine and Howard, and Ruston, St. Augustine and Xavier. And **they're** doing all right.

[00:32:40]

Q: And once more, just one last opportunity Mrs. Henry, do you have anything else to add? EH: It was good to see that a historical factor, you know, in this kind of community. Q: It is a very good point that you've made. In August, Pontchartrain Park will be evaluated and it will be determined whether or not Pontchartrain Park will receive a notice on the National Registry. EH: Oh, I thought it had already been. Q: It will be in August. What do you think about that? **EH:** Fantastic. And I hope they put something in reference to Greenup and all of them, you know, he was one of the stalwarts of it.

[00:33:31]

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 (**laughter**). They play cards with. I don't know. whatever, bridge, that's too sophisticated (**laughter**). Q: So are you successful at the Casino? EH: Up and down, up and down? I play poker at the table and the slot machines. And every Monday, I got a group that comes by me, on Monday we play from 10 in the morning to 4:30 in the evening, poker. And I'm 82, and they called me teenager, so you know how old they are, okay (**laughter**)? So we have been doing that for years. 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.

[00:34:39]

Q: Excellent. 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 I see all those kids coming

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. The teams all stood at my house, because each one of them had their own set, each boy. That's it.

[00:35:23]

Q: Well, once again we appreciate you participating. EH: Happy to be supportive.

Q: And your contribution is certainly dynamic and we will be in contact with you in the very near future. We are collecting these stories, we're going to digitize them and file them, and eventually we will be transcribing them and making them available to the public. EH: Modern technology, y'all are just doing everything, it's wonderful. Why thank you so much. Q: Thank you Mrs. Henry, we appreciate you. EH: Thank you.

[00:36:06]

This has been a presentation of the Center for African and African American studies at Southern University at New Orleans, and the following sponsors: the National Park Service; the United States Department of the Interior through the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism; the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.
[00:36:42] end

SUNO CAAAS PONTCHARTRAIN PARK PIONEERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. JOSIE LEWIS

July 31, 2019

[00:00:00]

The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project is presented by the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors: The National Park Service, the United States Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

[00:00:31]

My name is Dr. Clyde Robertson. I'm the director of the Center for African, and African American Studies, at Southern University at New Orleans. I am also the director, co-researcher, and interviewer for the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project. This oral history project examines the lives and experiences of the original home owners and residents of Pontchartrain Park. The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Projects team consists of Connie Abdul-Salaam, assistant professor of history at Southern University at New Orleans Dr. Mike Meehan Director of Communications at Southern University at New Orleans and Miss Helena Francis, senior Psychology major, Southern University at New Orleans, today's interview takes place, and the Millie Charles School of Social Work at Southern University at New Orleans. Today's date is July 31st 2019 and the time is 4:44 p.m.

[00:01:47]

Q: Please tell me your name? JL: I'm Josie Young Lewis. Q: And your birth date? JL: October the 11th, 1932. Q: Were you born in New Orleans? JL: Yes. At Flint Goodrich Hospital. Q: Where did you grow up in New Orleans? JL: I lived in New Orleans, uptown New Orleans, on Calhoun Street. Right near Tulane University and McAlister Place. It was a block away from there and we often, my sisters and I, babysat for the people in McAlister Place who were attending Tulane Q: So you babysat for the white people in the community. JL: Yes.

[00:02:45]

Q: Where did you go to school? JL: I went to McDonogh 24 school on Adams Street where Connie Hill was the principal. Q: And high school? JL: I went to McDonogh 35. Before that though, I went to Booker T. Washington for one year because McDonogh 35 started with the 10th grade at that time. Q: And who was the principal? JL: Lucien V. Alexis. Q: At Booker Washington? JL: No. Q: At McDonogh 35? JL: At McDonogh 35. But Lawrence Crocker was the principal at Booker T. Washington. Q: And did you go to college? JL: Pardon? Q: Did you go to college? JL: Oh yes. I went to Xavier University and I finished in 1954. Q: With what degree? JL: I finished in sociology with a minor in library science.

[00:03:54]

Q: Were you married? JL: Yes. I married in 1955 to Philip Lewis. Q: And so you married one year after graduating from college. Did you know Mr. Lewis at Xavier? JL: No. I worked in St. Martin Parish for four years and that is where I met him in Breaux Bridge. Q: And when you say you worked, you taught, you worked at a school? JL: Yeah, I was a teacher Librarian there. Q: And you met Mr. Lewis and married in 1955. JL: Yes. Q: Where did you all live initially, you and Mr. Lewis? JL: Well 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. Q: Okay. Was Mr. Lewis from New Orleans or Breaux Bridge? JL: He was from Breaux Bridge. Q: So you lived on Rocheblave Street before moving into Pontchartrain Park in 1960. JL: Yeah.

[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: So it was your father who informed you about Pontchartrain Park? JL: Well, when we came to the park with him, we saw Pontchartrain Park. Q: Had you encountered any newspaper articles about the Park or any advertisements prior to that point? JL: I don't remember. Q: 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. Q: Are you familiar with the work that they pursued to bring Pontchartrain Park into reality back in 1954, 1955? JL: Not completely but I knew they had played a part in it.

[00:06:49]

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: But you weren't familiar with his efforts to stunt the development of Pontchartrain Park? JL: No. 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. Q: What did Mr. Lewis do? JL: Well, he worked as an orderly at Baptist Hospital, then he worked out at the Michoud facility.

[00:08:03]

Q: When you started visiting Pontchartrain Park with your father, what was the first thing that attracted you to Pontchartrain Park? JL: Well, the fact that there were these nice homes out here and that possibly I could have one of them. Q:

So you moved into Pontchartrain Park in 1960. JL: June, 1960. Q: Who sold you your home? JL: I don't remember his name but he was there with Ross, who was one of the salespersons. But I do remember him, but I can't remember his name. Q: And your home was on the corner of Campus and Providence. JL: Providence and Prentiss.

[00:09:04]

Q: What attracted you to your home? Why that particular home as opposed to one on another street? JL: Well, they were in the process of building it and I wanted to get into it as soon as possible. Q: Now, when you purchased your home, did you have children? JL: No. Q: Were there neighbors already living in homes when you moved into your? JL: Yes. Q: Did you know anyone who lived in the park at that time or did you meet them as you moved in? JL: I basically met them as I moved in. I'm thinking John Roux may have lived over and he was one of my daddy's golf partners. Q: And did you know other people like your neighbors across the street to the side of you? JL: I got to know them. Like your mom and dad. We lived next door to each other and Lillian Jones across the street and Floyd Wilson.

[00:10:26]

Q: Do you remember how you financed your home? For example, was Mr. Lewis a veteran? JL: Yes, he was. Q: And did you use the VA Bill? JL: I think we did. Q: Was there any... JL: I think we had to make a small down payment and I think Crawford Homes was in charge at that time and we paid our note to Crawford Homes.

[00:11:09]

Q: All right. Now, can you describe your home's floor plan when you first moved in? For example, living room, dining room kitchen? What was your home's floor plan? JL: Living room and three bedrooms, which 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: And this was during the years subsequent to your moving in prior to one of the hurricanes or afterwards? JL: I don't remember exactly when. Q: Right. So, when you and Mr. Lewis moved in, you did not have children? JL: No. Q: Did you have children afterwards? We adopted Tony.

[00:12:17]

Q: How was Pontchartrain Park? What kind of environment was the park for raising children? JL: I think it was a very good environment. Q: For example? JL: Well, I sent Tony to the Thibodeaux Nursery School, which was an excellent... Miss Thibodeaux was like a mother to the children. We all loved her. Q: And was this Center in Pontchartrain Park or elsewhere? JL: Pontchartrain

Park. Q: What made that center so special other than Miss Thibodeaux loved the children? JL: Well it was spacious and convenient and she had them to perform and it kind of helped bring them out, you know? I remember Tony had that Nehru jacket on one occasion.

[00:13:20]

Q: Describe the Park when you first moved in, Pontchartrain Park, describe, Pontchartrain Park when you first moved in. For example, a lot of children, activities on the playground? JL: Yeah, there were a lot of children and activities on the playground. I know, at least once a year around the Fourth of July, we had a big celebration with all the niceties that...Q: Now, There was a playground in Pontchartrain Park. The NORD playground, New Orleans Recreation Department Playground. Were you involved? Was Tony involved in the playground? JL: Well, Tony went to the playground. Yeah. Q: Was he a part of the NORD programming? JL: Yes, he was. Q: Did you become a part of the booster club Pontchartrain Park Booster Club. JL: I don't remember.

[00:14:26]

Q: Now, as you moved into your home and became settled, 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 think I said that before. And always encourage him to have people over. Q: Your mother was Mrs. Young. JL: Yes. Q: And Mrs. Young would come spend time at your home a great deal. JL: And she, she always had a group of children in there in the yard with different activities and she enjoyed it and they did too. Q: I was one of them.

[00:15:29]

Q: When you moved in the Park, there were already people living there. Did they accept you and Mr. Lewis? JL: Oh yeah. Q: Pontchartrain Park was a place where a great many people lived, a great many families lived in the neighborhood. Do you remember any great stories? Any legends about the neighborhood? JL: Well, I can remember, you know, some of the people who lived there. The Dejoies lived down across from the park by the golf course down there. Q: Why were they important to you? JL: Well, they were my daddy's friends. Then we had Dr. Pratt, who was a Xavier graduate that I knew. And well, I'm trying to think of some of the others but it's been a while. Q: Of course Mr. Morial who became the first African American Mayor. JL: Yes. Right. Sybil and Dutch [Morial] lived down on Press Drive, Right?

[00:17:17]

Q: Did you find Pontchartrain Park to be a neighborhood where a lot of teachers and thus, your colleagues lived? JL: Right. There were. There were a number of

teachers living here. Q: Did that assist you in your professional experience, being around a lot of teachers, did that help you? JL: Well, I felt comfortable around them. Yes. Q: Getting back to the urban myths. Do you remember the myth about the Lady in White? JL: No. Q: Okay.

[00:18:00]

Q: What were some of the...you raised a son, a child in Pontchartrain Park. What advantages were there to raising a child in Pontchartrain Park? JL: Well, one of the big advantages was the playground where, you know, there was always somewhere to go to play ball and I think Tony joined the... what was it? The football team or something. But the funniest thing. The time I went to see him play, he wasn't there. He was at somebody's house. Q: And what did you do when you found that out? JL: I went looking for him and I found him on Providence Place down at one of his friend's house. Q: Were there disadvantages to having your child in Pontchartrain Park? JL: I don't think there were any disadvantages.

[00:19:15]

Q: What did you and your family do for recreation? I know there was the playground. Were there any other things you had family, gatherings and neighborhood gatherings. Were there any other activities that you pursued? JL: Yeah, I'm an avid bridge player, and I do that. Now, I belong to about three different bridge clubs, but I belong to one now. To which Miss Margaret Adams still plays. And then we play Bridge at...the great thing was the Center was opened and I played bridge over there. The director of the center and her assistant there, they are great at planning things. I think one time... well we go to the casino, but I also went to I think it was Azalea Gardens in Mobile or something with them, and that was a lovely trip. She always planned trips but I don't really go on the trips. She has a lovely program over there so on Mondays and Wednesdays, I go there. Q: Now the center that you're talking about was opened after Hurricane Katrina in Pontchartrain Park or was it pre-hurricane? JL: It might have been pre and then they had to redo some things and got it started again.

[00:21:10]

Q: We're going to revisit that line of questioning. Right now, I want to talk about the Park prior to Hurricane Katrina and even Hurricane Betsy. Continuing along with that line of questioning, 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 based, similarly built in terms of the architecture of the homes, but it was a white community. JL: Right. Q: Did you experience any difficulty as you traversed Gentilly Woods? J: No. And I

attended St. Gabriel the Archangel Church, which at first was almost, you know, everybody was white but then they redid the church and then it finally got to be mostly black. Q: So you never experienced any racial hardships, either at St. Gabriel the Archangel Church.... JL: See? As a youngster I lived in an all-white neighborhood and we always knew we were colored and you know, there were limits and with some people and others were open-hearted. They found us there because my grandfather's house was there, and around the corner from there, his brothers had lived around on Palmer Avenue. We accepted things as they were. Q: And so, you answered how you actually came to live in the uptown neighborhood, which was white. So you all were there prior to? JL: Yeah, my grandfather and his family lived around there. Q: And you didn't experience any racial animus from those in Gentilly Woods? JL: No.

[00:23:57]

Q: Now we know that you weren't a member of the Pontchartrain Park Booster Club. Were you, prior to the two hurricanes that really impacted upon New Orleans, Betsy and Katrina, were you a part of the Pontchartrain Park Association? JL: Oh yeah. Q: What were your experiences with the Pontchartrain Park Association? What were your responsibilities, if any? JL: 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 Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Betsy. JL: Yeah. Q: 1965 was your home damaged and if so, how? JL: Yes, we left. We had to redo the floors and...Q: So your home flooded? JL: Yeah, it flooded. Yeah. Q: You remember how many inches or feet of water? JL: No. Q: And so when you say you redid the floor, did you get governmental assistance? Did you have insurance, homeowners insurance? How did you...? JL: I had homeowners insurance, yes.

[00:25:50]

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. Was that the case in your home? JL: I think so? Yeah. Q: And how so? You did the floor. Did you get air conditioning, for example, central air? JL: No, I didn't have central air. Q: I know that after our home was flooded in Betsy. JL: Yeah. Q: And several of the homes on Prentiss central air was added. Prior to that, we hadn't had air. JL: I didn't get central air until after Katrina.

[00:26:39]

Q: So you moved right back into your home after Hurricane Betsy in 1965? JL: Yeah, I stayed with my sister for maybe a month and then until it was ready. Q: So we know that 1965 1966 '67 through the 70's Pontchartrain Park remained a very powerful close-knit neighborhood. Approaching the 1980's, did you start seeing a change in Pontchartrain Park? JL: I don't know exactly what it was but

I know right along through here we have some undesirables moving in. Q: That's now? JL: Yes. Q: But you don't recall it changing prior to Hurricane Katrina. JL: Not really.

[00:27:44]

Q: Let's talk about Hurricane Katrina. 2005. In late August, very early September Hurricane Katrina impacted the entire city, including Pontchartrain Park. Did you evacuate before the storm? JL: Yes, I left before the storm. I went to Georgia. Q: And the storm hit. Did it impact your home? JL: Yes. Q: How so? JL: Up to the ceiling... Q: Water. JL: Yeah. Q: So that would be roughly 10 feet? JL: I would say. Q: And you moved to Georgia. How long did you stay in Georgia? And what part of Georgia? JL: It was a little place outside Alpharetta. I can never remember. It was a nice place. We lived in an apartment. Q: And when you say we, who? JL: Tony and I.

[00:29:01]

Q: When did you begin contemplating returning home? JL: I didn't come back for a year. Q: But when did you begin thinking about coming back home? JL: Well, I was always thinking about coming back home but after a year I stayed at the Pontchartrain Oaks Apartment on Hayne and then I started trying to have a home built and I guess after a year we, even before they were finished up, I was getting in there. Q: Now, did you have to tear down your home? JL: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. Q: So the home you live in now is a complete rebuild? JL: Right. And I have a loose sketch of... [shows picture of new home] Q: Of the new home. JL: Yeah. That's the new home. Q: And that's in the place of the very same land. JL: Yes. Q: That you occupied. JL: It's turned to Providence whereas it faced Prentiss before. [says something indiscernible]

[00:30:35]

This has been a presentation of the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans, and the following sponsors, the National Park Service, the United States, Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

**SUNO CAAAS PONTCHARTRAIN PARK PIONEERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. MARGARET ADAMS**

July 23, 2019

[00:00:00]

The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project is presented by the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors: The National Park Service, the United States Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

[00:00:32]

My name is Dr. Clyde Robertson. I'm the director of the Center for African and African American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans. I'm also the director, co-researcher and co-interviewer for the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project. This oral history project examines the lives and experiences of the original home owners, and residents of Pontchartrain Park the Pontchartrain, Park Pioneers Oral History Project's team consists of: Professor Connie Abdul-Salaam, assistant professor of history at Southern University at New Orleans, Dr. Mike Meehan, Director of Satellite Communications at Southern University at New Orleans, Miss Helena Francis, senior Psychology major, Southern University at New Orleans. Today's interview is being conducted at Mrs. Margaret Adams home in Pontchartrain Park. Today's date is July, 23, 2019 and the time is 4:25 p.m.

[00:01:49]

Q: Please Mrs. Adams, tell me your name. MA: Margaret. Q: Mrs. Margaret Adams. Q: Where were you born? MA: New Orleans Q: Do you remember your birth date? MA: 10/27/30. Q: And what part of the city were you born in? MA: No. I guess, you know, I was adopted so I don't remember. I don't, I don't know all of that. I was an adopted child. Q: Your adopted parents' names were? MA: Viola and James Adams. Q: So your maiden name is Adams as well? MA: Yes, no...Brown. My parents name was Brown. Q: And in the background we will have Mrs. Adams' children, Paula and Terry.

[00:02:49]

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. Paula: Did you meet him at LSU? MA: Maybe at LSU. Q: Now, let's talk about your education and then we'll get back to Mr. Adams. What schools did you attend in New Orleans? I went to Holy Ghost Elementary School, Xavier Prep, Xavier University. Q: And LSU? MA: Yeah. Q: LSU in Baton Rouge or New Orleans? MA: New Orleans. Q: So LSUNO.

[00:03:37]

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.' MA: Fleet of foot, that's right. Q: 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? MA: I don't remember, I'ma tell you the truth. Q: All right. TA: I remember hearing this same story (*laughter*). MA: You remember hearing that? Q: I heard that in here in this room. MA: I don't remember how I met him. Q: So you probably met him at LSUNO. So you remember the year that you were at LSUNO? Q: I don't remember that far back. I don't remember the year we got married? Do you remember, Terry? TA: 53 Paula: I would say '54 because she conceived almost right away (I was born in '55) MA: I finished Xavier in '51. PA: So I would say October 16, 1954. Q: So roughly around 1954... MA: Probably, yeah. Q: You and Mr. Adams, were married.

[00:04:58]

Q: Do you remember your major? What did you major in at Xavier? MA: Vocal music Q: And what was your major at LSUNO? MA: Counseling. Q: And professionally, what did you do? MA: I taught vocal music for years until I got my masters, and I became a counselor. Q: In the New Orleans Public Schools? MA: Yes. In the public schools. 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. MA: He was? TA: Yes. PA: He was in the Marines. MA: Don't even remember how, when, and how it happened at...I guess, he would have been at Xavier. I don't know how he... Q: He was in the Marine Corps during the Korean War. MA: Yeah. Q: And was a combat Korean War veteran. TA: Yes. MA: I remember that now.

[00:06:05]

Q: Now you all met and married roughly around 1954. Where did you live with Mr. Adams after you were married? MA: I know, I think we lived in New Orleans, but we lived in Grambling for a while. TA: You remember being, living in an apartment next to Dillard's campus? MA: Yeah. PA: And before that you lived, Uptown, didn't you? MA: Yeah. Well, I live with my parents uptown in Carrollton by Xavier. Yeah. **PA: Don't you remember living with Daddy uptown? MA: Yeah**

[00:06:43]

Q: So after you married Mr. Adams possibly you lived near Dillard, adjacent to Dillard. MA: Yeah. Q: When did you and Mr. Adams become aware of Pontchartrain Park? MA: We moved to Pontchartrain Park early on I think, when it, you know... I know that part of it wasn't you know we were the first part of Pontchartrain Park. Q: And do you remember the year you moved to Pontchartrain Park? MA: Terry, do you remember the year? TA: Well, it was before I was born, Ma. I think it had to be 1955 maybe because Paula...you were here when Paula was born as far as that goes. MA: OK, say then 1955. That's good. PA: They built this house in 1958 like January or February of '58.

[00:07:49]

Q: So in January February of 1958, you purchased this house and moved in. Paula, your oldest child was three years old...PA: 2 Q: 2 years old. When you moved in, your youngest child Terry, was not born yet. MA: No. Q: Okay. All right, so you moved where, what home? Is this your first

home in Pontchartrain Park? MA: Yeah. Q: Which is on Prentiss Avenue? MA: Yes. **O:** Now, were you the first family to move into the Prentiss Avenue block? Q: I think so. I think we were, I think me and Delores. TA: You all said you moved here together. MA: Yeah, my next door neighbor and I moved into here together.

[00:08:47]

Q: Did Mr. Adams use his VA bill to purchase the home his Veterans Administration Bill? MA: I'm sure he did. He took care of everything, took advantage of everything he could (*laughter*). Q: Now, many of the women with whom we have discussed their experiences and who were married at the time when they moved into Pontchartrain Park husband's took care of everything. In fact, they simply moved into the home. Did you assist Mr. Adams in pursuing the paperwork and...MA: Oh, no. Q: Mr. Adams took care of everything.

[00:09:35]

All right, and when you moved into the home, you were a teacher. What did Mr. Adams do professionally? MA: He was a teacher, wasn't he Terry? TA: **Yeah.** Q: Do you remember how you became 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. Q: All right, and you purchased your home, roughly in 1958, you financed your home at least in part by way of the Veterans Administration MA: Yes. Q: And you had one child when you moved into Pontchartrain Park in 1958? MA: Uh huh. Q: When was Terry born? MA: Terry, when were you born? TA: 10-22-1958 Q: So soon after arriving in Pontchartrain Park? MA: Uh huh. Q: Your youngest child was born. MA: Uh Hum.

[00:10:55]

Q: Describe your home's floor plan, when you moved in. Do you remember how many feet your home was? MA: No, just this part here. 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.

[00:11:33]

Q: Do you remember how Pontchartrain Park was when you first moved into the park? Were there a lot of young families around with a lot of children in the neighborhood? 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? MA: About the same age, yeah. Q: Which also means then that the parents of those children were roughly your same age and that would have been in your middle 20s. MA: Uh Hmm. Q: Would you have been in your middle 20s? MA: Uh hmm.

[00:12:16]

Q: You, unlike many of the families that moved into Pontchartrain Park, 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 your life, the life of your family? MA: The golf course was just there, you

know, didn't... Now the playground was very important because of...we used to spend a lot of time at the playground. We had a lot of activities there, you know, the kids...with the kids. Yeah, the playground was really important. Q: Well let's talk about the playground Pontchartrain Park. Were your children involved in the N.O.R.D. activities, there? The playground activities? MA: Yep. Q: What...can you describe them? Did they play? Did your daughter play softball? Run Track? Did your son play? MA: Paula? PA: Yeah I played softball and I ran track. Q: And did Terry play any sports at Pontchartrain Park? MA: I'm sure he did. PA: He played football. TA: Yeah, I played football, ran track, baseball...it was year round. MA: Um hmm. Yeah.

[00:13:44]

Q: When you talk about the park, what role did you and Mr. Adams play on the park? Were you a part of the booster club, for example? MA: Yes. I don't know Daddy might have been a president at one time, huh? Yeah but we were involved in those, we were involved in activities. Q: Were you a park mother? MA: No, I don't. I don't, I'm not, I don't, I'm not familiar with that terminology. Q: Were you very involved with the activities? MA: Yes, very involved Q: Driving children to and from games, for example? MA: We were always involved with the kids. Yeah, we used to almost live over there. Q: And Mr. Adams did he coach on the playground? MA: Yeah, he coached. Yeah, we were involved in it.

[00:14:45]

Q: Do you remember any Pontchartrain Park Legends? Any people in your mind and in your life that stand out? TA: Remember Mr. Kanye? Lions guy. Remember Mr. Mac? MA: Yeah. See? They can remember all that, you know. TA: You remember Mr. Calhoun. MA: Yeah. Q: Well, these are all people who had major roles *in* I know your children's lives and also in your family as well with you and Mr. Adams.

[00:15:32]

What were some advantages to raising your children here in Pontchartrain Park? MA: Let me get started. First of all, it was a wonderful neighborhood. I mean you didn't have to worry about anything. And then the playground was right across the street. So you know, that was...we used to spend a lot of time over there. There was a good school in the neighborhood and it was close to church. You know, like, I didn't, I could get, walk to church and everything. It just had all of the advantages, it really was a wonderful place to raise a family. TA: You want to mention shopping? PA: Yeah, shopping was close. MA: mmm-hmm, shopping wasn't too far, just far enough to keep me from spending all my money (*laughter*). Q: Were there disadvantages? MA: I can't think of one. Not one. I have loved living in Pontchartrain Park.

[00:16:52]

Q: How did you get along with your neighbors? MA: My best friend and I moved in together. So you know I didn't have any problem there and then the next oh all our neighbors was great, huh Terry? TA: Yeah. MA: Oh, all that because my cousin was right across and, you know, just a couple of doors down. We were just like one big family in the neighborhood. TA: That was Frank Merrick. MA: Yeah Frank Merrick.

[00:17:31]

Q: Now adjacent to Pontchartrain Park for many of the years that you all were here was a neighborhood known as Gentilly Woods for many of the years that you lived here. Gentilly Woods was all white. What types of experiences did you have traversing, moving through Gentilly Woods coming back and forth? MA: Well, I went over there just for mass. I'd go to church and I didn't have any problems. I don't remember having any difficulties. Q: Your children were at, what schools did your children attend? MA: **Y'all** Went to Saint Gabriel, didn't you? TA: Yes. MA: Um hum. Q: Did your children's experience? Did children experience any difficulties? TA: Yes. PA: Yes. MA: Yeah

[00:18:29]

Q: Mrs. Adams, do you remember the ditch? MA: Yeah. Q: You remember the ditch? MA: It's not there anymore (**laughter**). Q: Yes it is. MA: OH! [laughter] Q: Yes, it is. It doesn't have the significance. MA: It doesn't have any water. Q: And of course it had water only once that I know of and it was Betsy. MA: Yeah. Q: 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 line MA: Was between you. Q: Was the point of demarcation between Pontchartrain Park and Gentilly Woods. MA: Well, that was understood but there are no problem for me because I didn't want to live in Gentilly Woods anyway. PA: And she wasn't on foot. She drove everywhere she needed to go.

[00:19:25]

Q: Do you know if Mr. Adams had any knowledge about the problems that your children had in Gentilly Woods? MA: Terry? TA: Did he have any knowledge? Q: Did he know? Did you know, did your children come home and share with you some of the experiences? 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. So, **that I'm** sure they were aware of, but that was, I believe, was in Gentilly Woods specifically.

[00:20:11]

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. MA: You do? TA: Yeah. PA: Tell me, no! Q: The story of the lady in white that permeated throughout Pontchartrain Park for at least 10 years. MA: You're kidding! Q: No. [laughter] but it was a...it was a story of a woman who, and there may be some truth to it, but it was much more benign an experience than people let on. It might have been a lady who had 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. MA: Hm Hm. Q: Which cleared the park. Terry and I were probably in the park at that time (**laughter**). And what eventually happened was that of course

the benign story of a woman wandering the playground, 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. So the lady in white is one of those stories that permeated Pontchartrain Park as well as she lived on Nanny Goat Island, which was one of the little places in the lagoon (*laughter*) MA: That's the first time I'm hearing anything about that (*laughter*).

[00:22:56]

Q: Now you said Mrs. Adams, that you actually attended church near the neighborhood. 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. And you were a major part of that church. MA: Well, I was active. Q: Yes. For many years you also directed the choir. MA: The choir. Yeah. Q: In fact, you attempted to recruit me (*laughter*). All right.

[00:23:34]

Q: Now you've lived in Pontchartrain Park nearly continuously since 1958. MA: Hm hmm. Q: Before Hurricane Katrina there was of course Hurricane Betsy in 1965. Do you remember your experiences? For example, did your home flood during Hurricane Katrina? MA: I remember experiencing that... Q: Hurricane Betsy in 1965...Alright. 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 in Grambling* for 16 years and then moved back and 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. PA: For Katrina TA: For Katrina but 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 in 1965, however, you were here in this house, 1965 for Hurricane Betsy. MA: Yes. Q: Did the home flood? MA: No. Q: Was there any damage to the home? TA: Water got close. PA: Yeah it did. It came up and was lapping at the front door. Q: Because many houses in the park including my own were flooded on that Prentiss Avenue.

[00:25:27]

Q: Mrs. Adams, before you moved to Grambling in 1986, did you see the **Park**, Pontchartrain Park changing? Did you see new neighbors coming in? If so, did they have the same ethics in terms of keeping your property up? Getting the children? MA: I don't remember. Q: And you moved to Grambling in 1986. 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, if I'm not mistaken, the police chief at the University. MA: I believe so. TA: That's true. Q: And then you moved back, shortly thereafter and then Mr. Adams, moved back in 19... in 2001. MA: Uh-huh. Q: You mentioned that Mr. Adams broke his neck. How did Mr. Adams break his neck? MA: Paula? PA: What he had was a blocked carotid artery, passed out in the bedroom and he fell badly. He got somehow, he got his neck wedged between the nightstand and the iron bed frame, and that's **where** he fell. And he had, he didn't have any motor control, he was still

moving, 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 the cervical discs, one or two discs in his neck. But that's what happened. He passed out and just fell badly. Q: And that happened here in the home? PA: Yeah. Easter Sunday right before we buried Mama Mamie, remember? **TA: Yeah.**

[00:27:39]

Q: Now Hurricane Katrina was not experienced here but 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: Oh yes. Q: Why were you happy to return? MA: This is home. There's no place like it's no place like home, but there's no place like Pontchartrain Park either. [laughter] Q: Have many of your neighbors returned? MA: Yeah. TA: Not many. PA: Not many. MA: Not many? Q: So many of... MA: Dolores is dead, huh? PA: Yeah. But she didn't come back after Katrina anyway. MA: She didn't? PA: She did not. The Mitchell's didn't come back. The Merrick's didn't come back. TA: Kristoff's PA: The Kristoff's didn't come back. TA: The Henry's tore their house down. Q: They've subsequently rebuilt. PA: Miss Yolanda? Yeah she didn't come back after the storm and she tore her house down. Q: But she's back now. PA: She's back now. Yeah, they kept the property. TA: Mr. Williams came back. PA: Yeah, Mr. Truly came back, and the Young's came back.

[00:29:30]

Q: In light of your new neighbors, 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 and laughter]**. Q: Well, it hasn't changed. MA: No. [laughter] 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: He's built several new homes around the neighborhood. MA: Yeah, that's nice.

[00:30:33]

Q: Even though some of these people have not returned home, are you still in contact with many of them, at least some of the people who might have lived in Pontchartrain Park? MA: Not many, not really, you know at my age this is my neighborhood right here. I don't I don't, you know. 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. And next door, she and I moved in here together, but I don't... Delores must be dead by now, huh? PA: For a few years now. MA: I don't even know who my neighbors are. 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.

[00:31:44]

Q: I'm going to ask this question and the answer may or may not be apparent. 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?...You have a lifetime worth of memories here in this home with your family and this neighborhood. What were your most...What are your most memorable moments in Pontchartrain Park? MA: The one thing I remember most about Pontchartrain Park beside playing bridge at the community center is working with the youngsters out at the playground. I used to...I was really active at the playground and that was important to me. Because you know, I mean we got this beautiful golf course set right across the street from us and my husband didn't even learn how to play golf. Q: I don't think that's odd though during that period (*laughter*). It might be a little different now. MA: But he was athletic and this one didn't learn either. TA: Parrain played golf over there all the time, he tried to teach me. Remember Bra Mitch, my friend Mitch? He used to play there all the time. MA: You think with the golf course, and especially an athletic person...PA: He held...as long as I can remember he had two jobs. MA: Always.

[00:33:41]

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, you know? We had lovely neighbors and it was just wonderful living here. It really was. Q: There was also Southern University at New Orleans. MA: Right. Q: Some of the people I interviewed say that their children went to the library at SUNO to do research and Terry and Paula? PA: Yes. MA: Paula, you used to go? PA: Yes. MA: Okay. Q: I know many of the children including myself... PA: I don't if Terry did. I know I did. Q: We would go to SUNO sometimes to research particularly if you knew the librarian. MA: Hm-hmm Q: As My mother did.

[00:34:57]

Q: Well, Mrs. Adams this wraps up the interview. MA: I enjoyed it. Q: What you shared with us, as I stated only moments ago, 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. MA: Well. I'm glad. Q: So this is very important and we certainly appreciate you. MA: You're welcome. Q: Thank you very much.

[00:35:45]

This has been a presentation of the center for African and African American Studies, at Southern University at New Orleans, and the following sponsors, the National Park Service. The United States Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

**SUNO CAAAS PONTCHARTRAIN PARK PIONEERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. RUTH OUBRE**

June 10, 2019

[00:00:00]

The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project is presented by the Center for African and African-American studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors. The National Park Service, the United States Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

[00:00:32]

Q: My name is Dr. Clyde Robertson. I'm the director of the Center for African and African American Studies, at Southern University at New Orleans. I'm also the director and co-researcher and co-interviewer for the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project. This oral history project examines the lives and experiences of the original home owners and residents of Pontchartrain Park. The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project team consists of Ms. Connie Abdul-Salaam, assistant professor of history at Southern University at New Orleans, Dr. Mike Meehan, Director of Satellite Communications at Southern University at New Orleans, and Miss Francis Helena, senior Psychology major, Southern University at New Orleans. Today's date is June 10th, 2019 and the time is 4:31.

[00:01:37]

Q: Please tell me your name and birthday? RO: My name is Ruth, Ruth Roussell Oubre. I was born March, the 13th, 1932. Q: And where were you born? RO: Born Edgard, Louisiana. Q: When and why did you move to New Orleans? RO: Well, my mother was in Edgard because her mother died. Then, after I was born, she moved back to New Orleans. Q: And in what part of the city did you grow up? RO: We lived on Foucher Street, uptown in Holy Ghost Parish. Then we moved from there, downtown in the Seventh Ward in the Lafitte Project. Q: And what was your maiden name once again? RO: Roussell

[00:02:37]

Q: You met Mr. Oubre? What was his full name? RO: Hurby, Hurby Oubre. Q: And where did you meet Mr. Oubre? In Edgard, Louisiana. Q: And when did he move to New Orleans? RO: When we got married. Q: What year was that? 1953.

Q: Was Mr. Oubre in the military? RO: No. Q: What was his profession? RO: He was a merchant seaman. Q: What was your profession when you were married to Mr. Oubre? RO: A housewife. Q: How many children did you and Mr. Oubre have? RO: Five. Q: And their names are? RO: Bryan, Percy, Vanessa, Elise, and Hurby.

[00:03:34]

Q: How did you hear about owning a home in Pontchartrain Park? RO: 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. Q: Prior to that point, where were you living? RO: I was living with my mother. Q: And when you and Mr. Oubre were married, you were living with your mother? RO: Yeah. Q: And what street was that on? RO: On Tonti. Q: Tonti, downtown. RO: Yeah. Q: In the Seventh, I think, seventh or sixth [ward]. RO: Yeah. Q: I believe seventh.

[00:04:37]

Q: Are you familiar with the Urban League's Housing Questionnaire and Survey of 1955? RO: No. Q: Can you describe the process of obtaining your home? You talked about Mr. Oubre going down to meet with Mr. Greenup and identifying a home. What else went into actually purchasing the home? RO: Well, after he picked it out, picked the house out, then they discussing financing and all that. And at that time, they didn't have any streets or anything because it took about almost two years before we moved in the house because they had to put the streets and the drainage and everything, and then they had to, which they were prefab houses, but then after they put it, put them up, so it was about two years. Q: So, when you first went to him, to Mr. Greenup, what year was that? RO: To Mr. Greenup what year was that? I think it was very late 53s or the early 54s. I don't remember. Q: And when did you move into the home? RO: It was close to two years. Q: So roughly 1955? RO: Yeah. RO: So, around 1955.

[00:06:16]

Q: Did you hear of any negative talk about Pontchartrain Park? RO: No. Q:

Everything that you heard was positive? RO: Positive. Yes. Q: For example, could you...? 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: Did you read anything in the media about Pontchartrain Park? RO: No. I don't remember.

[00:06:47]

Q: Now we are moving into the area of the interview where we are going to discuss life and Pontchartrain Park. So do you remember the month that you moved into the park? RO: No, I think it was in the first part of the year 1955. Q: Now, when you moved into the park, how many children did you have? RO: Two. Q: And they are Bryan and Percy. And you had three children while living in the park. RO: Right. Q: How long did you actually live in Pontchartrain? RO: For 25 years.

[00:07:39]

Q: Now, you mentioned that Mr. Oubre identified a home and brought you sometime later to look at the home and to approve it. Can you describe the floor plan of that home...for example, how many bedrooms? RO: We had three bedrooms, a living room, a little dinette kitchen, and a little kitchenette. And one or two bathrooms. **RO:** One bath. And of course the front yard, back yard, two side yards. Q: Why did Mr. Oubre choose that particular model? There were at least two or three models of homes. Why did he choose that particular model? RO: Guess, that's what we could afford (*laughter*). Q: Speaking of affordability, do you remember how much your home cost? RO: About 11,000?

[00:08:46]

Q: What was it like when you first moved into Pontchartrain Park? RO: It was really nice. Everybody was just like one big family, the whole block. Everybody got along together. It was really nice. In fact, today, we still get along. Q: And were there many families on your block? RO: Yes. Q: Could you remember the names of any of them...you said you still get along with them? RO: Moor's...Mr. Aguiard, or as we used to call him, Mr. Joe Lee.. Q: Now when you moved into Pontchartrain Park, how old were you and Mr. Oubre? RO: Let me see. I guess I

was about 22, 23. Q: And many of the people who bought those homes were of the same age? RO: Probably so. Q: With young children as well. RO: Oh yeah, the kids grew up together and they still friends. The MacNiel's....I'll think of them gradually.

[00:10:30]

Q: Did you know anyone else in the park when you, when you and Mr. Oubre moved into the park? RO: No. We didn't know anyone. Q: When you moved into the park, did any of your friends and family treat you differently? RO: No. **Q:** Speaking of the park, do you remember any great stories or legends about the neighborhood? RO: Yeah, you know, we all got along. As one big family. If my child did something you could correct it. They did something, I could correct it. There was one guy across the street, he didn't like nobody to run on his lawn. They didn't have any kids, but after a while he got used of it and it was like a joke with him. "I know you was on my lawn. I know you was on my lawn." But he was just joking with them but they all got along but real nice.

[00:11:42]

Q: Do you remember any of the stories that your children would bring home? For example, there was a legend of the lady in white in Pontchartrain Park. Are you familiar with the lady in white story? RO: No. Q: You're not familiar with lady in white? Who were some of the great personalities that you could remember in Pontchartrain Park....People like maybe Ernest Morial? RO: Yeah, they lived in the block with us. The Morials did. Yeah. They lived there maybe a year or so then they moved on Press. Q: And Mr. McBurnett Knox who worked so closely with the youngsters... RO: Yeah, I remember him. Q: Do you remember any stories about him that Percy, Bryan, Hurby would bring home? Q: Mr. Knox, the one that worked on the...uh...with the kids only? Yes. Mr. Knox, he was wonderful with the kids.

[00:12:54]

Q: Now, you lived in the area of the park closest to the golf course. RO: Right. Q: How was that? RO: It was all right. It was nice. Q: Did any of your, did Mr. Oubre, golf? Did any person in the family golf? RO: He was always at sea until he retired. Q: Did Percy and Brian caddy? RO: No. Q: Did you stop them from

caddying? RO: No. I never did let them go out there. Q: Why not? RO: I don't know. They never wanted to, I guess. Q: A lot of youngsters in the park with whom I grew up earned extra money caddying but my father defied me and my brother from going out there. RO: Yeah. O: And caddying or swimming the lagoon for golf balls. Did you know of any tragedies that occurred in the park...accidents? RO: No. I don't remember.

[00:14:03]

Q: What were some of the advantages... Were there advantages to rearing your children in Pontchartrain Park? RO: Well everybody there was so nice. They never did get in trouble. 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." And that's why everything was so nice. Q: Were there any disadvantages to rearing your children in Pontchartrain Park? RO: No.

[00:14:36]

Q: Did your...what did your family do for recreation when you lived in Pontchartrain Park? Did you go to the lake or Pontchartrain Beach? RO: Well, I would always take them around the city and then when my husband was in, we would take them like to the airport, to the zoo, or different places like that so they could sit by the window. At that time, you can put them sit by the window and watch the planes take off. We would take them out to dinner. One of the places, I'll never forget, we took them to Dooky's. It was Percy, he wanted a steak and when he got by my father, my father said, "Where did you all go?" "We went out to eat and I had a snake (*laughter*)."

Q: What about...you had the big yards. Did you have neighborhood gatherings in your yards, picnics, cookouts? RO: No. The children getting the kids would come because we had the swings and things, they would come over.

[00:15:50]

Q: Now, adjacent to Pontchartrain Park was Gentilly Woods, right? And during the early years, Gentilly Woods was a white community of working-class, middle-class whites. Did you encounter any difficulty with people from Gentilly Woods coming into Pontchartrain Park? RO: No. Q: Did you encounter any difficulty at the front? At the grocery store? At Walgreens? Sears? Maison

Blanche? RO: No. Q: Did your children talk about any difficulties? RO: No. Q: Are you familiar with the ditch? RO: The ditch? Q: The ditch. RO: The canal? **RO:** Yeah. Q: Separated Pontchartrain Park from Gentilly Woods. Q: So there were no experiences? RO: No.

[00:16:51]

Q: Were any of your children participants with the Pontchartrain Park Patriots, NORD baseball, football teams, basketball teams? RO: Bryan and Percy. And also Hurby. Q: Where you are part of the booster club? RO: Yeah. Q: What was your role in the booster club? RO: I used to help with the children. Q: Can you remember any experience that you might have had as a booster? RO: Well, I used to do is...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. Q: Were those good memories? RO: Yeah. Yeah. Especially when they would win. Q: Now you remember at that time Pontchartrain Park had integrated the NORD Lakeshore League, were there any negative experiences that...you know.... RO: No. Q: All positive experience? RO: Yeah.

[00:18:05]

Q: Were you a member of the Pontchartrain Park Association? RO: Yeah. Q: What were some of your roles there? RO: Just a member and help out when I can. Q: And what kind of assistance did you provide? RO: I used to mostly help with the kids.

[00:18:27]

Q: Did you attend church in Pontchartrain Park? RO: Yes. Q: Which church did you attend in Pontchartrain Park? RO: St. Gabriel (St. Gabriel was located in the nearby Gentilly Woods subdivision). Q: What kinds of experiences did you have? Did you have positive experiences at St. Gabriel? RO: We had negative. Q: Could you explain? RO: Well, when we would go to Mass, we had a certain section, we'd have to sit and then when we would go to... we couldn't go to communion until everybody was finished and they would bring the communion to us. We couldn't go up there and get it. Q: Do you remember the years that you were involved with St. Gabriel? RO: No. I don't remember. Q: Did you stay at St. Gabriel? RO: No. Q: Where did you go from there? RO: St. Paul. St. Q: Paul.

Yeah. And how was it different at St. Paul? RO: It was really nice because the kids went to school there. Q: Was that integrated or was that black? RO: Black.

[00:19:53]

Q: Before Hurricane Katrina, did Pontchartrain Park begin to change before Hurricane Katrina? RO: I wasn't living there then. Q: When did you move from Pontchartrain Park? RO: 1977 or so. Q: Prior to your moving did Pontchartrain Park begin to change and if so, for the better or worse? RO: It was about the same. Q: Why in 1977 did you all decide to move? RO: 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. Q: Are you happy to have moved away from Pontchartrain Park? RO: Not at first because that was... That was my first home and the kids was brought up there. That was all my memories there. and, uh... Really at first, I didn't care for it at all. I wanted to stay in Pontchartrain Park.

[00:21:43]

Q: How was life different here in your current home and neighborhood then was the case in Pontchartrain Park? RO: It was better in Pontchartrain Park because this was mostly white. You just had like the lady next door. And I think one a little further down. That was it, but the neighbor across the street, they were very nice. Q: The other neighbors who were white weren't as friendly or accepting? RO: No.

[00:22:22]

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. And we didn't have any damage. Water in the street, but didn't come all the way up. Didn't come in the house or didn't have any damage. Q: So there was little to no need to have to rebuild or repair your home. Did you move directly back into the home? RO: Right. Q: How long after the storm had passed that you moved into the home? RO: As soon as I was able to get back here. Q: A week. Some days? RO: Couple of days. We didn't have that much water. It went

down. Q: And your other neighbors, did they move back as well? RO: Everybody went back. Q: And did you get any form of assistance in moving back from the local, federal, state government? RO: No. Q: After Hurricane Betsy, did you notice a change in the neighborhood? RO: No.

[00:23:52]

Q: Now you moved in 1978. Did you sell your home? RO: No. Q: Rent your home? RO: No. Q: 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: Which sons? RO: Percy, was the first one to go in now Hurby is in. Q: Do you visit your son in the family home? RO: Yeah.

[00:24:23]

Q: Has the neighborhood changed? Can you describe and discuss those changes? 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: And which street did you move on? What street are we talking about? RO: Deboire. Deboire is located again on what is known as the other side of the park. Q: Are you familiar with that term? The other side of the park? RO: We on the side with the golf course. Q: That's right. The other side of the golf course. RO: We were the first ones there. That side is the first. Q: In fact, if you moved in 1955, you are among the first-ever residents of Pontchartrain Park. RO: Yeah.

[00:25:33]

Q: Are you aware of Wendell Pierce's post-Katrina efforts to provide people with new homes in Pontchartrain Park? RO: Yeah. Q: What do you think of those new homes that he was able to establish? RO: I think they're nice. Q: Do you think he was successful in his attempt? RO: Yeah. Q: If so, why do you think it was successful? RO: Because the houses the people needed, and he was helping them because that's the type of person he is. Q: So do you know Wendell well? RO: Yes. Q: Did he grow up with one of your sons? RO: Yeah, he's just like my son. Q: Which one? RO: Hurby.

[00:26:33]

Q: Let us talk about the people you met early on and your experience with Pontchartrain Park. Are you still friends with any of them? RO: Most of 'em is dead. Only Miss Morris. Other than that, most of them is dead or they didn't come back. Q: What were your most memorable moments in Pontchartrain Park? RO: My neighbors were very.... My neighbor on one side was very very nice. They would always, 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? Blah blah blah. And you know they would always...they was always so nice Q: Do you remember his name? RO: His last name was Auguillard... Alphonse. Q: Is there anything else you want...? RO: Alphonse.

[00:27:49]

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about regarding Pontchartrain Park that we didn't address? RO: One thing is, when the kids was little teenagers, they went to a parade and the police was nagging them about "move back this that and the other." 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 policemen treating us like this." And he did. He became a lawyer. Q: What do you miss most about Pontchartrain Park? RO: Well, now I don't miss anything but before I missed the neighbors. Q: All right, well, this concludes our interview. I'd like to thank you. Mrs. Oubre for participating in the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History project. RO: I'm sorry I couldn't remember all of the names. Q: You did fine.

[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: Speaking of that uh...why do you think many of the young people, the children who were with your children in Pontchartrain Park, are successful today? RO: Because of the parents.

[00:29:47]

Q: Well again. Thank you, Mrs. Oubre, for participating in the Pontchartrain Park Oral History... RO: Wendell's other brother, he worked for Obama. You know, and he didn't want to go to St Aug so he went to Holy Cross. Q: My brother was

among the first in Pontchartrain Park to go to Holy Cross. He went in 68. RO: Yeah. I don't remember what year he went, but I think it was like seven Blacks. Q: From the park? RO: Not all of them was from the park. But the little Dejoie boy, Ron. Hurby. I don't know if any others from the park but they all stick together. Q: Yeah, I remember all three of them very well. Yeah. They grew up under me. RO: Yeah. Ron went to West Point. Q: West Point. Yep. RO: And then Dejoie went to the Naval Academy. Q: United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. RO: Yeah.

[00:30:47]

Q: I remember them quite well. They were on my father's baseball team I think, at the Park. Was Hurby with Troy Henry, was he in that same age group as Troy? RO: I don't know. Q: Or, is he older than Troy? RO: Troy is the youngest, or the oldest? Q: Roy is the second one. RO: Which one one is the pharmacy? Q: That's the youngest, that's Ruston. RO: Yeah. Q: He's with Ruston. RO: No, I don't, I don't know. Q: He's either older or younger. I think he might be older than Troy. He's with Ruston. Yeah, he's younger than Troy. Yeah. RO: They all stuck together.

[00:31:39]

Q: Yeah, quite a few success stories coming out of the Park. RO: Yeah, there's a lot. Q: On the opposite end of that coin. There's some heartbreaks as well. RO: Yeah. Q: But I think there are more success stories coming out of the park than they are not. RO: Yeah. Right. Q: And it has something to do I think with what you've suggested that each parent parented people other than, in addition to, their children because it was the same thing on my block, which was Prentiss Avenue. RO: Right. Q: There were people, they are, I can remember the ladies standing out, there were a lot of homemakers... RO: Yeah. Q: A lot of ladies were 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.

[00:32:51]

RO: Well I used to...we had a lot of them going to St. Paul and I used to pick

them all up, take them to school because their parents was working and I wasn't working. Q: No, do I remember that well! RO: Jones. Q: Stevie? RO: No. Austin. There was a lot of them, only one boy. Q: It was a glorious place in which to grow up. RO: I hope it builds up nice again. They had... It was really nice. Q: Yeah. Well I applaud...RO: Cezanne. Q: Actually I don't remember them. RO: They was on Congress. They backyard and our backyard was together.

[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, you know, things come back the way that he had envisioned them. RO: Yeah. Q: But 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. RO: Yeah. Q: Prentiss Avenue, Congress, Press Drive are still pristine. It's when you go into the community. It's those streets that are not on the main drag, as it were. They are the ones that there's a lot of abandonment. RO: Yeah. Q: A lot of Abandonment. Homeowner abandonment as well as the municipal abandonment: sidewalks, streets.

[00:35:13]

RO: When we first moved back there, Southern wasn't up. In fact, it didn't have 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. Q: Let me ask you about the role of SUNO? Did SUNO have an impact? There were two schools in Pontchartrain Park. That was Southern University at New Orleans and Coghill. RO: Yeah. Q: Did any of them have an impact on your standard of living or your family. RO: No. Because mine's went to Catholic school. Q: Did your children use, for example, SUNO's Library? RO: No, they used the library at the school they attended. Q: Alright. Are there any other memories that you'd like to share? RO: No. I could hardly remember (Laugh) some of these people's names. Q: (Laugh) It's a tremendous contribution. If there aren't any other memories, then I'd like to again, thank you for participating in the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project.

[00:36:32]

This has been a presentation of the Center for African and African-American Studies at

Mrs. Ruth Oubre Transcript, CORRECTED Paragraph-TimeCode Consolidation

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SUNO-CAAAS PONTCHARTRAIN PARK PIONEERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. SYBIL MORIAL

July 16, 2021

[00:00:00]

The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project is presented by the Center for African and African-American studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors. The National Park Service, the United States Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

[00:00:31]

My name is Dr. Clyde Robertson. I'm the director of the Center for African and African American Studies, at Southern University at New Orleans. I'm also the director and co-researcher and co-interviewer for the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project. This oral history project examines the lives and experiences of the original home owners and residents of Pontchartrain Park. The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project team consists of Ms. Connie Abdul-Salaam, assistant professor of history at Southern University at New Orleans, Dr. Mike Meehan, Director of Satellite Communications at Southern University at New Orleans, and Miss Helena Francis, senior Psychology major, Southern University at New Orleans. Today's date is July 16th, 2021. And the time is 20 minutes after 11 a.m.

[00:01:44]

Q: Please tell me your name. SM: I'm Sybil Haydel Morial. Q: And when were you born, Mrs. Morial? SM: I was born, November 26th, 1932. Q: And where were you born? SM: I was born in Greek Town, the neighborhood near Xavier University and only lived there four years when my parents bought a home downtown closest to my father's medical office. Q: So your father was a physician? SM: Yes. Q: Did your mother work? SM: My mother was a teacher before she married but back in those days when a teacher married they had to resign. They thought mothers, wives and mothers should be home, taking care of the house and the kids.

[00:02:33]

Q: Can you describe your childhood? SM: I have wonderful memories of my childhood. I don't remember much about Greek Town, our home in Greek Town, because I was four when we moved. We moved downtown on Miro Street as I said near my father's medical office. We had a huge backyard and it was a big house. It was a very, very great neighborhood to grow up in because it was very diverse. There were whites and blacks, they were grand homes and rentals and medium-sized homes. So it was a mix

of what America is. And I grew up and played with these children with no regard to the fact that we were different, except we went to different schools. And then of course, high school. We had to ride the bus and that's when the distance came. We rode the back and our white friends rode the front of the bus. Q: Now, what high school did you attend? SM: I went to Xavier Prep and we went on the bus, three transfers.

[00:03:47]

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, we played jacks and jumped rope, and girls even played marbles. So it was a wonderful relationship. No, no difference because we were of different races. Q: Did you go to one another's homes? SM: I didn't go to their homes because their homes were small and there was no place to play. And there were lots of children in these small houses. So our big backyard became the neighborhood playground and my mother allowed it. 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, come up in the kitchen and get your beans. And we go back outside and sit on the lawn, slapping away the mosquitoes while we ate our midday meal.

[00:05:04]

Q: And so race, in your early life, was certainly a consistent item. However, it was not anything that deterred you from having a relationship with... SM: No. Q:...with other young white children? SM: Except we could not go to public places together. There was a movie house near the Circle Theater within walking distance and we would go, 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, it was our reality. So we accepted it.

[00:05:56]

Q: So you grew up... Born in uptown. Grew up downtown. SM: Yes. Q: Went to high school at Xavier Prep Uptown. SM: Yes. Q: And where did you eventually go to college? I went to Xavier University for two years. I wanted to go to another city. I wanted to know another city. I wanted to know about a northern city. We had traveled as a family and so I knew of other cities where there was no limit. You didn't have to think. Oh, can I go here? Are they going to put me out? Are they gonna' humiliate me? Well, I wanted to go north and we had traveled to Boston and I was fascinated with Boston. I guess the look of it. I knew it was an art City. I knew there were many universities there. And so that's why I applied during my sophomore year at Xavier. My parents told me I was too young. I was young in college. They said a couple of years

and you can go. So I was accepted with full credits and Junior status and spent my last two years in Boston. Love the city because I could go wherever I wanted to go, you know, to the museums and to the theater, live theater. And I just love the freedom of a northern city.

[00:07:21]

Q: In which university did you attend? SM: I attended Boston University. Q: Were you there at the same time with Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott? SM: Yes. Martin Luther King was a dear friend. In those days, all of the black students in all of the several 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. And in those days, 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 South, the segregated South. And Martin, he was working on his Doctorate at Boston University and I was an undergraduate. But we talked about what was coming, you know, we kept up with what was going on in the courts. The Brown decision was being...was going on then.

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SM: And we had to go to the black neighborhood in Boston, Roxbury, to get the Negro newspapers, the Pittsburgh Courier, and the Afro American Newspaper, to read what was happening in the courts and all over the country in terms of blacks. So we talked about the possibilities. When the Brown decision came, did we celebrate? We were thrilled and we wondered what this meant. How would change come? What would happen? And all of us from the South, 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. And of course, Martin was our leader then. He was a graduated minister and he would preach in churches where the minister had to be out of town. And we all went to his sermons. I mean, it was almost like a social activity. The buzz in the dormitory was Martin's 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.

[00:09:57]

Q: So, when he did become a part of that world stage and you had returned to New Orleans and began and had become a part of that world stage, did you reconnect? SM: We did reconnect. He came to New Orleans to speak...this was...he hit the stage when he led the Montgomery Bus Boycott which was successful. And so he was speaking all over the country. And so when I found out he was coming to New Orleans, I wrote him a letter and I had kept up with him. He dated my best friend, before he met Coretta, and she knew how to contact him. So I wrote him an invite. I said, when you come, if you have time, come to dinner. I was living with my mother, then, okay? Or

come to lunch. He said I will call you when I get there. So he was speaking at the Coliseum Arena which was like a big gym where they had prize fights and that's where he spoke. And so, I went to hear him. His wife was expecting one of their children and I was expecting my first. So I went backstage and talked to him. 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, "yeah." Okay. I don't want to use this word but that trumps Sybil Morial. [laughter] Q: And this was 1957. SM: Yes. Q: 1957.

[00:12:00]

Q: Now, you graduated from Boston University and did you return directly to the city? SM: I did not. I got a job teaching in Newton, Massachusetts, which was one of the premier excellent public school districts in the country. And I...a team came to interview teachers and everybody wanted to teach in Newton. Well, I thought...my advisor had asked me if I wanted to go to graduate school. She said, you can be my assistant and it will pay your tuition. I said great, but I went to the interview at Newton and there were 17 of us at first. It was shaved down to five and then I got a call offering and that was... you know, threw me into a flip because I had already had plans, and my advisor said, Sybil, you need to give this some thought. You can go to graduate school later, but for you to go and teach in Newton that's great on any level, but you will be the only black, I think, teaching. And I don't know that there are many black students even in that neighborhood. It was a big suburb of Boston. So, I taught school and I went to graduate school in the evening and on Saturday.

[00:13:29]

SM: So in 1955, I finished my Graduate Studies. And in the meantime my husband Ernest Morial and I were dating and we decided to marry. 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 all of them, all of them, men who were trained at the Army intelligence school after they graduated, they sent them to Vietnam. So Dutch said, "I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna leave you and go to Vietnam." We got to get married and when I come back, we'll start our life. So we did marry. We married in Boston. 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. SM: I taught in public schools. It was the first year they had integrated the faculty in the Boston Public Schools, and they were five of us in this faculty of 30, 5 blacks in this, among 30, 30, so there were 35 teachers in the school. It's a big school. So when his term was up, we returned to New Orleans. He was an attorney and he had been practicing law with A.P. Tureaud who was the dean of black lawyers in Louisiana.

[00:15:10]

Q: Now you said you lived in Baltimore. SM: Yes, and Mr. Morial attended law school... SM: Before I... before we got together. Yes. Q: So when he was in the intelligence corps, he was also in law school or was he an attorney? He finished law school. When I came back, he was already a lawyer practicing. He finished Law School in 1954, I think. Yeah. So. Q: At LSU? SM: At LSU, the first black. And then he came back home and resumed his practice with A.P. Tureaud. Q: After separating from the army? SM: From the Army. Yes. Q: And what year was that when you all returned? SM: That was 1955, 1955. Q: So, in 1955, where were you living? SM: 1955, we came back to New Orleans and we rented a house in Pontchartrain Park. We were looking for a house to buy. And at the time, they had not begun, had not finished building on the other side of the Park, which is where you and I lived. So, we rented this house on New York Circle and we lived there for four years. And began to look to buy a house in the Park. Q: So you rented it from an institution or an individual? SM: An individual had bought the house and, for some reason, his wife could not come at that time. She had a job somewhere else, and she could not separate at that time, but he did not want to sell the house. So he rented it, which helped him pay his mortgage. And as I say we were there three or four years.

[00:17:13]

Q: Now. What year did you decide to purchase your home? SM: Let's see. I'll try to think how old my children were....1960 I think. '59 or '60 which is when we purchased the home. Q: Now what other options were made available to you and Mr. Morial when you returned? Fortunately, Pontchartrain Park had been created, but if Pontchartrain Park had not been created, where could you all have lived? SM: I don't know. We came home. Pontchartrain Park was being built. Young families were moving in. And after we rented in that area, we were sold on raising our children there. So we didn't consider any other place. We took to Pontchartrain Park. We rented because it was a single home with a yard with young neighbors like ourselves. And so there was no question that we were not buying a house in Pontchartrain Park.

[00:18:36]

Q: Now, in the process of buying homes, what kind of paperwork did you pursue? I know, Mr. Morial was a veteran. Did he...? SM: Absolutely. Yes. He got a VA loan and 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. Q: And so, when you moved back, you secured your home eventually in 1960 by way of the VA loan. Mr. Morial was a practicing attorney. And were you teaching at the time? SM: I was teaching. I may have been on maternity leave because I had two children after we had moved. We had bought our home, but I was teaching with your mother. My dear friend, Dolores Robertson. Q: You were teaching at Henderson H. Dunn? SM: Henderson H. Dunn which was in the Desire Housing Development. Q: Yes, and you prior to that had taught at Newton... SM: Among middle and upper middle class

children and at Dunn, it was those people who were not well off at all. Yet many of them on food stamps and all kinds of assistance.

[00:20:01]

Q: Now, were there...when you moved into Pontchartrain Park were you familiar with the wrangling about Pontchartrain Park being segregated? For example, 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 between?... SM: Not for us. We wanted that neighborhood. We wanted families like ourselves, young, married with children, and I did not think living in a segregated neighborhood would be adverse to my children. I thought it might, it might be healthy for the development of their self-esteem. Now. They, they eventually went to the Catholic School, which was located in the white neighborhood. There was a white neighborhood, Gentilly Woods, big, and then there was Pontchartrain Park and so my children had to navigate getting back to the Park because there was some resistance to to integrating the Catholic schools, and it passed...parents passed it on to their children. And if you remember there was a ditch that separated Gentilly Woods from Pontchartrain Park, and when you got over the ditch to Pontchartrain Park, you were safe.

[00:21:52]

Q: Can you recall any of those incidents? Did your children relate with you, some of the experiences? SM: You know what? They did not. Hardly at all. But years later, they told the stories. Jacques about how he had to run home, 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, and I say, I hope that if you do need us, you will tell us. They said, okay.

[00:22:39]

Q: We're going to return to that conversation in a moment. When you finally purchased your home in Pontchartrain Park, what was your reaction? Was it excitement, or buyer's remorse? SM: It was exciting and one 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. And I loved that, that it was a nice... But I also loved that there were many children their age. They had children to play with and 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.

[00:23:43]

Q: Can you...let's return to the concept of Pontchartrain Park being a safe haven for you, Mr. Morial, and more importantly, your children. Can you explain that a little more?

SM: Well, there were friends of my parents who commented. They knew we grew up in a mixed neighborhood and a diverse 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? And we agreed that number one: We were all young families, homeowners, had the same interest, 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.

[00:24:41]

Q: We talked about the Park being an advantage, the Park itself being an advantage. Were there other advantages to raising your children in Pontchartrain Park? You mentioned the fact that there were other children in the neighborhood. What other types of advantages? There were churches, there was a university and the community.

SM: Yes. There was Southern University that had just opened around the time we moved there. There was the public school, Coghill School, but the Catholic school was in the white neighborhood Saint Gabriel. And so if we wanted them to go to Catholic schools, they would have to go into Gentilly Woods. The first year that the schools were integrated, we registered my two oldest, Julie and Marc. There were not many blacks that were there in the first years. But there were differences. The children brought the ideas of their parents. It was ingrained in them. But 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, you know, it was following the law. So my children went to the Catholic school. They had friends who went to the public schools in Pontchartrain Park. And that was good. So I was, as an afterthought, I was glad that they did go to the integrated schools, the Catholic integrated school, Saint Gabriel to have that experience even though some of it was negative. It wasn't overt, it was subtle. But it was there. You know what those subtleties can do to young people.

[00:26:52]

Q: Now we talked about your children's experiences. In Gentilly Woods, there was also the shopping district that we called the Front. SM: Absolutely. Q: There were two big box stores Maison Blanche on one end, Sears on the other, and in between grocery stores, restaurants and the like. You had to traverse Gentilly Woods as well. SM: Yes. Q: Not by foot by car, but you had to interface with people at the Front. Did you encounter any experiences? SM: Not that I recall. I guess there were maybe snubs but nothing overt. Nothing verbal that upset me. In fact, sometimes white people spoke to me. Not that they knew me even from school, but just nice people who were kind of polite. 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.

[00:28:06]

Q: Any neighborhood friends? Did you develop lifelong friendships with people around whom you lived? SM: I did. Many in Pontchartrain Park but I had one friend, early on, Clare Katner, who had a lot of children who were at St. Gabriel. And two of my children were in the same class as two of her children. And her husband worked for the city. I think he was in City Planning. She invited our family to dinner. And she had six children and at the time I had three. And so we went into Gentilly Woods. And she told us this story. She said, "my neighbor down the street. 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," but she said the neighbor down the street told her children in the presence of a woman to her own children, the presence of Clare's children, "now, you be nice to those little colored children but don't play with them." And she said, of all things. "How can she teach that negative thing to our own children? What are you saying? Don't play with them. Why? What's wrong?" And so...she was Christian enough and brave enough to invite all of us to dinner. And so we came into the neighborhood. And so were lifelong friends. And right now she lives right up the street in that apartment building. And so sometimes we go to Church together. So there were good people who were willing to take risks. And by risks I mean snubs from their neighbors, their neighbors with whom they had been friendly, but she didn't mind. She didn't mind that. She did what her conscience told her. She should do for her children.

[00:30:23]

Q: Right across the street from your home, as you stated, was the playground, but it was not only a playground. It was 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 bitty basketball team, the NORD basketball team, and he was also on the football team. Was it the Mid-state? Q: It was the NORD 85 through 120-pound football. SM: But did it have a name like... Q: The Patriots. SM: Yeah. So Marc participated in both of those sports which happened right there in the Park. Q: Literally across the street. SM: Yes. I can look out my window and see him and 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 he got tired, came in and ate and then he was ready to do his homework. But that was his, that was his day structure.

[00:31:42]

Q: Do you remember the game, Marc's last game as a Pontchartrain Park Patriot before he went off to high school? SM: I don't. I only remember the champion basketball player. It was a bitty basketball team. Yeah, and Marc was, I was talking to Marc last week and he was reminiscing on, on the NORD football and basketball experience he had. Q: The reason I queried you is because in that game in which I

played, we were beating Lakeview, one of our rival teams. And of course, Pontchartrain Park was one of two black teams in the Lakeshore District of NORD. We were playing a rival team, well-equipped, well-endowed Lakeview Vikings. And we were beating them handily. And in that game Marc Morial did something no other NORD player did before or since. He kicked a 20 plus yard field goal. SM: I remember that. Q: Yes. Yes. Yeah, and I think there was a write-up if I could remember in the Times Picayune shortly thereafter. SM: Yes. Q: What is remarkable is that we never practiced it. He only practiced kicking from far distances as you just described. But in that game, everything fell into place, miraculously. Snap was good. The hold was good. And the kick was through. 20 plus yards. I don't.... Right now, NORD doesn't even play with goals. There's just the goal line. So there's no way for people to kick that far. That was done in 1969. If not '69, no later than '71 or '72, which was remarkable then and would be remarkable now.

[00:34:09]

Q: Were 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 of course, he 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, they were strategizing how to get the state to conform to the national...the result of the Brown decision, the national mandate to desegregate the schools. So he was, he was busy. He was gone all the time and he regretted that. And of course, I was home. Three other children. And so I and I talk about, we've talked about it now because his son is a, is a, really great basketball player in New Jersey where they live. He's now a freshman in college, but he, Marc, went to every single game. He said, I'll arrange my schedule. He says, because I remember dad was too busy to make all of my games. And just last week, really, we were talking about that.

[00:35:37]

Q: Now, let's get back to the Civil Rights issue. 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. SM: Yes. Q: In Pontchartrain Park, there was Mr. Morial and you. There was Dr. Adams, the podiatrist, who was a major Civil Rights stalwart. There was Dr. Mitchell, the optometrist. SM: Yeah. Q: who was a Civil Rights stalwart. SM: Yes. Q: What was it about Pontchartrain Park, do you think, that gave rise to these activists? SM: I think they were all professional people who chose to live in Pontchartrain Park. Who were aware of what was happening, not only in the country, but what was happening in our state, and in our city. And I think that during that time, many young black women and men were involved in some way, in some small way because this was a life-changer for them and their families.

[00:37:02]

Q: Let us talk about the women and the Civil Rights era. In particular, the Civil Rights Movement, that movement for integration. We had, coming out of Pontchartrain Park, several young women, very young women at the time, who were audacious enough to create a political organization which served to educate other black women and men around the city. Can you... SM: You know that well because your mother. Q: Yes. SM: Was a charter member. Q: That's right. SM: We, in my case, early on during the Civil Rights Movement. I couldn't... Of course, it was all over the news. You know, I think that's what accelerated the activities of the Civil Rights Movement because everyone all over the country was seeing what was happening all over the country, as well as what was happening in this city. And so this motivated many of them to become involved. So I belonged to a women's group. There were eight of us and we did the typical good deeds of that time. We would have rummage sale and give it to the orphanage. We would visit the orphanage to interact with the young women who weren't going to get out until they were adults. 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. I saw on the news and said, okay, what happened that wasn't on the news? And I decided I was home with two toddlers and I said, well, I don't, I want to do something, but I'm limited. I'm working. I have young children and I have a husband who is very active and not home a whole lot. So I went to my eight friends, seven friends and said, you know, we could really make a contribution.

[00:39:12]

SM: We first, I had a white friend from Gentilly Woods who belonged to the League of Women Voters and she talked about that they had just gotten a grant to do voter registration. So I said, well, you think, are there any blacks in the League of Women Voters? She said not in this neighborhood. 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. Why? Because it was against the law. It was a state law that said white and black people could not meet together or eat together. And that impacted the restaurants. 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. She was my dear friend back then. And so, we educated ourselves to what the registration process was. It was very, very involved. And the intent was to keep as many black people off the rolls. So we educated ourselves and then we selected four places to do what we call voter registration workshops. Black churches always welcomed us and then we went to the Guste Homes, which was the first senior citizens federally funded apartment complex. And so one of us was assigned to each of these.

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SM: We had one day a week where we led a workshop, and 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. Now that's not easy to do but you can figure out ahead of time and be ready. But if you figured it out day before yesterday and you get there and you suddenly have this other number in mind and you missed it. But it was a challenge to them because they had to figure out if you were wrong. So, it was an intimidating experience to have to face all that to get the right to vote. But we did it. We were loyal to our areas and we did that for several years and then we added on. We educated ourselves. 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? So we were educating ourselves. So we could in turn educate others.

[00:42:17]

SM: Then we had a brilliant idea of having a meet the candidates session and there wasn't much of that. Some of the old-time political organizations would do that. We did it. It was a city election. Moon Landrieu was running for mayor. We did it at a labor union hall. There weren't many places we could do that. I mean, we were pretty good, you know, figuring all that stuff out. And so there were actually a hundred and one people running in this election, and that sounds crazy, but there's a lot of little parochial positions. So after we set it up to have it in a labor union hall and have some refreshments, light refreshments. I thought I said what's the point? There were no black candidates. I said, suppose they don't come? We have the people and they don't come? So I knew Moon Landrieu because 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. I don't know. So that was good enough. Even if he came, he was running for mayor and we could ask him some questions. Like are you going to appoint blacks to City commissions? What are you going to do for this or that? Almost everybody turned out, then we're curious about these young women who had the nerve to have this big meet the candidates session in a big union hall and they must be expecting a lot of people. So, I think that really gave us the exposure that we were serious. And we were young women who had children and jobs and so, our organization thrived all through the years.

[00:44:17]

SM: Your mama was with me all the time, every step of the way and guess what happened? Katrina came. And all of our members dispersed, left to go to other cities. So many years later and people came back, some restored their houses. There were six of us who were who I contacted, the last presidents and so forth. The previous president. I said, do you think we can bring this together? We need to find a couple, a young live wire because this should not die. So we tried. Two of the women had grown daughters. And so, we tried to pull it together and 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. So, you know, the banks were all upset too because their people were gone and one of our members, our past president, was a successful businesswoman. She said, well, you know, our money is there and it's been eight years since Katrina. I'm going to find out, I'm going to get our interest on that and make it grow. And she really had to do some stuff because she had to work with the bank to figure out what our interest would be and we ended up getting I think it was close to thirty thousand dollars.

[00:46:10]

SM: And this is what we decided to do since we couldn't pull the organization back together. We decided to do two scholarships, one at Dillard, and one at Xavier. We would divide the money in half, and it would be an endowed scholarship, which means you could add more money through the years. And we felt that that was the right thing to do. And the only restriction we had on it was that it would go to a woman. She didn't have to be a political science major. She didn't have to be anything else, but a woman who needed money. In the meantime, I had talked to Dr. Norman Francis, who was president of Xavier, to see if this little money was worth it. He said absolutely. He said sometimes when we're putting a package together, three thousand dollars can make the difference and we thought with twenty thousand dollars and each one of those universities, it could yield in interest, we would only spend interest. Could do maybe \$5,000 if the market was good. So every year I get a report from Xavier that the corpus is growing and they're giving it, let me know how much they're giving to a woman each year. So all it did is it was not lost and some of our original members are gone like your mother, but they left a great legacy.

[00:47:41]

Q: What year did you create? LLOGG? The Louisiana League of Good Government?
SM: 1963, right in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. Q: 1963. And what, how old were you all at that time? SM: Let's see. We were not 30 yet. Maybe 28. Yeah. Q: So very young women. SM: Very...who worked and who had little children and this is what we say. Well, we got 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: Many of the women I interviewed for this project were housewives, but very many women in Pontchartrain Park were not. Very many women like yourself, like my mother were actually professional educators or professionals in some other realm and who actually worked and assisted in purchasing the home, maintaining the home, and the like. In fact, one of the ladies, Mrs. Slack, identified the fact that she was responsible for paying the mortgage every month and she did so as a result of her job. So LLOGG, actually through these scholarships, LLOGG is still in existence. SM: Yes. Q: So from 1963 to 2001 and beyond. SM: 2021 Q: 2021. Thank you.

[00:49:27]

Q: Now, how long did you and your family remain in Pontchartrain Park? We remained in Pontchartrain Park until 1972. We left because we had had a fifth child, and we didn't have any room. And Marc says this in his book. He was pointing out that we lived in the middle class modestly. And he said, our house had three bedrooms, one for the two girls, one for the two boys. And here comes my last one, a girl who's crib had to stay in our bedroom and that was not going to work much longer. So we had owned this lot for several years and could not afford to build on it. so, we started planning and kind of getting our money together and seeing how we could do this. And until we left Pontchartrain Park, when my youngest was three years old in 1973. And 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. But in this neighborhood, there were lots of children and so they had that good experience.

[00:51:10]

Q: So you left the Park because this provided you with a larger area. SM: Right? We needed more room. Q: And what part of the city is your current home in? SM: This is in Gentilly on the fringe of Gentilly in the Seventh Ward, which is a political designation. And we on the Bayou. When we bought the property, all this area was just being developed. They were just putting in a sewer line in the water line and the streets and so forth. So there were no houses yet. They were selling the lots. And we bought this one on the end, and just held it until we could get our money together. Q: Your parents lived... SM: Lived three doors down. Yes, and they bought that as a result after they realized we were buying this house. My husband told my father there's a lot right up the street that's for sale. And my dad loves to fish, not that you could do a lot of fishing here, but it just had that appeal and he likes to Tinker and fix things and so forth. And so he was looking forward to this kind of area and my mother also. And so they built before we did because they had money to buy and we were still, you know, 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.

[00:52:52]

Q: Before you moved in '73, right after you created or helped create LLOGG, the Louisiana League for Good Government in '63. There was in 1965, Hurricane Betsy. You lived through Betsy in Pontchartrain Park. SM: Yes. Yes. Q: How did Betsy impact you, your family and the neighborhood? SM: We flooded. The whole neighborhood flooded out. We didn't have a lot of high water. We had about 10 inches of water in our house. But when we drove out after things had settled down, we had to get a boat to go to my house up the street, the flooded street to see what Betsy had done. What we needed to do to get back if you want to get back and so forth. So this was a real tragedy for us, but more of a tragedy for others who could not come back from that. Q:

Did you all have insurance at the time? SM: We did. We did have insurance, but it was not enough. The flood insurance increased, the coverage increased after Betsy.

[00:54:21]

Q: My father had said that because of Hurricane Betsy, many of the homes in the neighborhood were modernized, for example, central air was added into our home. Prior to that, we had a big, huge ceiling fan. Was that the same with your experience?

SM: Well, we restored the house to make it livable. We closed on the screened back porch and that was our den. And we still had, in our future, building a house here. But we restored it 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.

[00:55:42]

Q: Do you remember any of the Pontchartrain Park Legends? Urban myths? For example, there was the story about this mythical story about the Lady in White? Do you recall? I don't know that story. Yes. The lady in white was, I think there might be some truth to it. I am sure because Marc spent a lot of his time on the playground. I'm sure he's familiar with the lady in white. It was supposedly there was a lady who lived somewhere on the other side of the park near the golf course. SM: The old, original side Q: Yeah, still on Prentiss, not Congress. And 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 and who was in the Park who might have been wearing a gown, whose hair was white and blowing in the wind, but was not as menacing a character as the children let on. SM: You know, I never heard that story. Q: Lady in White. SM: But she was mostly on the old side. Q: Well, was she...SM: She would come over to our side? Q: From the golf course to the playground. And for years, just the mentioning of the lady in white in the spring and summer would clear the Park... for years.

[00:57:38]

SM: You know, 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. And so maybe that's what... Q: Might've carried over. Q: Yes, the lady in white. I'm sure Marc would be familiar with the lady in white. Marc because he was on the Park, a great deal. And this was a Park myth. Wasn't necessarily in the neighborhoods, but on the Park and when I say the neighborhoods in the blocks, but in the Park, it was very real. SM: Let me share this with you, Clyde and you remember it. Remember all parents said, "soon as the street lights go on, you better be home." Well, soon as the street lights went on I could see kids running all over to make it home before it got dark. Q: Yeah, we were a bicycle

community as well. So wherever you were on your bike and the lights came on. SM: You better rush. Q: You were hightailing it on home. That I could remember very well.

[00:58:52]

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, it turned out to be an asset because it, I think it it raised self-esteem. They did not get the taunting and the idea that you're not as good as the rest of them. So I don't regret at all. Even though I loved that I grew up in a very diverse neighborhood. I think that Pontchartrain Park was very healthy for my children. And moved here and my two youngest, lots of kids in this next two blocks. Yeah.

[01:00:22]

Q: So in 1973, did you notice the Park beginning to change? SM: That's when I moved. Q: I know, I know, but prior to... SM: No. I did not notice a change because Marc was still very active on the playground. And I want to remember a legend: Mac Knox, McBurnett Knox, the coach who really had those guys not just teaching them sports, but passing on good character to them.

[01:00:58]

Q: Now, you moved in '73 and of course in 2005, Katrina hit. You lived through Katrina here. SM: Yeah. Q: What was that experience like? SM: Oh, it was horrible. We evacuated. Why we...all of my children were flooded. I was flooded. Monique was flooded. She had bought a house. Julie had just come back to New Orleans. She flooded and Jacques's roof was almost ripped off. So four of us. Well, and me, we were, we couldn't live in our homes and 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. We couldn't come back as I said, it was flooded. She said, go get what you need. People... she brought us cooked food and she brought us fresh food. She was wonderful as were the neighbors. The neighbors sent towels and sheets and all of that. It was just a very Christian attitude, at that time. Those people who did not have, you know, great loss helped others. So we stayed there. Some of us like two years and I was there. Five years, I decided, these people need to get back to their routine. I mean, you love your family and all that, but this is enough, your house had become a hotel and so I rented a house.

[01:03:00]

SM: I had just retired from Xavier University, two months before Katrina. So I had no reason to come back here to live and reason to come back and try to get my house back together, but I had not only flood but fire so it was going to be a major undertaking to restore my house, but I did want to restore it. This is a family homestead that has so many happy memories. All five of my children will be here, 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. Well, first the insurance and so, Marc, no, Jacques and Monique came to see what the damage was. They got boots and masks and all of that and got as far as a bridge and had to wade here to get into the house. And what they did was they pulled up all the carpets and rugs and put them out, emptied the refrigerators and threw out stuff that was gone. Put it out front because they were telling you to put it on an Avenue, put it on neutral ground.

[01:04:22]

So, when I came to meet with my insurance agent, it wasn't as bad as when they came. They had done some cleaning up, but I tell you, when I walked in the side door, tell you the truth, I said I need a minute. Just wait, I can't talk right now. So, the insurance was what I expected. I didn't have any trouble getting it, but that was not nearly enough. And I had no mortgage on this house. It was all paid for. And so, in Baton Rouge, I was thinking how I could recover. And I did...was able to get an architect to see what...you didn't know the house, but we had walls around here. The walls were gone, stripped down to the studs. I didn't put the walls back up. So I've got this open look that I like. But I was coming every week to meet with the contractor. But then I guess a month into the restoration, fire, 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. Q: So, Furniture... SM: No, it was all gone. So I was just intent on getting the house back together. I wanted to come back because I wanted my children to have a place to come on holidays. 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. Outside, it's wonderful.

[01:06:29]

Q: Well, you've done a tremendous job Mrs. Morial in putting your home back together. There's no question about it. Do you have any reason to go back through Pontchartrain Park? SM: I do because I have my hair done in Pontchartrain Park. I pass my old house every time I go. That's once a week and I have such happy reminiscences each time I go. Of course, 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.

[01:07:10]

Q: Are you familiar with Wendell Pierce's efforts to rebuild the Park one house at a time? SM: Yes. Q: It wasn't as successful as everyone had hoped. Q: What are your thoughts? SM: I think that's a great idea because I think well, it's a historical neighborhood. I think it was one of the first all black neighborhoods. I don't know if it's in the South or whatever. I mean there were new neighborhoods coming up with their new developments. I remember in New York, there was Levittown with all the new houses and it was all that concept was spreading across country. Q: Well, certainly in Louisiana, it was the first subdivision style neighborhood for African Americans. SM: Yeah. Q: They were also pursuing this kind of development in places like Atlanta, even Jackson, Mississippi. Medgar Evers Community was just like Pontchartrain Park or very similar to it. But Pontchartrain Park is the first of its kind in the state of Louisiana. SM: Well, I'm glad to know that history. Yeah. Q: Thank you. Mrs. Morial for your participation in this oral history project. Your contribution is tremendously appreciated. Thank you very much. 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]

This has been a presentation of the center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors, the National Park Service, the United States, Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

**SUNO CAAAS PONTCHARTRAIN PARK PIONEERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. VELEZ WHITE**

August 6th, 2019

[00:00:00]

The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project is presented by the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors: The National Park Service, the United States Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

[00:00:34]

My name is Dr. Clyde Robertson. I'm the director of the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans. I'm also the director, co-researcher and co-interviewer for the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project. This oral history project examines the lives and experiences of the original homeowners and residents of Pontchartrain Park. The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Projects team consists of: Connie Abdul-Salaam, assistant professor of history at Southern University at New Orleans, Dr. Mike Meehan, director of Satellite Communications at Southern University at New Orleans and Ms. Helena Francis, senior Psychology major, Southern University at New Orleans. This interview is being conducted in the Millie Charles School of Social Work at Southern University at New Orleans. Today's date is August 6th, 2019 and the time is 4:20 p.m.

[00:01:50]

Q: Please tell me your name? VW: Velez Bluain White. Q: And where were you born, Mrs. White? VW: New Orleans, Louisiana. Q: And what part of the city VW: Uptown around Fourth Street? Q: Were you born in a residence or hospital? VW: I was born in a residence. Q: How many siblings did you have? VW: Four. Q: And were they boys or girls? VW: Is 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 that was on Claiborne Avenue, then I went to Booker T. for ninth grade and then on to 35 for and that's where I finished in June in 1946.

[00:02:52]

Q: Were you, during your life, married? VW: Married to Phil White for 20 years and he died January 26, 1968. Q: Where did you meet Mr. White? VW: In high school at 35. Q: And what year were you all married? VW: June 12, 1948. Q: Did Mr. White join a military unit? VW: He was in the Navy. He served in Korea and Vietnam and in the world war. Q: So Mr. White was a career man? VW: He wasn't a career man, but he was, he was at

Xavier and they called him back and then after he got out of Xavier, they had the Korean War and they had the Vietnam War and they called him back for that one. Q: So he served in three different wars? Do you remember his grade when he exited the Navy? VW: With them two little things on. He was in the Navy. Q: Petty Officer? VW: He wasn't...What's lower than a Navy petty officer? Q: Seaman. VW: Well, that's what he was. Q: Seaman First Class, those two stripes would mean Petty Officer. VW: Right.

[00:04:11]

Q: Now, where did you all....were you married to him while he was in the service? VW: Yeah. Q: Did you all live elsewhere? Where was he stationed? VW: Transferred him to San Diego and I lived in San Diego with him. I had Philip and my daughter and we were there for about nine months and then we came back. Q: Now, how many children do you all have? VW: I have five, four boys and a girl. Q: And two of them were born while Mr. White was in military service? VW: 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: Where did I live? I lived on Second Street and then I lived in the Magnolia Project. Q: So, 2nd Street again in Uptown New Orleans? VW: Uptown Magnolia Projects on Washington Avenue. Q: When did you move downtown? VW: I moved downtown in the sixties on Saint Ferdinand Street right off of Old Gentilly Road. Q: Which is in the Gentilly section of the city. VW: Correct.

[00:05:29]

Q: When did you start hearing about Pontchartrain Park? VW: Well, you knew Joe Bradford? Mr. Bradford? You know who Joe Bradford was? He had bought...we had all these children. We were all in this one little cluster and he brought him (Mr. White) out to the park and he showed him where their house was. And that's how he (Mr. White) got to the park. Q: And what year was that? VW: 1962. Q: So you were living... VW: On St. Ferdinand Street in Gentilly and then I moved. Q: When Mr. Bradford shows children (Mr. White) and the children... Were you with him at the time? VW: No, he picked it out without me. Q: So your husband did that, Mr. White? VW: Yeah. Q: Who is Mr. Bradford? VW: Mr Bradford was the guy who enticed him to come and look at the house. Q: And so, the house that Mr. White looked at was on which street? VW: Providence, Providence Place. Q: And was that the house you ultimately purchased? VW: Yes.

[00:06:33]

Q: Now. Did you... Were you aware of the Urban League's survey? VW: No. Q: What about the work that Miss Keller and the Stern's did to promote Pontchartrain Park? VW:

I wasn't Q: Were you aware of the work that Mayor Morrison, deLesseps Morrison, did to promote Pontchartrain Park? VW: No. Q: And were you aware of AP...attorney, AP Tureaud's, advocacy against Pontchartrain Park, the development of Pontchartrain Park as a segregated neighborhood. VW: No. Q: So the way that you were introduced to Pontchartrain Park was by virtue of the fact that your husband... VW: Right. Q: Came and saw it and was impressed by it? VW: Right. We knew about it, we tried... we thought about it when they first built on the old side and then we never did, you know, try to get it then and after Mr. Bradford told him about it, that's when we started looking into it. Q: So Mr. Bradford told your husband about it in '62. And what year did you all purchase your home? VW: '62. Q: '62. VW: We moved December the 1st 1962. Q: In addition to Mr. Bradford, did you know anyone else? VW: No one. Q: How many children did you have when you moved into the Park? VW: I had four. Q: children at that time.

[00:08:14]

Q: Did Mr. White use his VA Bill to purchase the home? VW: Yes, yes he did. Q: Can you explain to us or describe for us your floor plan when you moved into your home? VW: A kitchen, living room, and three bedrooms and one bath. Q: And your front and side... VW: Front yard, back yard. Q: Were there any other young couples, young families on Providence when you moved in? VW: Yeah. Q: Do you remember any of them? VW: Brian Johnson and his family and the Davidson's and the Valerie's, and the Edward's, all those others... Q: All those had young children... VW: Uh huh. Q: When you moved into Pontchartrain Park, what was your profession? VW: My profession? I was teaching at Holy Ghost, 2nd grade. Q: And your husband's profession? VW: Teaching at Hoffman, fourth grade. So you were teaching at both schools? VW: He was teaching at Hoffman and working at the post office at night. Q: And you were teaching at Holy Ghost.

[00:09:34]

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 one room and we had more room, you know, to span out and the neighborhood was nice. Q: Now, you had four children when you moved into the park, but you have five children. VW: Yeah, Leonce was born in February of '63. Q: So, all he knew was...all he knew was Pontchartrain Park. Q: And when you moved into your home, what was your reaction? Q: I was happy. I had my own place. You know? Q: Compare it to your home in the Gentilly section. Compare it. What was, was it comparable? VW: I don't think so. I think it was a little better then what the old was. Q: So you were relieved? Q: Relieved.

Right.

[00:10:52]

Q: Now. Did you know any of the people other than Mr. Bradford? Now, when you moved into the neighborhood, if you found other people. VW: Other people, right. Q: Did you know any of them? VW: No. Q: Did you have, when you moved into the neighborhood, did you have...what kinds of activities do you all do together as a block? VW: As a block? Q: Yeah. VW: We were a neighborhood... Q: Were there backyard gatherings? VW: We did that, you know. It was like family, family oriented, you know. In fact a little boy across the street see's that my grass is cut all the time, and he was a baby. He wasn't even born when I moved out there. Q: But you didn't know any of them when you moved in? VW: No. Q: How quickly did it take for you all to become friends? VW: It didn't take long.

[00:11:49]

Q: Now Pontchartrain Park had a number of people who lived in it. Do you remember, 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: Now when you said you weren't ready to move on the older side of the park, that's that area from 1955 to about 1960, the 1955 through about 1959. Why didn't you all move into that area? VW: Because my husband wasn't ready!

[00:12:40]

Q: Now, let's get back to some of the other stories. There were some 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). Q: What about other people? For example, one of your children played on the playground. VW: Right. Q: Who was influential in his life at that point outside of your home? VW: Who is what? Q: Influential, who influenced Leonce on the park? VW: Philip played on the park too but he wasn't, he didn't play like Leonce played but he played on the park. Sterling didn't do it too much but he did. And Gregory didn't do it but he got his from Philip. Philip used to be on the park all the time. A coach I remember is Mr. Calhoun, Mr. Mac, Mr. Holmes.

[00:13:47]

Q: Were there any disadvantages to rearing your children in the park? VW: Well, the only disadvantage, I think, was when we went to St. Gabriel and they had to sit in the

back and they went to St. Gabriel school and they weren't treated the way they were supposed to be treated. Q: Well, let's talk about that for a while. Gentilly Woods was the Caucasian community that was down Press Drive. VW: Right. Q: A neighboring Community, almost a spitting image of Pontchartrain Park, save for the golf course and the large park. Gentilly Woods had the Catholic Church. VW: You're right. Q: A public school. VW: Right. Q: And the Catholic School. VW: Right. Q: So, which of your children went to the Catholic School? VW: Leonce and Gregory. Q: What school did your older children attend? VW: They went to Holy Ghost and Sterling went to Coghill and Rivers Fredricks and Kennedy, not Kennedy, John Mac. Q: And of course, Coghill is the Pontchartrain Park neighborhood public school. VW: He went to Coghill. That's the only one who went from my children who went there was Sterling, he went to Coghill. Because when I moved out there Philip and them was still going to Holy Ghost so they continued until, they go until they finished. Q: Oh, what part of the city is Holy Ghost? VW: Holy Ghost was on Toledano between Danneel and Saratoga, right off Louisiana Avenue right behind Holy Ghost Church.

[00:15:27]

Q: Now what kind of issues **did** Greg and Leonce have at St. Gabriel? You began to discuss it? VW: Well, they were altar boys and of course they weren't treated like the white boys were. If they had any, they didn't tell me too much about it. Q: Do you remember the ditch? VW: Yeah I remember the ditch, the way you used to have to cross it. Q: Did Greg and Leonce talk to you about...? Q: They probably had but they never told me about it. I know they had the ditch. 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.

[00:16:14]

Q: Let's talk about the recreation component of Pontchartrain Park. We touched upon it. Pontchartrain Park as a neighborhood had tremendous advantages, the playground and the golf course. VW: Right. Q: You mentioned that Philip and Leonce played on the playground. VW: Right. Q: Do you remember which sports? VW: Leonce played it all and he played that Lakeshore District. He was on the All-Star team for the Lakeshore District. But Phil just played all year and he didn't play on no team but Leonce played everything. He did most all of the all of the sports. Q: There was a golf course, or there is still a Golf Course, tennis courts as well, connected to Pontchartrain Park. Did any person in your family play golf? VW: No. Q: Did any of your children caddy or raise... earn money by caddying for the golfers? VW: No.

[00:17:15]

Q: Did you know any children who might have died swimming the lagoons? VW: Yeah, that little guy, I forget his name. He used to live on Prentiss. Edwards was his last name, lived right across from Joe Jackson right across from Joe Jackson, he drowned. And other little guy got...on the track who came and the train hit him. Q: Barnett Johnson. VW: Yeah the other little guy too, the Johnson boy. Q: Barnett. Barnett Johnson VW: Yeah, Barnett. Q: Barnett died coming from Dillard (University). VW: Yeah. Right. And there was another little guy, lived out with Miss Barnes; her grandson died sometime like that too. Q: Swimming the lagoon? VW: I don't know if it was swimming. Think it had something to do with the train.

[00:18:02]

Q: Did any of you have sons or daughters become Scouts? There were several Cub and Boys Scouts. VW: Gregory was a Scout with Mr. Shanklin. Leonce wasn't but Gregory was. Q: As Leonce participated on the park, were you a booster club member? VW: Yes. Q: And what were some of your responsibilities? VW: Well, just the way they had someone go up. What I really remember was, when they played the football game in Gatlinburg, and I went there and I went with two other three other black families that go to that event. Q: That's when Leonce was a part of the All-Star team? VW: All-Star team. They didn't do too much in Pontchartrain Park. They didn't do too much of that.

[00:18:59]

Q: Were you a member of the Pontchartrain Park Association? VW: When I first moved there. Yeah. Q: And do you remember any of your roles and experiences? VW: I didn't do too much. I just paid the little five dollars. Q: Now there are several churches, what two churches, to be specific in Pontchartrain Park (Holy Cross Lutheran and Bethany United Methodist). Which church did you attend? Did you continue to go uptown to Holy Ghost? VW: So when I first moved out here I went to Holy Ghost but then I changed to St. Gabriel. Q: And did you personally experience any negativity? VW: I had to sit in the back of the church and that's the only thing I experienced. Q: And what did you feel about that? VW: Well, I guess since we had to do it, I just accepted it. There wasn't much you could do then or I didn't have the courage to do anything more, but I just...I wanted to go to church and that was the only one they had so I had go there. Q: Do you remember when it changed? VW: Not really, not really. Q: You just remembered eventually being able to sit where you wanted to sit. VW: Yeah.

[00:20:22]

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 and everything. I lost some stuff, not like it was for Katrina and we stayed. We survived it but it was hard. We did had water in the house but we didn't have it seven feet. We just had it to the baseboard. Q: When you moved back into your home, after Hurricane Betsy, how long was that period between Hurricane Betsy and you moving back home? VW: I guess about two or three months. Q: With Hurricane Betsy? Q: Did you have assistance in rebuilding your home? Did you have to rebuild? VW: I had to re-sheet rock but I never had no say...I think I got was a washing machine and they were giving them way over by the station over that way. Q: When you re-upholstered and repaired your baseboards and your floors, did you get assistance from the government? VW: No...Yes I did, I got a SBA loan.

[00:21:54]

Q: What's the difference between the neighborhood coming back after Hurricane Betsy and the neighborhood coming back after Hurricane Katrina? VW: Big difference, big difference. There's more still family oriented after Betsy but now everything's there now. In fact, I got a house next door to me that grows grass taller than you and squatters in there now. Q: So squatters are living next door to you now? VW: Yes. Police had to come out there just last week to try to see if they were in there but they weren't in at the time they came, but they had been in there. It's in one of those brand new houses. Q: Now, after Hurricane Betsy, the neighborhood, the family orientation was still there. VW: Still there. Q: Your neighborhood, your neighbors returned. VW: Everybody came back.

[00:22:52]

Q: Prior to Hurricane Katrina. Did you start seeing the neighborhood change? VW: Yeah. Started to change before Katrina. Q: And how so? VW: For the worst, not for the better. Q: Can you explain that? VW: Well, the Section Eight people came and everybody, anybody came. It wasn't the same as it was before. Q: When did you first start noticing that people were moving out of the Park? VW: I used to have a lady live next door to me and she moved out saying because it was getting to be the ghetto. She moved out over by Mayo, I think. So I guess it was before Katrina, that's what happened. But it's worse now.

[00:23:45]

Q: So, Hurricane Katrina happens in late August, very early September, 2005. VW: Uh huh. Q: Your husband had passed. VW: Oh yeah. Well, my husband dead 50 years. Q: Who was at home with you at that time? VW: Home with me? Myself. Just me. Q: So

you were an empty nester? VW: Myself and my dad. My dad was staying with me. He was like 100 and we left with Miss Jones and went to Houston and stayed in Houston about until about three, about three weeks. And I went to Georgia, I think. And then my daughter-in-law, I think, was transferred to Nashville for six months 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. Q: The trailer in Pontchartrain Park? VW: The trailer in front of my house. They had to do something. So they're moving from the trailer to the apart...to the hotel on Old Gentilly Road, not Old Gentilly Road. The road, I-10 service road, that hotel. And then I got my house built and I moved in my house in 2009. And that's where I am now.

[00:25:13]

Q: Have you changed the floor plan? VW: It's pretty much changed. Is pretty much changed. Q: And how so? VW: Well, 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, and three...I have more baths, but I have two bathrooms before, but now I have three bathrooms now. It's a little bigger but it's but it's up the steps. I gotta climb up them steps. Q: Have...Which of the homes do you think is better? VW: The one I have now. Q: Why is that? VW: Because I have more room. VW: Are you still an empty nester? VW: No. My daughter lives with me.

[00:26:06]

Q: Now, when you were evacuated, did you live with family? I know you were with your daughter-in-law... VW: Yeah, I lived with family, most of it was family. Q: And it took you maybe two years to get back home? VW: Four. Q: Four years to get back home. And you say that now the neighborhood has truly changed. VW: It has. Q: Are any of your old neighbors still on the block? VW: I have three of them, four of them still came back and my immediate part, four of them back. Q: Now, since you've returned have you resumed your membership in the Pontchartrain Park Association? VW: Yes, I have. Q: Are you a part of the Pontchartrain Park Elder's Community? The Elder Center? VW: Yeah. Q: And what types of experiences? VW: That's a good experience. I can play bingo every Monday (laughter). Q: Do you go on any of the excursions? VW: Yeah. Not too out of town ones but the ones that they have locally and I belong to the St. Gabriel's Trumpeteers (laughter), that's a senior citizen from St. Gabriel. Q: And how has St. Gabriels changed over the years? VW: St. Gabriel's it's all mostly black now but it's still a family oriented place. I'm comfortable there.

[00:27:47]

Q: When you rebuilt your house, after Hurricane Katrina, you did that independent of your husband because he had passed. Talk to me about how difficult, or how easy that was. VW: Well, I guess it was difficult to get it done, but I got these different grants and stuff that helped me. I couldn't have done it if I hadn't got the grants. I wouldn't. I don't have a loan or anything but I don't. I wouldn't have been able to do it if I hadn't got the grants. Q: So you got a road home? VW: I got a road at home and I got another kind of grand from somewhere else. Two other kind of grants, you know. But I wouldn't have been able to do it if I hadn't got help. Q: Did you get any assistance, when applying for any of those? VW: Yeah. I guess. Q: From whom? Your children? VW: From Road Home and another one, but I don't know the name of it.

[00:28:41]

Q: Now you mentioned that the home that is next to you that's abandoned is one of the newer homes... VW: Right. Q: Was that one of the homes from Wendell Pierce? VW: Yeah. Q: And no one lives in that home? VW: No one. But first they had it up for sale and Greenup had it and something happened and they don't, they don't have it anymore. And they used to keep the grass cut but now they say the bank have it and the grass not being cut. Q: Mr. Greenup is that the same Mr. Greenup who? VW: That's his son that's the same. When they had it they would come and check on it. But all the signs are gone now. Nobody's in the house. Q: But there are squatters in that home? VW: I haven't seen them but the lady on the other side has seen them. Q: And of course, going back to Greenup. It has to be made clear that that's the same Greenup family. VW: Right. The same family. That's his son. Q: That helped bring Pontchartrain Park into fruition. VW: But I bought my house from Mr. Ross. That was my realtor, Mr. Ross, I think. Q: Is anyone attempting to adjudicate that process? VW: They said they were, you know. And I called but I swore. That's when...but they told me to call the police and that's who I called. But they did come out and check it. But it's like a forest out there right now.

[00:30:07]

Q: So, what do you think about Mr. Pierce's attempts at providing people with new homes in Pontchartrain Park? VW: I think it was a good idea. I'm sorry didn't work out for him, but it was a good idea. Q: Let me ask you this very important question. You were two years, four years away from your home. Why did you move back? VW: Because I was too old to go anywhere else. And that was paid for. Q: Are you happy that you've moved back in and you are satisfied now? VW: Yeah. Uh huh. Q: And of course you stated earlier that you are still friends with those Pontchartrain Park residents who moved back. VW: Right. I am. Q: Are you still friends with any of the Pontchartrain Pioneers from the earliest years, who may not still be in the park? VW: Uh huh. Q: Have many of them that you know moved back to New Orleans, are they scattered? VW: They scattered. Q: Since Katrina or even before Katrina? VW: Before Katrina.

[00:31:29]

Q: What are your most memorable moments, experienced in Pontchartrain Park? VW: Like what? Q: Family? Catastrophe? 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. Q: What do you miss most about the way things used to be in Pontchartrain Park? VW: The people are not as friendly as they used to be. Everybody fighting. They're just not friendly, just not as friendly as they used to be. And you're afraid now to go out because at five o'clock, I'm in, I don't leave out any more you know. I'm content to be to be where I am, you know? And you know what, you just, life just goes on, you just go with the flow, you know?

[00:32:39]

Q: Is there any assistance you could possibly get from the church, from the community center, in terms of helping you solve the problem of the vacant home next door? Can they advocate? VW: Well, you go to those Pontchartrain Park meetings, they say that they know about that and they working on it and that's all I could do, you know. Because they told me to call 311, I did that in order to tell me to call the police. So you know. Nobody cares about that by the grass being high like that, you know? Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add to the conversation? VW: No. I just want to thank you all for interviewing me. I hope...Hope I did everything right (laughter). Q: Of course. Well you told your the truth. You told your story which is what we're asking to do. So in

essence you did everything right. VW: Well, that's all I wanted. Q: Mrs. White, we certainly appreciate you participating and we thank you for participating. VW: Alright. Thank you for taking the time to talk to this old lady.

[00:33:55]

This has been a presentation of the center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans, and the following sponsors, the National Park Service, the United States, Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, for the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

**SUNO CAAAS PONTCHARTRAIN PARK PIONEERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. VELMA SLACK**

June 27, 2019

[00:00:00]

The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project is presented by the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors: The National Park Service, the United States Department of the Interior through the Louisiana Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

[00:00:32]

My name is Dr. Clyde Robertson. I'm the director of the Center for African and African American Studies, at Southern University at New Orleans. I'm also the director, co-researcher, and co-interviewer for the Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project. This oral history project examines the lives and experiences of the original home owners and residents of Pontchartrain Park. The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Projects team consists of Connie Abdul Salaam, assistant professor of history at Southern University at New Orleans, Dr. Michael Meehan, Director of Satellite Communications at Southern University at New Orleans and Miss Helena Francis, senior Psychology major at Southern University at New Orleans. Today's interview is taking place at the Millie Charles School of Social Work building. Today's date is June 27th. 2019. And the time is 3:47 p.m.

[00:01:47]

Q: Please tell me your name. VS: My name, my full name is Velma Lee Wilson Slack. Q: And what year were you born, if you care to share that with us? VS: I was born April the 28th, 1931. Q: Where were you born? VS: I was born in Franklinton, Louisiana. Q: What made you move to New Orleans? VS: After I graduated from high school, I came to New Orleans to attend Dillard University. Q: And what years were those? VS: Do you know I don't remember. Q: Okay. Did you meet your husband at Dillard? VS: No. I met my husband in Franklinton. We are Pentecostal and he played an electric guitar at church. So he came out there for a Revival meeting and I met him then two years before I finished high school. We stayed in touch until I graduated from high school. And when I came here, I didn't live on Dillard's campus. I lived with relatives, a Reverend Julius Burrell and went to school.

[00:03:31]

Q: Was your husband from Franklinton? You said you met him while he was, while you were in Franklinton? VS: No, my husband was born in New Orleans. Q: And he visited Franklinton while playing the guitar in church? VS: Yes. Q: Was he or you in the military? VS: No. Q: And so you got married, while you were attending Dillard, or after you graduated? VS: I was still attending Dillard. Q: And you all were married? VS: Yes. Q: Where did you live when you were married? When you became married where did you live? VS: I was living with a relative Reverend Burrell

in the St. Bernard project in New Orleans. Q: And how long did you and your husband remain in that residence? VS: After we met? Q: After you were married. VS: Oh we didn't live there after we married. We lived at 1900 New Orleans Street. His parents owned a double house there and we lived in a half house. Q: What years were those if you could remember? VS: I married in 1951. You know, I graduated from high school in 1948. And I married in 1951.

[00:05:08]

Q: And you lived on New Orleans Street until you moved into Pontchartrain Park? VS: No, we lived there next door to his parents for about five years and we had children. So we got a larger place at 4141 Gibson Street. Q: And what part of the city is Gibson Street? VS: That was one block on the other side of the St. Bernard project. Q: What year did you move into Pontchartrain Park? VS: In 1963. Q: How did you hear about Pontchartrain Park? VS: I don't even know how I heard about it, but someone told my husband, there was a house for sale in the 4200 block of Mithra Street and he's challenged now, but he was a longshoreman and he was up and he took care of business and stuff. So he went and looked into buying the house. We moved from...he bought you know, when we bought the house, moved from Gibson St. to Pontchartrain Park in 1963. Q: How old were you then? VS: Let's see. I must have been... Okay, I must have been about 32 years old.

[00:06:59]

Q: Can you describe the process of purchasing your home? For example, what kind of paperwork...did you have an interview with the realtor? How did you go about purchasing a home? VS:: My husband took care of all of that but I paid the house notes after, a hundred and forty dollars a month. Q: How much was your home? Do you remember? VS: It was in the teens and I don't have the paperwork because after Katrina all of that was lost. Q: So at the time that you purchased your home, your husband was a longshoreman and you were a student at Dillard. VS: No, I went to Dillard in the evenings after that and finally finished at Southern. Q: In Baton Rouge or New Orleans? VS: Yes. Q: Southern University at New Orleans. What was your degree in? VS: In Secretary Science or something. Q: What year did you finish from SUNO? VS: Not right away because I had children and I went to evening schools before I finished. I had children and I didn't even march with my graduating class. I just got my degree.

[00:08:32]

Q: So at the time you purchased your home, you were a college student? VS: Yeah. Q: What had you heard about Pontchartrain Park prior to your moving in? VS: Before we moved here, we knew that it was that Southern was going to be built. Southern was not built. And that there was an area where colored people were buying homes, nice homes, and everything so we were interested in it. Q: Were you familiar with the Urban League questionnaire of 1954? VS: I don't think so. Q: Were you familiar with the Stern family and their involvement? VS: I can't remember them. Q: What about Rosa Keller, and her involvement in creating Pontchartrain Park? VS: I do remember that name, but now, I don't remember what she did. Q: Miss Keller and the Stearns were wealthy, white businesspersons and socialites who helped contribute to the creation of Pontchartrain Park financially and in terms of other areas of support. They worked very closely

with the Urban League.

[00:10:13]

Q: You purchased your home in 1963. Do you remember how you financed your home? VS: My husband was not in the service but his, but our loan was a VA loan. Now I don't even remember how we got it, but our loan came through the VA department, that one - you know. I remember it having to be a hundred and forty dollars a month. Q: How long did it take you to pay off your home? VS: I know about 20 some years, I guess. Q: When you moved into your home, how many children did you have? VS: I had five children when I moved into my home. Q: Were there any born while you were in your home? VW: One born since then.

[00:11:19]

Q: Can you remember your home's floor plan? Your original floor plan. How many bedrooms? VS: Okay. We had, when you walked in the front door there was a living room and just beyond that wall 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 were in that corner room there, and the girls were in a room that's now the dining room, right there, so it was three bedrooms. Q: Did you choose the bedroom? Did your husband choose the floor plan, I mean, or was that just the floor plan of the home you were able to purchase? VS: I think that was what it was and we were so glad to own our own home because we had been renting with the Slacks and then to Miss Davis at 4141 Gibson Street and then when we were buying a home, this was going to be our house. So we didn't, we weren't too choosy. We were just glad to have it.

[00:12:51]

Q: What was it like when you first moved into Pontchartrain Park, did a lot of families live adjacent to you? VS: Yes. There were no other empty houses. Mr. Dicks lived on the corner. You want all those names? Q: If you could remember. VS: And there was a Mr. and Mrs. James, this is across the street live next door to him. And the Moten's 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 and oh, I don't know the names of the people next door to them. Then on our side on the corner, it was the Collins'. And next door to them was Mr. Octave Smith? And 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.

[00:14:26]

Q: Did you know them before you moved? Or did you meet them? VS: No, I met them after. In fact, 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. VS: Yes. Q: 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.

[00:15:16]

Did those families have children of the same age as your children? VS: Okay. I know the Moten's had children the same age, the Collin's, then Mr. Smith and Mrs. Smith had one son, Octave and he was along with some of my children. 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. And they played ball in the street in the afternoon.

[00:16:09]

Q: Coghill Elementary School was right down the block. VS: Yes. Q: Did your children attend Coghill? VS: They did. Q: Were you satisfied with the education they received there, the teachers...? VS: I was happy that they could go there because 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. Q: Can you remember the name of the principal and some of the teachers? VS: I remember, Miss Bouise, I remember the dance teacher. What was her name? Oh, I probably could think of it but I can't think of it right now. Q: Yeah, I quite understand. While in Pontchartrain...VS: Miss Terry. Yeah. And I can't think of them now.

[00:17:35]

Q: While in Pontchartrain Park, do you remember? 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, on about a two or three blocks on the other side of the school. Q: That would be Dr. Haydel yes, one of the younger Haydel's and then Mrs. Morial, who's a Haydel, lived on Press Drive. VS: Okay.

[00:18:28]

Q: Do you remember through your children some of the mythical stories, some of the mythical legends about the Park or about some people in the Park? VS: I can't think of any now. I don't know, I know 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, they were held regularly. And whatever the school did we participated in because the children were happy. Q: Now, from Coghill, your children went to what Junior High School? VS: Rivers Frederick is what I remember they went to. Yeah, they all went to Junior High at Rivers Frederick. Q: And high school? VS: High schools. I know the girls went to 35 and the boys, Kenneth went to...up on Carrollton Avenue.... Q: Ben Franklin? VS: Ben Franklin. Kenneth went to Ben Franklin, but Rosario went to Kennedy because he wanted to play ball.

[00:20:06]

Q: And College? VS: College, when Kenneth finished...college, he went to Tulane because he wanted to go into law. Rosario went back to Southeastern one semester and when he came home for Christmas, he told me he wasn't going to school no more. But he has a doctorate now but he got it on his own because he dropped out and he worked at Dillard and I really don't know what capacity, but he worked at Dillard. And Valda was a dean of students at Dillard. And Thelma Lee got married.

[00:21:14]

Q: I want to return to your children's childhood. Did they bring home any tales about mythical legendary figures of the park? For example, the lady in white, or you familiar with the lady in white myth? VS: They didn't talk to me about it. I don't I don't remember any of those. Q: Now you said at one point, one of your neighbors would regularly host breakfasts and coffees at their home. Were there any other forms of recreation that you all had on the Block? For example, cookouts, gatherings? VS: Not really at Pontchartrain Park. Now when they started working on Southern University, one year they had an Easter egg hunt and I remember Kenneth won the Easter egg hunt. They had groups and his age group and Kenneth was five years old at that time, too. So it was shortly after we came out here. But other than that, it was football and I know that when Rosario went to Kennedy to school he didn't like for me to come to his games because he was playing football, and he was a receiver and when he'd catch the ball, everybody fell on him. And I would holler and talk about it, get up off my child and he said he was embarrassed. So he didn't like for me to come and the same thing with Kenneth with basketball when he was at what? Q: Ben Franklin. VS: Ben Franklin and it was just he was the only black one on the team and we would just holler, you know, and they didn't like for me to come to their games.

[00:23:38]

Q: Now, did your children play ball for Pontchartrain Park, the NORD program at Pontchartrain Park? VS: I don't think they played in an organized Pontchartrain Park setup. Q: But they played a great deal on the streets? VS: Yeah. Just in the street. They would all play out there and after a while they would come in and make their own Kool-Aid and own hot dogs. Q: Do you remember other games they might have played in the street in Pontchartrain Park. VS: That's about it. Remember, they would come back to the park and play. There were games back at the park, but I don't think they played in any organized games back there. Q: In the street, do you remember them playing a game called cool cans? VS: Yes, they would stack them up. Q: That's right, you would stack the cans up and the object was to knock your opponent's cans down. VS: Yeah, 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. VS: Oh. Okay.

[00:25:12]

Q: Now again, let's talk about your children's experiences. Your children did not go to St. Gabriel. VS: No. Q: Did you all go to St. Gabriel's Church? VS: No, we were Pentecostal Q: To

your knowledge, 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. Well, by the time they finished college, we bought a car for Rosario and Kenneth because they went to Southeastern and we bought a car for the girls. If they had to go somewhere, they very seldom walked out front. Q: Do you remember the ditch? VS: Yes, it's right behind Gretchen's House. Q: In fact, the fact that you all live 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 all the time and then on the weekends, you know, that was church or whatever connected to that. So we never had any problems.

[00:26:56]

Q: Were you a member of the Pontchartrain Park booster club? That's the parents organization in Pontchartrain Park. VS: No, I never joined it. Q: Were you are part of the Pontchartrain Park Association? VS: Yes. We joined that. Q: What were some of your of your experiences there? VS: Now, I really just joined to support because I didn't have a lot of extra time. I had the children and I had to, and I worked full-time. And then by the weekend, there were shopping to do. In the evening, there was homework to help with. So I didn't have a lot of time. We just paid dues, and I don't remember what it was, but I did it to support because I know they were doing different things to build up. That was the reason I joined there.

[00:28:00]

Q: You all moved in 1963. In 1965 Hurricane Betsy hit . Was your property and were your belongings damaged? VS: No, we didn't have any problem with Betsy, but there was water on the corner of Mithra and Press. So, it was a lot of water, and people couldn't drive through for, I guess, a day or two, but we didn't have any water inside the house. No problems at all. Q: Did you evacuate or did you stay put? VS: No. We stayed there. But we didn't have any water in there. Q: Did you have any wind damage to your home? VS: No, I don't believe. It was the strangest thing, whatever happened at that time, my husband would fix it. And you didn't, you know, I didn't pay any attention, I guess. Q: Were there any homes in your vicinity that were damaged? VS: Not severely. There might have been some little things but it wasn't to where anybody had to move out anything like that. Our area was pretty good.

[00:29:31]

Q: 1965 on into the 1970's, at any time before Hurricane Katrina, did you notice the Park changing? VS: I don't, I don't think so. Q: See any families that you were familiar with in the early 70s moving out?...the 70's through the 80's moving out? VS: I don't remember anybody moving out unless... because everybody was happy on our block. I don't remember anybody moving. Q: Prior to Hurricane Katrina, there were, in some areas of Pontchartrain Park, a number of people to move 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. Because my husband added on to our house as much house as we already had, so my house is twice as large as it was when we bought it. It's a four-bedroom house with three bathrooms, three full

baths. And after the children finished college and whatever they were offered jobs, they started going away. So we would have never left if Katrina had not come.

[00:31:27]

Q: So let's actually talk about the Hurricane Katrina experience, for Betsy you did not evacuate. Did you evacuate because of Hurricane Katrina? VS: Yes. And 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 I told her I was not going to evacuate so she got a room in Jackson Mississippi because that was the closest room she could find. And she told me we had to go and if we didn't go, they were not going to give her her money back. So that's the only reason we left because we had never flooded. So we went to Jackson, Mississippi and a little hurricane, or something, came through while we were there. And I don't remember how many days we were there, but then the news came about the problems and New Orleans and Velma and her husband lived in Atlanta. So we left the hotel and went to Atlanta to live there. And that's when we found out that all of the flooding in New Orleans and we stayed there until we tried to get back home.

[00:33:10]

Q: Was your home on Mithra Street damaged? VS: Yes, the house itself is pretty sound, but inside all the walls, the refrigerator was up in the air and all the furniture was ruined. All the clothes, all my fur coats. Everything was damaged. So we had to get rid of everything in there.

Q: Now when you remodeled did you go up or back? In essence did you add a second floor?

VS: No. Q: Because many times the second floors were not damaged, but the entirety of the bottom floors were damaged many times. When did you decide to move back? VS: Well, at first they told us we couldn't go in Pontchartrain Park. Nobody was allowed in there and that was kind of word of mouth from friends. As soon as they told us, we could come home, we came and we couldn't find anywhere to rent and our neighbors and everybody was just like us-- nowhere to stay. So a Minister that we knew, Clayton Neil, lived in Mandeville and 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 or anything. And we went there, and then when we came down, we saw all the brown trees and how everything was. And that's how we ended up buying a house in Covington. We would go out looking for a place to live and they were building areas, a hundred houses and all like that. So we could have waited until January, waited until July the next year, for a house but we kept looking for a house. We would drive through and look so we found this one house in the North Park Subdivision. It was a gated community and 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 house. 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 and

[00:36:21]

Q: What year? Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, when did you all move to Covington? VS: We lived with Clayton. I guess we must have come back here in 2007, something and that's when we

bought that house in 2007. Q: Did you sell or abandon your home in Pontchartrain Park? VS: No. We... 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. So, my husband, he would wake me up at night talking about how everything he ever worked for. I mean, "it's just like, I never worked. I don't have anything" and he worried about that until he had a stroke and while he was in the hospital, he had another stroke. So there I was with these two rental houses and Pontchartrain Park house and a husband. So I had, I was really challenged, you know? So what we did is I was going to get somebody to fix the rental houses. So we got a church man that we knew and he didn't do a good job and so we had to let him go. And then the city condemned those houses because they weren't fixed quick enough. So I was able to sell them, the two of them for less than \$50,000. So then I still had the Pontchartrain Park house and first, we had to hire somebody to clean it out. So that was something they did and then my husband had another stroke. And so every time he would have a stroke, I was in the hospital. So the house was sitting there. It was a long time trying to get the house finished, but we had the house in Covington, it was not completely furnished like I had this house but we had bought some furniture. So we struggled for a while, trying to get things done. So my husband finally had another stroke. Then he had a heart attack. While he was being treated for that, they found blood on his brain because he was having seizures and they said that was from all those aspirins that he had been taking. So we worked with trying to get the blood off of his brain. And in the meantime, he had glaucoma and he went blind. So now he's in a wheelchair. And he's, you know, he's challenged. I didn't want to put him in a nursing home. So I just take care of him. So that's what happens with him. But the house in New Orleans, is... the house is about finished but it's not like I would want it and it's not as furnished as I would do it. But we do have the bedrooms, the kitchen is finished, the baths are finished, and we come down sometime and stay, but I, you know, I went through a lot with my husband being challenged.

[00:40:52]

Q: So when you say we come, it's you and your husband. Q: Yes, I have a son that live in Maine. He, after the hurricane, a guy that he went to college with Theron, the youngest one, he went to Maine. And so he's home right now and I wish he would stay but he just comes to help me some with his dad. Q: And I don't know if we actually got your husband's name? VS: David Lee Slack. Q: So, you're rebuilding your home, it's practically finished. Have your neighbors returned to Mithra? I believe Mr. Dix is there but I believe his wife is deceased. James's family is gone. They didn't come back after the hurricane. The Moten's didn't come back. The Lacage's, Mr. Lacage who lived across the street too. Well, he's deceased and his wife so... That house is still there. I don't know who lives in it. And Gretchen lives in the Bradford House. The Coleman's lived next door to me, the Smith's are gone, and Collins's people are gone.

[00:42:27]

Q: In addition to your neighbor's some being back, some having gone, some having passed on, what other differences do you see on the Block? VS: The houses are not the caliber of houses that we had. They're just a little house and the neighborhood is not kept up like we did. So it's, it's really changed. Q: And Coghill? Does Coghill exist? VS: Coghill does exist and I have not

been over there since the hurricane because my children are all grown.

[00:43:24]

Q: Are you aware of or familiar with Wendell Pierce? VS: I know who he is, but my children know him. Q: Are you familiar with his post-Hurricane Katrina efforts to provide people with new homes in Pontchartrain Park? VS: I am aware of that. Do you think that the new home constructions inspired by Wendell Pierce are actually good additions to Pontchartrain Park? VS: 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. You have maintained your home and Pontchartrain Park. Do you have any regrets? So are you happy that you have maintained your own? VS: Um, You know. I think that since we have another house, I'm never going to sell this house. There's some things I want to have done and as my husband gets stabilized, I do have other things done there. I want an iron gate and the driveway needs to be replaced. You know, it's kind of cracked and places. I need to have that done. It's a few things I want done. But the children will have to sell it after both of us are gone because I'm never going to sell it. Q: Is there a reason why? VS: Because that's the first house we bought and I don't have to sell it so, I'm not going to. I'm going to try and finish it for them. But we were so excited to have that little house. It's twice the size I told you, but my daughter went back to Philips School and told her classmates that we were moving to Pontchartrain Park, Louisiana **(laughter)**. So we were all excited that we had our own house and I just, you know, since there's no reason to really get rid of it. I'm going to keep it.

[00:46:12]

Q: Are you familiar with the efforts being launched by Gretchen Bradford and other current members of the Pontchartrain Park Association? VS: I know that Gretchen is involved and I don't know exactly what she does because we really live in Covington most of the time and one of the reasons we live there is, I've found that the crime in New Orleans is different than when my children lived here and so we are more involved in the house in Covington. I know Gretchen is involved because I know she has the fair and Theron came home one time when the fair was going on too.

[00:47:11]

Q: Are you familiar with the fact that they are attempting to make Pontchartrain Park a historic neighborhood, to add it on to the historic registry? VS: Is that what this is? Q: This is actually an oral history that's not associated with that effort but it is an effort to identify the significance of Pontchartrain Park historically. But what Gretchen's organization is trying to do is create... Is to insert Pontchartrain Park into the National Historic Registry registering Pontchartrain Park as an official historical neighborhood. Are you supportive of that effort? VS: I will be.

[00:48:14]

Q: We know that many of the initial residents of Pontchartrain Park are no longer in the neighborhood or even in the city. Some of them have passed on. However, do you continue your friendship with anyone from those earlier years? VS: Well, of course Gretchen is, you know,

they were, we were my children and theirs was always in and out and the Coleman's right next door. They were always in and out. Any other family out here? I don't. I don't really know a lot of people that live here but if you drive through it's not the same Pontchartrain Park and also it looks like there's a lot of rental property and I have gotten letters. People would just write me and want to buy my house so I don't even answer them because I'm not interested.

[00:49:32]

Q: So in your opinion, the neighborhood has changed for the worse. VS: Yes. That's what I think. You live out here. What do you think? Q: Yes. I agree. What were... What are, I should say, some of your most memorable moments in Pontchartrain Park? When you think of the Park, what do you remember fondly? VS: Okay, well one thing about Pontchartrain Park is when the children were going to school, they could just get dressed and walk to school. They didn't have to wait for brothers and sisters because I felt like nobody was going to bother them. And I was right because I never had anybody attack my daughters, nor my sons. And so that was... I was comfortable with that because when they live 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 and whatever. So that was one of the things. Being affiliated with the church, sometimes the Ladies Auxiliary would do things at my house luncheons and meetings that I would have. I was proud of the way my house looked. I like those kind of things and we just had a kind of family affair, kind of relationship in the whole block. That's why I know everybody that lived in that block.

[00:51:28]

Q: Is there anything you miss most about how things used to be? VS: Well, it's all different for me now. All of my children are grown and nobody really lives in Louisiana. Theron is home now and he is in an ant's nest to leave. But the children were little and grew up and you watch them grow everything. And now I don't even have baby pictures, you know so everything is so different. My neighbor's, so many of them, the husband and the wife are deceased, so that makes it different and then you have people that seemingly are rentals and you notice the way the property is kept is different. So those are things you look at.

[00:52:45]

Q: You've mentioned that Mr. Slack was a longshoreman. There were several longshoremen in Pontchartrain Park. For example, Mr. Henry, Chink Henry. Did you know any of the other longshoremen in the neighborhood? VS: No, I didn't know any, he would know them because sometimes if he was cutting the grass or something, some of them would drive by and they would talk for hours outside and wouldn't even come in, you know, but 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 and all that stuff.

[00:53:42]

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to discuss that we didn't touch upon? VS: No, not really. I don't think the crime is real bad in Pontchartrain Park. It is just bad in New Orleans, I think. And

so you're not as comfortable, you know, with living in the city as you would be. And, of course, I'm accustomed with living where I'm living and security drives up, and down all the time. and that's what I'm accustomed to now. Q: Well, Mrs. Slack on behalf of the team, I'd like to thank you for participating in this oral history about Pontchartrain Park Pioneers. Your contribution has been immeasurable. Again, thank you very much.

[00:54:52]

This has been a presentation of the Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans, and the following sponsors: the National Park Service, the United States, Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

**SUNO CAAAS PONTCHARTRAIN PARK PIONEERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH MRS. YOLANDA HENRY**

June 17, 2019

[00:00:02]

The Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project is presented by the Center for African and African-American studies at Southern University at New Orleans and the following sponsors. The National Park Service, the United States Department of the Interior, through the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development and the Division of Historic Preservation.

[00:00:33]

Good afternoon. My name is Connie Dorsey Abdul-Salaam. I am assistant professor of history at Southern University at New Orleans and co-researcher & co-interviewer for Pontchartrain Park Pioneers Oral History Project. This oral history project examines the lives and experiences of the original home owners and residents of Pontchartrain Park. The Pontchartrain Park Pioneer oral history Project team consists of Dr. Clyde Robertson, Director of the Center for African and African American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans; Dr. Mike Meehan, Director of Satellite Communications at Southern University at New Orleans; Miss Helena Francis, senior psychology major at Southern University at New Orleans. Today's date is June 17, 2019 and the time is 4 p.m.

[00:01:48]

Q: Please tell me your name. YH: My name is Yolanda Kay Henry Q: And your date of birth. YH: My date of birth is February 4th, 1933. Q: Where were you born? YH: I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana

[00:02:10]

Q: What area did you grow up? YH: I didn't grow up in New Orleans. I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio and Los Angeles, California. Q: Were you in the military? YH: No, I was not in the military. Q: Your husband was in the military? YH: My husband was in the military. Q: What branch of service? YH: United States Army.

[00:02:42]

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. All I know is he came down to New Orleans from California before I did. He came down to get a house for his family. At that time, we had three children, and he came first.

[00:03:18]

Q: Are you familiar with the Urban League's Housing Questionnaire, and the survey of 1954? YH: No, I was not familiar with that. Because in 1954, we were still living in Los Angeles and that's that, that's the year I got married. 1954.

[00:03:48]

Q: Your husband, was he from New Orleans? YH: Yes, he was, he was from New Orleans. Q: What area of the city did he grow up in? YH: In the Ninth Ward. My husband was Clarence Henry Jr., and his dad was President of Local 1419, Longshoreman's Union.

[00:04:14]

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your stay in California. Why did you move to California? YH: I was living in Cincinnati, Ohio and this particular summer, the summer of 1947, my godmother sent for me to come and visit her in Los Angeles. And of course, I was excited and went! My mother let me go. And living in Los Angeles, meeting everybody out there, it was surreal. I wrote my mother, and told her that she gotta come to California, she gotta come. And my mother and my sister did come to Los Angeles, and that's how I ended up living in Los Angeles.

[00:05:15]

Q: We talked a little bit before, and you said that your family moved to California, and then you came back to New Orleans. How old were you when you came back to New Orleans? YH: when I came back to New Orleans, I was almost 25 years old. We came back in October, and we moved into Pontchartrain Park in April. So, came back in October '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: And at what point did you get married, what year did you marry your husband? YH: Oh, we got married in July, 1954.

[00:06:40]

Q: So when you came back home, and although you did say that your husband, he took care of all the paperwork, 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. Q: You were waiting for your house, yeah. So, waiting for your

house, where did you all live? YH: Lived **on** Treasure Street, almost across the street from Dillard University. As a matter of fact, Judge Israel Augustine's parents were my next door neighbors.

[00:07:34]

Q: So, as you moved in, what was your profession at that time? YH: Housewife

Q: Housewife. How long did you stay a housewife? YH: 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.

[00:08:01]

Q: So, were there any negative talk, or positive talk, or discussion about obtaining a home in Pontchartrain Park? YH: If it was, I didn't hear it. Being a housewife, I was home, not out in the public, like most people. I was a housewife at home with my children.

[00:08:34]

Q: So in 1954, you purchased your home the same year... Q: No, we got married in 1954, we were still living in California. I purchased our home, I guess you would say it had to be '57 because we moved in April of '58.

[00:08:56]

Q: So what was your reaction after moving into your home? Did you enjoy your home, did you like it? YH: Oh, I enjoyed my home, I enjoyed getting it together. Doing work in my yard, getting my yard together. It was fun. Even though I had four children, I handled it all.

[00:09:18]

Q: So how did your husband finance your home in Pontchartrain Park? YH: I couldn't tell you. Q: Okay. So he totally took care of everything. YH: Everything, he took care of everything.

[00:09:38]

Q: And how many children did you have, total? YH: Total, four children: three boys and one girl. Q: Okay, three were born in California. YH: Yes, and one here, in New Orleans. Q: : So, how long have you lived in Pontchartrain Park?

YH: Lived in Pontchartrain Park? From 1958 until Katrina in 2005.

[00:10:13]

Q: So describe your home's floor plan, how many bedrooms YH: We had three bedrooms, one bathroom, living room, and a kitchen. Q: Okay. And your husband picked that out also. YH: He picked out everything, I just moved in.

[00:10:40]

Q: So what was it like when you first moved in Pontchartrain Park, the neighborhood? YH: I lived on Prentiss Avenue, and my house was in the last block, you had to turn around. If you came down my street, you had to turn around to go back to Congress Street to get out of the Park. There was three houses past my house. At that time. Ed Adams was the last house. Well, the first house. And once you got to his house, you had to turn around and go back, if you wanted to go back out of the Park. Because from his house on was like, nothing but black forest, I guess you could say, it looked like a forest.

[00:11:43]

Q: So it was still being developed. YH: Still being developed. Q: Now on your block, how many families would you say was there? YH: 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. Yes.

[00:12:13]

Q: So where were they friendly? Did they give you a warm welcome when you moved in? YH: Well, I think we were like the third, if I can remember correctly, I think we were like third family to move in that block. The Adams', the Francis', and us. We had the Perkins' came in, and then the rest of them came after us. Like the Misshore's, it's the Gertude Geddes funeral home people. They came in after us, but everybody, they were very nice. We had a nice group of people on our block. There was never no fighting, no fussing. The children got along fine. We didn't have to run out for the kids to stop fussing. We didn't have that problem.

[00:13:26]

Q: So did you know anyone when you moved in? YH: I didn't know any of those

people. I met them all after I moved in, and all became friends. Q: The golf course, was it already up and running during that time, I know that was one of the amenities for Pontchartrain Park? YH: Yes, it was up and running, it was still like getting it together. Yeah. But it was there. And that's the one thing I liked about it. I like 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 go onto the golf course, and that's where I still am today.

[00:14:18]

Q: Okay so do you remember any great stories or legends about the neighborhood? There's one, Dr. Robertson, he always talks about the "Lady in White." Did you hear anything about that? YH: I didn't hear too much about it, but they used to say something about a lady in white or a lady in grey out on the golf course, but I never saw. That was mostly among the children, you know, not the adults. It was the children.

[00:15:03]

Q: So what are some of the great personalities? You've already mentioned some of the names like the Geddes. So what are some of the great personalities from Pontchartrain Park?

[00:15:19]

YH: Hmm. Yes, we can say the Greenups, because he was in that real estate, and a lot of people knew him because of that. And he was very much interested in the development of Pontchartrain Park. And a little bit about John Roux, who was the golf pro. Mr. John Roux was the golf pro. He lived down the street from me after they finally built houses and my street was opened to Press. Yeah, so he lived on the same block I did.

[00:16:12]

Q: Were there any advantages to raising your children in Pontchartrain Park, what were some of the pros, or are advantages of raising your children there.

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 you enjoyed raising your children there in Pontchartrain Park. YH: Yeah, you know when they were small.

In California, same way.

[00:17:10]

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 clubs, okay? Q: Within the City of New Orleans, anyone in particular you can remember?

[00:17:33]

YH: The Vikings. At that time it was like a new club. They already had like, Original Illinois, Bunch, and Studs. But this was like a relatively new club, and he belong to that organization, and they would have picnics other than just giving a dance, a ball once a year.

[00:18:02]

Q: And these events were held outside the park. YH: Oh yes. And then they also, the ladies, the wives and significant others of the club members, they formed a club. And so I was in a club, so we had plenty activities going on.

[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 Michoud when Michoud opened up. Q: And What was his occupation at Michoud? YH: He was a ... I can't even remember now.

[00:18:58]

Q: So what did you do for recreation? YH: I joined the club, for the wives and significant others, that the Viking had. And as a matter of fact, Leah Chase, Chef Leah Chase, was a member of the club. Her husband was a Viking.

[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 that meant I was home all the time, I didn't have to interact with them one way or the other. I never had a problem. Q: And your husband drove you to all the places that you needed to go. YH: That's correct. 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.

[00:20:17]

Q: Do you recall your children having any types of negative incidents, or maybe even positive, with the people in Gentilly Woods? YH: No, everything was centered around Pontchartrain Park. So there was no interaction except when they went to-- well, my oldest son, he never was accepted in St. Gabriel School. They never did, they always claimed they didn't have a space. But they took the three younger children. But they didn't take that older child. Q: And how old was he at the time? YH: He was...when they integrated, seven, eight. And at that time, you know, the whites, they didn't want to do it. [De]Segregation--they just took little bitty ones, I guess they figured they'd have more control over them.

[00:21:38]

Q: Were you or anyone in your family a participant with NORD Pontchartrain Park Patriots? YH: NORD Pontchartrain Park Patriots? For those kids? Yes. Q: So what sports did your children play? YH: They played softball and a little football; they did that. So it's strange, in my mind I can see the men's faces but I can't remember their names. Because I think now, they're discussing something about naming this playground. After one of the gentlemen who was with those kids. Do you remember, Clyde? Q: [Clyde]: Mr. Mack. YH: Yeah, Mr. Mack, That's right. Q: (Clyde) My father, Coach Rob, was out there. Q: And they enjoyed playing on the park. YH: They even had little cheerleaders. Q: Were you a booster club member? YH: No, I was not Q: Okay. Were you a member of the Pontchartrain Park Association? YH: I attended, I don't recall if I was a member or not, but I think I remember I participated in different things.

[00:23:20]

Q: Let's go back a little bit. You already spoke about St. Gabriel Church. 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 was nothing. You know, it's like that's how it should be. People just go and come, without incidents. We didn't have none in California. Didn't have any in Ohio,

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Q: So you didn't really experience any outright racism. YH: No, because 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: So can you recall your children experiencing any sort of racism at St. Gabriel Church or school? I never had to go to school about anything. I never did.

[00:24:48]

Q: Before Hurricane Katrina, did Pontchartrain park begin to change? YH: I don't think so. I don't think it changed before. Q: Yeah, before Katrina but definitely after Katrina. Q: And did you perceive Section 8 residents in Pontchartrain Park when Section 8 was open to the park, any type of problems from Section 8 residents?. YH: I couldn't tell you, because I haven't had-- I couldn't tell you who was a Section 8, I don't even know if there's a Section 8 on my block. I don't know. There may or they may not be, I do not know.

[00:25:59]

Q: Did you move from Pontchartrain Park prior to Hurricane Katrina? You do stay there until Hurricane Katrina. YH: I stayed in Pontchartrain Park. Until the mayor say, evacuate. And when they say evacuated, I was the only one left in the house at this time because my oldest son was in Africa. And I called him and told him, if you're landing in New Orleans, don't come because we have the threat of a large hurricane. So he landed in New York, and that's where he ended up staying, in New York. My other son was already in Washington, DC. My daughter and my youngest son was here in New Orleans. When they said evacuate, my daughter picked me up. And at this time she picked her daddy up also, because by this time we had separated and divorced. And Marvin, my youngest son, he and his family, they went to Dallas. But we went to Houston.

[00:27:19]

Q: So before we get a little bit more in depth, about Hurricane Katrina, let's reflect on Hurricane Betsy. Hurricane Betsy occurred September, 1965. Did you experience Hurricane Betsy in the Park? YH: When Hurricane Betsy struck, well, before it struck, we bundled up and went to my mother-in-law's house. Because her 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 to walk into her house. So we all went to her house. And it was so funny, that next morning I put my feet on the floor in water. I had left my house to get away from it. Put my feet in water, but what it was, her house had floor furnaces and the water had come up through the floor furnaces. So she had like about an inch or two of water on

her floor.

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Q: And how long did you stay there? YH: After everything was passed over, I mean, you know, like a day or two. That's it. And then we came back, and rode a skiff up to my door. My house was totally dry, my house was totally dry, not a drop of water, and we rode a skiff up to the door.

[00:29:13]

Q: So you didn't have to do any type of repairs, nothing else or anything. YH: Nothing. Q: Was assistance still offered to you, any type of government assistance? YH: We didn't apply or ask for any assistance after everything was okay with our home.

[00:29:36]

Q: After Hurricane Betsy, did the neighborhood change? YH: No. Q: So, alright, let's get back to Katrina. So tell me about your experience for Hurricane Katrina.

[00:30:03]

YH: Well, Katrina--Watching it on TV and listening to everything there is to say about it and what people should be doing. My daughter and her husband called me and said we got to leave. And I was sitting there, ready, waiting on her to pick me up. And she did, and she picked me up, and she picked her daddy up from his house and we met another family who Cherylyn consider her a sister, because she doesn't have a sister, either, she has three brothers. So we like tailgated out of the city. That was the experience. It took us, look like six hours to get from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. Because of that, they didn't have it together, right?

[00:31:16]

Q: So where did you evacuate to? YH: Houston, Texas. Q: How long did you stay in Texas? YH: I was in Texas eleven and a half years, and I loved it.

[00:31:33]

Q: So when did you come back to New Orleans to check on your home? YH: I didn't come back to New Orleans until they let people come back in and all like

that but it was like six, maybe seven before I came back.

[00:32:09]

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 believe it or not, everything that was there you could still have that smell, that smell from whatever. 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. It was all out everything.

[00:33:05]

Q: So did you move back into your house, are you in your house now? YH: I'm in my house now, a brand-new house. My old house had to be torn down, completely torn down. They came and they gutted it. They had an organization, I don't know what the organization was, but it was young college kids who came, working with groups and they came in and they was taking everything out the houses. Q: And were/are you able to salvage anything from your home, after Hurricane Katrina? YH: No furniture, no clothes. No utensils, no apparatus, pots or pans and stuff like that. I mean, I got a few little whatnots, something like that, just a very few. Q: And all your photos. YH: All the photos gone, neither college degrees, I don't have that. I had my high school diploma-- that's gone, but all the pictures, the pictures...Q: So you're glad to be back? Q: It's okay.

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YH: I really got used to Houston, the reason I'm back is I was the only one there, and my children felt like I didn't need to be over there by myself. Houston is 365 miles from here. I didn't have a problem with it. But they felt that at my age I didn't need to be over there by myself.

[00:35:04]

Q: So moving back to Pontchartrain Park YH: Oh yes, 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, I don't understand that at all.

[00:35:31]

Q: So how has the neighborhood changed since Hurricane Katrina? YH: Well, I don't know-- the neighborhood itself, 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 Taylors, the Roux's, the William'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 their sons, is living in their house. So it's like the Mitchell's are still there so it's like four houses. But all the rest of the houses from Piety to Press, don't even know the neighbors. Don't see them. I don't know. Q: Yeah. YH: That's the difference.

[00:36:55]

Q: Wendell Pierce, are you aware of Wendell Pierce's post-Katrina efforts to provide people with new homes in Pontchartrain Park. YH: I don't know anything about it. 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. But anyway, 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.

[00:37:41]

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, and she's in the house with her daughter, Paula 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.

[00:38:54]

Q: So what do you miss most about Pontchartrain Park? YH: I can't say it is anything that I miss, I'm sorry there's nothing I can't say 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.

[00:39:57]

Q: Any memorable moments about Pontchartrain Park that you often think about before the Hurricanes Betsy and Katrina? YH: Not really. I can think of some times when I was working at SUNO. I used to enjoy when 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.

[00:40:36]

Q: Well, we are coming to an end. Is there anything you want to talk about or maybe add? YH: I think you just about covered it all.

[00:40:57]

How long did you work at SUNO, Southern University at New Orleans, and what was your occupation? YH: I started working at SUNO as a secretary and I started in June of 1966, working at SUNO, and I stayed there, I believe I stayed there until about... [Laughs.] I left in the 70s the year the Hyatt Regency opened in New Orleans, because I left there and I was working at the Hyatt Regency in New Orleans. Q: What was your occupation at the Hyatt? I was a supervisor in housekeeping And I stayed there and I went to San Diego, California. Q: It could be where we may know each other, because I worked at the Hyatt during that time, in the 70s. YH: I was there, that's right, supervisor of housekeeping. I will never forget, I had three floors that I had to supervise. And we had 54 rooms on a floor, and that was quite a lot. Finally, they decided that they'd cut it down because they really realized that was too much for one person. 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.

[00:42:52]

Q: Yeah. Did your living in Pontchartrain Park persuade you to work at SUNO, Southern University at New Orleans? YH: I went to, they had a school, we went to school for secretarial training. It was a funded program for disadvantaged, even though I was not disadvantaged. I don't even know how I got in it, because everybody in the program was like disadvantaged. You know, they were either

single mothers with no husbands, or very low income. Well, anyway, I got into that program, and when they sent us after the graduation, everything they set up for job interviews, since I lived in the Park, I think I'll get a job at SUNO. And I got a job with the state, I took the exam and passed it, and I've come and got interviewed, and got the job Q: Working as a secretary, Okay

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Q: Well, is there anything else you may want to talk about, that maybe I overlooked or maybe anything you would like to add?

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YH: No, I think that's it. I am back in my house. And I enjoy my house, it has a porch, which it didn't have before, I have a porch, so I can sit on my porch and look out to the golf course. I enjoy that.

[00:44:48]

Q: Do any of your children live with you? YH: My oldest son will be living with me, he and his wife will be living with me. He'll be retiring from his job and he's coming back in November.

[00:45:10]

Q: So the floor plan, did you change the floor plan? I know you said your husband took care of everything, three bedrooms, living room, dining room, den.

YH: Yeah after we split and were separated and everything, I continued working and everything, so I added a den onto to 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. Yeah. But guess what? Katrina wiped it all away.

[00:45:57]

Q: After Katrina, you remodeled, YH: After Katrina, there was nothing but the piece of land, because the house had to be torn down completely. So now the house is elevated, I guess I would say about five feet. So it looks like a two-story but it's really just a one story, but it appears to be a two-story being elevated. It's three bedrooms, living room, kitchen and a den. Two and a half baths. It's really nice.

[00:46:42]

Q: Well thank you so much. I enjoyed interviewing you, it's quite a story. YH: Well, thank you. If there's something else that I might have forgotten, I'll be glad to call you and fill you in.

[0:47:03]

Q: So, all right. Thank you very much. Thank you.

[00:47:08]

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