

Margaret Bernice Smith Bristow
Interview Summary

Interviewee: Dr. Margaret Bernice Smith Bristow

Interviewer: Katie Fisher

Interview date: January 20, 2015

Location: Paul and Rosemary Tribble Library, Room 211, Christopher Newport University

Length: 1 audio file, WAV format, 1:26:55

THE INTERVIEWEE: Dr. Margaret Bernice Smith Bristow was born in Newport News, Virginia on February 20, 1950 and has remained in the area her entire life. She attended Dunbar-Erwin Elementary School from 1956 to 1963, before enrolling at Huntington High School, where she graduated in 1968. She went on to receive her B.S. (1972) and her M.S. (1974) in English Education from Hampton University. In 1990, she earned her Ed.D. from the University of Virginia. Dr. Bristow taught English at many high schools and universities in the Hampton Roads area. Community activism is very important to Dr. Bristow. She started a community business called BERNICE, Better Education Resources Needed in Community Education. Dr. Bristow also volunteers at local elementary schools to help children with reading.

THE INTERVIEWER: Katie Fisher is a senior at Christopher Newport University studying History and American Studies. She is a part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project through the Ferguson Fellowship program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: The interview was conducted in room 211 at the Paul and Rosemary Tribble Library at Christopher Newport University. Dr. Bristow was very eager to be a part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project and was very descriptive in all of her answers. Much of the interview focuses on: her early childhood and upbringing; her educational and professional trajectory; and her community involvement. Dr. Bristow also addresses the history of race relations and the civil rights movement in Hampton Roads, and her own commitment to black history and culture.

Dr. Margaret Bernice Smith Bristow—Edited Transcript

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START OF INTERVIEW

Katie Fisher: This is Katie Fisher. Today is January 20, 2015. I'm interviewing Dr. Margaret Bristow. This interview is taking place at the Paul and Rosemary Tribble Library at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. This interview is being carried out as part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project at Christopher Newport University. Good afternoon, Dr. Bristow.

Dr. Margaret Bernice Smith Bristow: Good afternoon.

KF: We're taking what we call a life history approach, so we're just going to begin with a few basic questions about yourself and your childhood. So, what is your name?

MB: My name is Margaret Bernice Smith Bristow.

KF: And, when and where were you born?

MB: Born in Newport News, Virginia, February the 20th, 1950.

KF: Great. And who were your mother and father?

MB: My father was from West Virginia, Brownwell---Leroy Smith; and, my mother is Margaret Gatlin from Mufflesboro, North Carolina.

KF: What did your parents do for a living?

MB: Well, my mother went to work when I was about fifteen; and she worked as part-time help in the cafeterias. She became full-time at the first school I went to: Huntington High School. She worked fifteen years there and retired. My father was a warehouseman in Fort Eustis. And, I'm not sure what a warehouseman does, Katie, but I think he passes out supplies---has something to do with supplies.

KF: Ok. Great. Do you have any siblings?

MB: Yes, I have one deceased sibling, my oldest sister, who was five years older than me; and, I have a brother who is nine years younger than me. And, four sisters: I'm a middle child. I have two sisters older than I am, and I have two sisters under me. Wait a minute. Jeannette and Carolyn are under me. And, then Jackie and Brenda were above me, so I'm right in the middle. So, it's five girls, in total, and one boy.

KF: Wow. Where in Newport News did you grow up?

MB: A place called, the South-- it's now called the Southeast section of Newport News. I grew up in a project that's now torn down called the Harbor Homes project. I have pictures of it. I took pictures. I commissioned a girl to do a pastel painting of it, so I could have those memories.

1536-A Harbor Homes. And right across the street was the famous Ridley Circle Projects that produced Michael Vick. Harbor Homes Projects produced Aaron Brooks who was, at one time, quarterback for the New Orleans Saints.

KF: Oh, wow.

MB: Michael Vick's house is still standing, it's the project--. The apartment where he was raised is still standing as part of Ridley Circle. So, that area, it's,--. Well, it's the poorest area on the Census Tract for Newport News, Virginia. That still holds that status: poorest tract on the Census Tract.

KF: Ok. What was it like growing up there?

MB: Well, I would say it was--. We never heard of anybody breaking in anybody's house, Katie, back then. I left there in '63, you have to remember. I was there from '54 to '63. I never remember anybody breaking into anybody's house. Parents were-- there were nuclear families. I could only remember-- I remember the first family I knew was on welfare. And, that was like an anomaly. That was like unusual. Everybody had what they called nuclear families. We had ring games, where all the kids in the neighborhood get in circles, rings. I call them ring games. I can't remember any specifics, we're talking about '50s, early '60s. But there was a closeness. I remember going to the store for this particular lady. Back then, they gave you a nickel, you know. I would never think of taking her money, like even though she trusted me with her, maybe five dollars, you know. She always wanted peanuts, and--. What was it? Peanuts, a Stanback, and a Pepsi-Cola. Growing up, we had a town bully. I had to fight the bully, and me and her are friends, now, thirty years later. She picked on everybody in the neighborhood. It's always one bully. It's always--she was a female bully. I remember, in terms of white people, there was the insurance man who was white. I could've sworn the milkman was white. And, every now and again, somebody came around the neighborhood to take pictures, and they were white. But, other than that, the neighborhood was basically all black. The church was black. The school was black, back then. And, we had the insurance man [who] was white. The picture man, photographer, came and he was white. Very little white contact---very little.

KF: Ok. Where did you move after '64?

MB: To 32nd Street. 719 32nd Street.

KF: Ok.

MB: And, I stayed there from '63 until '72, when I got married and moved into my own apartment.

KF: Ok. So, it's all been in the Newport News area, around here?

MB: Uh huh.

KF: Ok. So growing up, at any point in time, did you ever notice or experience segregation in public facilities?

MB: My father, one--. You know why I didn't experience a lot of what I call the blatant, unequivocal-- what you call it? Unmitigated segregation. I didn't feel it as much as some people did, because we didn't go anywhere. My father didn't have a car until he was like 52 years old.

KF: Oh.

MB: So, we were not--. We didn't have transportation. And, we were a family where my mother didn't have money to go catch a cab here or get on the bus--catch it, you know--with six children. She didn't have the money to do that: I didn't do a lot of moving. What was the original question, too?

KF: Did you notice or experience segregation in public facilities?

MB: And, like that thing about going to the restroom and there was a colored side versus a white side.

KF: Uh huh.

MB: I can't remember that. I just remembered [pause]--. I don't even remember getting on the bus and going to the back of the bus. We talking about '50s, the early '50s.

KF: Uh huh.

MB: I don't even remember that. I remember trying to apply for a job in one of the clothing stores on Washington Avenue, and I'm trying to figure out why my mother didn't tell me that they didn't hire black girls. She never did. I guess she'd let me experience it on first-hand.

KF: Mmhmm. Huh. That's a good way to experience it. So, everything you had like your church and your school [were] all in the neighborhood where you grew up in?

MB: Yeah, yeah, and the movies. The movies, the first movie I ever went to, Katie, is still there. It's called the Moton Movie [movie house], named after Robert Russell Moton. And it was always black and then we had Dixie Movie and the Jefferson Avenue Movie. And that's the way it was, back then. You know, it's like your own little conclave. Your own little clan, just one race.

KF: Huh. Ok. So, I am also curious about the impact of segregation on education in Newport News, and you said that you attended Dunbar-Erwin elementary?

MB: I certainly did.

KF: So, was that an all-black school?

MB: Yeah.

KF: At the time?

MB: I don't remember seeing anybody white, the whole [time] I went, Katie from '56 to '63, June of '63.

KF: Uh huh.

MB: I don't remember seeing anybody white in whole school, the whole time I was there. Now, you have to remember, now, my memory--we talking about '56. I entered school August or September '56, first grade. When I left, that was seventh grade; and, it would have been June of '63. I can't remember anybody white.

KF: Ok. So, that's what we would want to know. So, did *Brown v. Board of Education*, the ruling, have an impact on your experience in school or the school?

MB: I remember when kids in high school had that freedom of choice.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: And some kids were leaving and going to Newport News High. And, I remember some Burden boys went to Newport News High. The guy I'm closest to now, responsible for me meeting President Obama and First Lady, he took a chance and he went to the white school, Newport News High, because it was freedom of choice there. But, a lot of them came back.

KF: Oh.

MB: Yeah, they came back for various reasons. I remember Johnsie Williams. I said why didn't Johnsie Williams graduate with us at Huntington? That's because she went to Newport News High. So, some of them did leave, but they had that choice.

KF: Ok. So, but you stayed through Huntington.

MB: I stayed. Right. My mother never encouraged us to be the first to integrate the schools; never did get any encouragement from the church either.

KF: Oh, ok. So, I'm curious about your experiences at Huntington. What was it like going to school there?

MB: Well, Huntington, we never even--. Say, we had a white teacher did come there to teach sociology. I don't remember having her. I was there, Katie, from '63 to '68. You know, because you had the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade. I remember the person in charge of taking school photos was white. But I never went to any of the white teachers. But, I think we did, before we graduated, there was one or two white teachers.

KF: Ok.

MB: And, some denigrating remarks were made by some of the black teachers in an effort, I guess, a good-hearted effort, to get us to be quiet, to get us to be more orderly. And, it was--. I remember one teacher, her name was Miss Weaver. Stout, real light-complexioned, math teacher. I remember her saying, "That's why the whites don't want to go to school with you, you're too loud." And, she wasn't the only one who I remember saying that, because I think when the teacher got the most angry, is when they made that remark. And, I thought that it was very callously made, then. You know, I said, "Oh Lord, you know. Who would have said such a callous remark." But, it seemed like it quieted us down. You know, "That's why whites don't want to go to school with you." And, I also noticed too, our textbooks were used textbooks from places like Warwick and Ferguson. Now I do remember that, especially, for some reason, I remember the math book being a used textbook from a school, you know, that the whites previously [used]--a book previously used by whites.

KF: Uh huh. Did you have a favorite subject?

MB: My favorite subject in school--. You know what, Katie? I didn't have a favorite subject. I had a very weak subject, and my weak subject was math. Katie, you have to remember, I didn't meet a math teacher with a sense of humor, and confidence, and exuding knowledge until I went to the University of Virginia.

KF: Oh.

MB: Miss (McDougal? 0:11:00.3) was tenured. She was a female math teacher. And she taught statistics, educational statistics. She was the first female math teacher I've ever seen with a sense of humor and made me relax and, thank God, graded on a curve, too.

KF: [laughter]. That's always very nice.

MB: Yeah, so I didn't have a favorite subject. In college, my favorite subject ended up being English. I majored in English. But, I remember, just, you know, making sure I did all the work. Teacher said I only had trouble with math.

KF: Ok. Well, one out of six or seven subjects isn't too bad.

MB: Right.

KF: Can you remember any teachers at Huntington who were particularly influential?

MB: You mean like in terms of racial consciousness?

KF: Sure, anyone who just inspired you to do well.

MB: I would say Miss [Patricia Hayes] Holman. Miss Holman inspired me to compete and to look forward to competing on a larger scale in college. I think she prepared me real well. She taught AP English.

KF: Alright.

MB: So, she was highly inspirational when it came to English because, you have to remember, she had the reputation of somebody never being able to make an "A" on her final exam, and I did make an "A" on her final exam, one of the rare cases.

KF: Oh, great!

MB: I even wrote on the--. The subject I wrote on was an analysis on the imagery of "whiteness" in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, and we're talking about '67, '68. That's when I would have taken that exam. One thing, when I read about folks who are older than me, and the schools they went to, in terms of in the South, and how they had a favorite teacher who taught them about civil rights and the need to fight for justice, I kind of envy them. I was currently reading Coretta Scott King's autobiography--no biography because her sister wrote it--and how they were nurtured at a very early age to be racial conscious, to see the need to fight for justice. I

said, well I didn't get--. What did I miss? I can't think of one teacher who was racially attuned to inspiring me to want to carry on the fight. I can't think of one, I can't even think of one. I think I was in college before I got a teacher who was along the militant line--. Well, I have to choose that word-- I have to use that word cautiously. But, that's one thing I always admire when people say they went to all black schools, and they grew up in the '40s and the '50s as black folk in the South, and such and such teacher made them racially conscious. I said, "Oh wow, must be nice to have that at an early age."

KF: Do you think your teachers or adults, when you were growing up, were more just like going with the flow, just taking things as they were?

MB: I think they were victims of the school administration. Now, with all that civil rights going on in the '60s, early '60s, I was—[In] '63, I was 13 at Huntington. You would think that I would remember a discussion on the civil rights issue. I think they were quieted by the administration. I think it was not politically-correct to discuss that. I think it even trickled down to the principal telling them. You know, I think it must have been some type of code of silence. You know?

KF: Yeah.

MB: It had to have been. I was a student, Katie, who went to school every day. I think I may have missed, in the five years, I may have missed maybe two--. Two absences. So, I was there.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: You know, I was always aware. I graduated number 2 in my class, so you know I must have paid attention. And if they had some kind of racial discussion, I would have remembered it.

KF: Yeah, um huh.

MB: So, I think they were silenced, in a way. And, there's a teacher--. I should go back and ask her too, because she's still living. She has full strength and faculties. I'm gonna ask her. I'm going

to say, "Miss Holman, were you and the principal, in the administration's own way, were you silenced in terms of talking about racial issues?" I still have a chance to ask her.

KF: Yeah, that would be very interesting to find out.

MB: She should be one of the interviews, interviewees. I don't know why I didn't add her name: Patricia Hayes Holman.

KF: I can write it down, and give it to Dr. Puaca.

MB: Yeah, she, I think she'll be a good interview.

KF: Patricia?

MB: Patricia Hayes, that's her maiden name, Holman. She taught at Huntington from the '40s through the '70s. Then she ended up retiring at Warwick.

KF: Oh, ok.

MB: Yeah, she was head of the English Department. She was known as an English teacher. Had a nice reputation.

KF: Great. I will tell Dr. Puaca. Ok, do you remember there being much interaction between Huntington and any of the white schools?

MB: I don't remember. We didn't play them in football, Katie. There were different leagues. I don't remember, I don't remember any interaction. We didn't compete with them like on a-- Maybe an Academic Super Bowl or, you know, that kind of stuff. I don't remember any interaction.

KF: Ok. So integration obviously didn't have an impact on Huntington while you were there?

MB: No, no, not to me. Not an impact enough for me remember and to cite evidence and examples for you. It must not have had one. I remember my school getting a distinction. And, it's a distinction, meaning, it was distinct, it was distinctive among black schools. And, I was proud

of that. Some type of Rosenwald recognition of black schools, and it was one of the sixteen highly recognized in the nation. But, you got to remember now, that's among black schools.

KF: Uh huh.

MB: That was not mixed. And, I remember when I went to the University of South Carolina, the presentation that the school did to get that distinction, they said they were housing it in their archives, somewhere in the University of South Carolina. And, I went looking for it, found the guy who is in charge of the archives, and he later told me that it had now been digitized. So, if I wanted to see it, I would have to see it online.

KF: Huh.

MB: I'm not sure what happened to it physically, the presentation physically.

KF: Ok. So, from Huntington, you went to Hampton University. Why did you decide to attend Hampton?

MB: That's a good question. My two girlfriends, bless their hearts, Hattie (Suber? 0:17:53.3), she was a Hattie Spruill back then, and (Sheryl? 0:17:56.3) Jones, she's still a (Sheryl? 0:17:57.2) Jones. (Sheryl? 0:17:58.7) and Hattie decided to go to Hampton University, and I just followed, you know, that peer pressure.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Just followed meticulously. Where they chose, I chose.

KF: Oh, ok. Do you remember any teachers at Hampton who were particularly influential?

MB: In choosing Hampton, I know Miss Holman had gone to Hampton. And, I remember some of the other teachers had gone to Hampton; they were sponsoring certain girls to be in the same sorority they were in like Miss Lea K. Frazier sponsored my girlfriend to pledge AKA, Alpha Kappa Alpha. That's the oldest black sorority in the United States.

KF: Oh wow.

MB: I wasn't sponsored. I had to pledge graduate chapter. But, I said, "It must be nice to have somebody to sponsor you and pay those expenses."

KF: Yeah, must be very nice. I think we have AKA on CNU campus.

MB: Mmhmm, you do.

KF: Yeah. So your major was English.

MB: English, English education.

KF: English education, ok. What made you decide to major in that?

MB: Because, as I said before, Katie, I made an "A" on a teacher's exam that was very demanding. She was always demanding; it was Miss Holman. The lady I say would make a good interviewee, and I made that "A" and I said, "Maybe I ought to major in English." You have to remember, I didn't think about what I was going to major in till January.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: That's late. School ends June.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: So, it was that exam, and I made that "A." And, so, I have no regrets majoring in English. Lord knows it's been a joy. Oh Lord, I'm still interested in the new research, research in terms of which is the best way to teach high school students English, you know, in terms of the writing process. I'm still interested in what's hot out there. Look, Katie, I'm also interested in animation, now. I want to learn how to animate. I had to pay this guy to animate something I did for the lady I did my dissertation on. But, I'm interested in, you know, having, and even teaching, a class and having the students create their own animations. You know, so, I'm still teachable.

KF: Mmhmm. Well that's good, always good to learn new things.

MB: Mmhmm.

KF: What made you decide to go towards education rather than just, like, regular English major?

MB: You know what, I think it's because that stereotype--. I fell into that stereotype of black folks' professions back then: teacher, preacher, nurse. I think I fell into that. And, then, somehow or another, I thought, "Well, if I taught I could have, you know, a steady income; and, I would be self-sufficient." That's what it was; it was the stereotype of what black folk that were around me were. You know, I didn't know any female lawyers, even though there was a Marian Poe that people spoke about. I didn't know any female doctors. Then my church, apparently, nobody at my church attended the--. I went to an all-black church, going back to 1896, that's when it was founded. But, I didn't have anybody in that profession in the church, Katie. You're just making me remember because there was no female doctors to encourage me to maybe major in medicine.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: There was no female lawyer in my church. But, there were teachers.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: You know and they were the ones who taught Sunday school. They were the ones to say, "You know, you ought to apply to Saint Paul's University, and I can get you into Saint Paul's College." And, you know, they had that kind of response.

KF: Mmhmm. Oh, ok. So, what was it like teaching, fast-forwarding a little bit, what was it like teaching in an area where you also attended school?

MB: Oh, well, you know, I remember teaching at Hampton High, and every time I pass Hampton High, Katie, I still give it a kiss, because that's the first school I got my professionalism, my professional experience. I remember teaching and two of the students--I remember they were brothers--they were at my church. They were in my church, and I remember, you know, I said, "I

sure won't have any trouble out of them," because, you know, they not going to act up or I'll see the parents and grandparents in church that same Sunday. And, then the same thing happened at Hampton University. When I started teaching there, well the pastor's son was in my class, in my English class.

KF: Oh.

MB: He came every day. It was a Monday, Wednesday, Friday class, Katie. I don't think he missed one day; bless his heart. He majored in mass communication, but he later switched to theology.

KF: Oh wow. Good for him.

MB: Yeah, so I would see some of the church people in my class. That's one thing. That's-- Well, yeah. I don't remember teaching any of my good friends' children. You know, in terms of, you know, "Lord Knows, I know your mother. I certainly will tell her what you did." I don't remember having that kind of closeness.

KF: Mmhmm. Where did you first teach after graduating from Hampton University?

MB: Hampton High.

KF: Hampton High.

MB: 1972 to '77.

KF: Ok, awesome.

MB: And Coach Smith was still there, too. He was there. You remember the famous Coach Smith who won the state championship several times?

KF: Oh, ok. Mmhmm.

MB: He was a winning coach.

KF: Yeah. What were the racial demographics of students? What were the racial demographics of student and teacher populations?

MB: At Hampton, at, Hampton High?

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Well, you know, when I first started teaching in '72, I think it was 60:40. It may have been 70:30.

KF: Ok.

MB: And, I remember being--. Oh, that's another thing-- the tension I felt when I did my student teaching at a predominantly white school, Kecoughtan [High School, Hampton, Virginia]. That was in October '71. And, I remember the (0:23:38.8) teacher, Miss Wexel, Jane Wexel, would always--the students who gave me trouble--she would always take them out of the classroom. And, I thought, wow, she sure was protecting me, because, you know, when you are student teaching, you supposed to expose the student to the positive and the negative.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: So, you know, it usually was a guy, never was a female that gave me trouble back then. But, the classroom was predominantly white. I remember I had an advanced class and I remember anything that acted up, she got rid of it. And, I remember being at Hampton High, and we were teaching something and I did not know--. I hesitated in the answer. This was my first year as a teacher, and I remember some white boy in class--I can't remember his name, I used to remember for the longest time, this was around '72, '73--he said, "She doesn't know it." And, the way he said it, it stood in my memory for him to say that. You know, no teacher wants to be put on the spot in terms of having any kind of (24:36). Even if you don't know, you know, you going to act like you know 'till you find out. But, I remember him saying, "She doesn't know that." That kind

of flippant attitude--I mean comment--he made. That was at Hampton High. But, then another thing too, I remember our principal turned out to be African-American. And, I remember one time we just had a fight in class. You know, these were two good guys. There was a white guy fighting a black guy. Two good students, never gave me any trouble, you know. And I remember him calling an assembly--Mr. [Wilbert] Lovett called an assembly. I guess he didn't want it to escalate to something, you know, worse. And, I just thought that was kind of blown out of proportion. But, you know, I don't know that's it's better to acclimate them real early than to let it later grow out of proportion.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: And, I remember, not seeing any plays with black teenagers in it. I was teaching a black literature course called the Harlem Renaissance. I said, "Wow, I can't find a play with black teenagers that would interest my black teenagers in this black literature course." And, the course was all black. Nobody, even though Hampton High during those days was, I say 70:30, we couldn't get any white kids to take a black literature course. So, I wrote that play. I wrote a play called "Washington's Narrow Escape." And, I'll never forget, the white assistant principal of instruction must have been in the room while the girl was typing it up, and he must have been kind of nosy, looked over the copy, and he took it to principal. And, it had an attempted rape scene in the opening, Katie, and instead of him discussing it with me, he took it. And the principal called me, and that's the first time I ever heard the principal curse. He used the word "damn." I never heard a principal curse. Anyway, it was closed, you know, just me and him. If I'm not mistaken, there may have been another teacher in there; and, he said, "You're not going to teach this." And he's still living too. That's another thing on my bucket list. I'm gonna find him. I

going to say, "Mr. Lovett, I don't mean any harm: that play had a lot of black facts about us in the Revolutionary War--."

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: "You missed an opportunity to learn a lot of black facts." You know, 1770s facts on how blacks participated in the Revolutionary War. And I'd say, "Well, do you mind reading it now, since you are retired and you have time on your hand?" So, I got to find the play because, Lord knows, my house is so junky, Katie. Somehow or another, I started putting it on a flash drive. It may have been a floppy disc, back then. That's how long ago it was. But I got to find a copy and share that with him, 'cause it was based on true facts.

KF: So, you really didn't get to perform the play?

MB: No. You know what? That was 1976, Katie. Guess how long it took me to actually see that play performed? 1996, twenty years.

KF: Wow.

MB: And, I did see it.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Now, this was at James Blair Middle School [Williamsburg, Virginia]. They did the play. And, the sad part about it is that she couldn't get any white kids to play George Washington or one of the revolutionary spies. She couldn't--. She had to take one of the [black] kids, Katie, and put white paint on their face. Isn't that something: I thought that was real sad.

KF: Wow. It is.

MB: She was a veteran teacher. She had been teaching there for some time.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Black teacher. Yeah, I saw her--.

KF: Did they keep the original opening scene that was controversial originally?

MB: I'm not sure how that was. I'm not sure.

KF: Ok.

MB: Yeah, because, the only thing it was--. The opening scene--. These two spies, revolutionary spies, were soldiers who were out to secretly poison General Washington. And, what they were going to do--. Well, it started out with them seeing this black girl come down the street with a bag, a satchel of groceries, because her father ran a real life tavern where George Washington used to eat at. This is based on true history.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Her name was Phoebe Fraunces. So, one soldier says--this is the fictional part, this is my creativity, being infused in it--one soldier says, they were drunk, "Lord, I sure miss my Bessie, that's a cute little pickaninny over there. Lord, it'd be nice if she'd warm my bed tonight." That's all he said. And, then he said--. Then he moved closer to her. And, the other soldier said, "No, you not going to touch her, you not going to touch her." And, then you have to remember now, since he saved her from a possible rape, he was able to secretly offer her money to poison Washington with the peas--George Washington had a favorite peas he ate--and then she could buy that money to trade her boyfriend. That's the carrot he held out for her to take.

KF: Oh.

MB: And, she decided that she was going to tell that these were some spies, and that they were going to poison General Washington. And, he did hang those guys. And, she goes down in history as the little 16 year old girl who saved the life of George Washington. That's true history.

KF: Wow, wow. That's awesome. I didn't know that.

MB: And, that tavern is still there--a reproduction of it--in Manhattan. I took a tour of that area, and the lady mentioned Fraunces Tavern, I said, "Do you know the history of Fraunces Tavern?" When I told her, she claimed she was going to Google it and find more about and she was going to tell it on tours she would later give to that part of the city. She had never heard of it.

KF: Wow. Awesome. So, backtracking to Hampton High School. What kind of impact did integration have on Hampton High?

MB: I think they had the homecoming court, was integrated. You know, I think it was nicely sprinkled with people, African-American girls. That was one impact. I remember some of the kids going to schools that I normally would not have gone to. Say, for instance, they're going--black kids at Hampton High--going to the University of Virginia, or going to Dartmouth, you know, or going to William and Mary. I remember that. That's about it.

KF: In general, do you see a difference in race relations in schools, from the time when you were of school age to when you began teaching there or teaching in the area?

MB: Yeah. Difference in race relations?

KF: Yes.

MB: From the time I started teaching to now?

KF: Yes.

MB: Ah.

KF: Or, from the time when you were in school to when you began teaching.

MB: I remember the first interracial couple I remember, that was at, wow, Hampton High. There was a girl who dated a black guy. And, by the time I got to Hampton University, as a student, I saw a girl who actually dated a guy, and, she married him. There are some other--. [I'm] trying to think of some other instances. Ask me the original question: it may come to memory.

KF: Do you see a difference in race relations in schools, from the time you went to school to when you began teaching?

MB: [pause] I'm trying to think of the political increase and how people--black folk--were running for more offices. They were getting on the school board. That's different things I was seeing. That's about it. Yeah, I saw more political participation.

KF: Ok. Then, obviously, the schools were integrated so there was more mixing of kids. Ok, what made you decide to pursue your doctorate?

MB: Oh, oh, another thing too in terms of the racial atmosphere: I remember teaching at Hampton High, and a white kid befriended me. And I'll never forget what he said. He said--back then I wasn't Dr. Bristow, I was Miss Smith. That's how long ago it was. I've been married forty-two years to Bristow--but, he said, "Miss Smith, I wanted to tell you this." And, he said, quietly, just me and him. He said, "I don't think you should go to Poquoson." He said, "Because you know a lot of, they don't like black people at Poquoson." He was calling himself, looking out for me. Yeah, he said that. And, then the rumors got around to which schools are prejudiced and which aren't. It's always been this thing about Foxhill Schools being prejudiced. One teacher came to teach in the Foxhill area, and somebody wrote "nigger" on her car.

KF: Oh, wow.

MB: That I do remember in the '70s, yeah.

KF: Ok. So, what made you decide to pursue your doctorate?

MB: Oh, I was the type of person who was never satisfied with just the master's, BS, master's: I want to learn further. I wasn't through with learning, getting degrees. It was simple as that. I pursued my doctorate for knowledge's sake; had nothing to do with my increase in salary; had nothing to do with me moving up to another economic level, or getting more prestige and being

tenured, had nothing to do with that. It had to do with the quest for knowledge. And, I know that the doctorate was the end of, you know, we call it--. That's why some people call it the terminal degree. So, mine was pure pursuit of knowledge.

KF: That's great. That's awesome. How would you describe your experience at the University of Virginia?

MB: Well, I remember, one of my teachers put me on the spot, bless his heart, Dr. Joseph (Stresspack? 0:34:31.6). He graduated from Stanford, with his PhD in English. But, I remember he did some poetry for an adolescent literature class one summer. And, he said, "Well, Margaret you, you know, you're African-American---you got a lot of rhythm." So, he wanted me to read the poem with rhythm, and I was kind of put on the spot. But, the class was so small, Katie, I didn't really get mad at him. He was such a nice professor. Yeah, he put me on the spot. And, also I remember one incident at the University of Virginia one summer. Waylon Jennings was teaching. He was a professor of education history. And, he was teaching, and somehow or another we were in class and, I don't know how we got on Thomas Jefferson. So, I said, "Is it true that Thomas Jefferson had a mistress and a set of black kids?" He said, "No. That's just total conjecture. That's just somebody's imagination. It's not followed by documented history." So, he was not going to pursue it; he wasn't even going to entertain the discussion. But, the white kids in class--I was the only black graduate student--the white graduate students started saying, "Yeah, we want to know more about it; we want to know what's been circulating." You know, "How does the University of Virginia feel about that because he was its founder. "

KF: Yeah.

MB: And, he discussed it then. He discussed it then. Yeah, and I remember at the University of Virginia, I said, "Lord knows, why is it that when we come into a classroom, if you're black, you

tried to sit as far as you can from the other black person?" I never liked that. I thought, you know, wow, it's so few of us, let's sit together. But, it seemed as though a lot of the--some of my friends, what I perceived, is that they wanted to fit in. They wanted to blend in, so, you know, they wanted to blend in with the majority race. But, that may have just been me 'cause I was always a very sensitive person anyway. I'm Pisces. So, Pisces are known as being, as being sensitive. We're creative, but we're also very sensitive.

KF: Yeah. I'm a Pisces, too. My birthday is the 24th of February.

MB: Oh Lord, Katie. Look, do you have trouble making decisions? Because indecisiveness supposed to be a Piscean trait, too.

KF: No, I don't have problems making decisions [laughter].

MB: Ok, because you said these two fish seem like they're swimming in opposite directions.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Oh, ok. Well, welcome to the Piscean Club.

KF: Thank you [laughter]

MB: I'm just joking with you, Katie.

KF: When did you go back for your doctorate?

MB: Ooh, Lord. I took these summer courses. I think it was '75, the first time I took a summer course. And, see, the way the University of Virginia did, they made me take additional courses to get the master's; and, I thought I could get into the doctorate program real quickly. But, it seems like I was forced to take some courses in the master's; and, then I was admitted into candidacy in terms of the doctorate. I thought it would be, it would take less time. And I said, "I don't know whether or not that was the fact I came from Hampton University. Would they have made me take more courses had I come originally from William and Mary?"

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: I don't know. I was so eager to learn, I just went on took them. Paid for them, took them.

KF: There you go. That works. Were there any professors at the University of Virginia who were particularly influential?

MB: Yes, Dr. Ralph Cohen. He used to be an editor of the prestigious, juried *English Literary History*. *English Literary History* was a prestigious journal. And, I remember him teaching a course called "Aesthetics." And, I'm saying, ok, he took the longest time giving us the definition of aesthetics. I remember that. We met in a seminar fashion, seminar. This was a course in the Department of English. So, anyway, when it came time to do a major paper, he said, "Margaret, have you ever considered doing Addison Gayle?" I said, "Addison Gayle? Who is Addison Gayle?" He said, "Margaret, you're from Newport News and you don't know Addison Gayle?" No, I didn't, Katie. He said, "Addison Gayle is the father of black aesthetics." He said, "You never read the book *Black Aesthetics*? It's collection of essays edited by Addison Gayle on why we--why blacks should have a different criteria for evaluating their art, and why or why not--why they shouldn't just use all the European standards." I said, "No, I never heard of it." He said, "Well, why not do your paper on black aesthetics?" And, that's what I did it on. But, I went further than that. I was so enamored with the information. In fact, this guy actually went to my high school. He was older than me. His sisters and I were in high school together.

KF: Oh wow.

MB: His family house was two minutes from mine. You know, I was so caught up in his research. And, then, I got a chance to help bring him to Hampton University to speak. All because of Ralph Cohen at the University of Virginia. So, what I did was I assigned his autobiography as part of my course. I would never--. I don't know when I would have heard of

Addison Gayle, had it not been for that paper and professor at UVA. And, I always said, too, like people kind of fall in love with their professors. Out of all my professors at UVA, if I could have fallen in love with one, it would have been Ralph Cohen. Yeah, (39:36) Ralph. And, so, I owe that to him. I was so, influenced by him that Hampton used to have these little mini courses during the end of the first semester and the second semester, and I thought of developing a course called "The Black Aesthetic." It was approved, but they ran out of money to run it. But, it went back to my favorite professor at the University of Virginia.

KF: Oh, that's great.

MB: One of my favorite professors, because I also had two others, Joseph (Stresspack? 0:40.05.4) and Richard Meade, Dr. Meade, because if they ever hear the tape, I want to make sure I throw out their names too and they not get jealous. "Oh, Ralph Cohen. Oh, ok. What about us? We helped her through the doctorate program." So, I want to give a shout out for Dr. Joseph Stresspack and Dr. Richard Meade. One was from California; the other one was from Dinwiddie, Dinwiddie, Virginia. Dinwiddie. Yeah, that's the name of it: Dinwiddie, Virginia.

KF: There are some very interesting names out here.

MB: Yeah I know, whoa, whoa, we got some strange names.

KF: Alright, what was your idea behind your community business, BERNICE?

MB: Oh, my community business! Oh, I am so proud of that, Katie, I don't know what to do. I've been to Africa, Israel, the Caribbean, a whole bunch of different little countries. Haven't been to the Far East yet. May be going to Spain in July.

KF: Oh wow.

MB: Brazil, recently in November, and Argentina. And, I said, I don't need to run anywhere to do anything. I've got enough work to do right at home. And, that started my little business, my

little consulting business. So it's, you know what it stands for? BERNICE? My middle name is Bernice.

KF: Yeah, then you wrote it on your form, what is stood for.

MB: Right.

KF: 'Better-Educational-Resources-Needed-In-Community-Education.'

MB: Right, and that's what I'm doing. Because, recently, on Saturday, Katie, that same business, I was awarded a grant to take the young kids or the teenagers at Pearl Bailey Library--that's the black library in the area I'm from, Southeast--and introduce them to Virginia Hamilton, the lady I did my dissertation on. And, I was awarded a contract under that business. And, so I'm also using it to write, what I call it, edit and proofread lawyers' personal statements--personal statements as to why you want to go to law school. And, I'm doing that in the name of that business. And, it's just that, you know, I'm so proud of it, because, you know, everybody, after a while, you want to--. After you semi-retire, you want to do something to the community, other than just say you're a retired teacher. So it gives me another little thing to brag about, my little business. And, eventually, I'm going to get it incorporated. Right now, I just have Sole Proprietor, the EIN number. And the DUNS Number. But, I want to get it where you have your board of directors, and you have a mission statement, and all everything is in place like a little corporation. Yeah, basically, because I have a girlfriend who has done all that in her (troy? 0:42:43.1) business.

KF: That's great. So, what do you hope to accomplish with this business, other than, like, getting your mission statement?

MB: Oh, I hope to accomplish one thing: collaborate with the American Association of University Women to help them fulfill one of their missions, which is to get more young girls into STEM careers [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics careers]. And, so, I

submitted a grant. Twice it's been rejected. I know exactly why it's being rejected. The third time around when I submit it, it's going to be accepted. But, what I want to do is have them, have these young girls, in conjunction with the American Association of University Women, in conjunction with their mission, have these young girls research and write about Hampton Roads STEM women, you know, the notable women in STEM Research here. Do their children's picture book, go around to the high schools and read it: go around to day care centers, the girls' clubs, Girls On The Run clubs, Boys and Girls Club and read it and share that information on women. Yeah, because, you know, the statistics, in terms of what women who major in the STEM research and how some women, they claim, that if they're in a math class, higher level math class, they get the impression that the faculty, even the faculty member caters to the men--and in engineering--than the women. And, for some reason, it's not true in statistics; women tend to major and get more PhDs in statistics, that field of STEM, than any other of the areas. So, I was proud to hear that. Yeah, so that business connects me with the community. I envision writing grants, more grants, in the name of that business, BERNICE. And I'm so glad I don't have to run anywhere else to do anything---stay right in your community and improve your community. Because there's a very disturbing stereotype among black folk who get educated in my community. Katie, notice I said "stereotype." They get the money and, instead of staying in the community, developing a business, [and] work in an educated community, they get the money, and they move as far as they can out of the black community, as far as they can, because they have the education and the money.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: So, sometimes we've said--. Some blacks have said--notice I say "some," I use that pronoun all the time, "some"--some blacks have said that we are our biggest boycotters. We create some of our ghettos because soon as we get some money, we move out of them.

KF: Oh, huh.

MB: You know, we, sometimes, we create our own ghettos. We create our own boycotts. Soon as we get some money, we're buying the majority folks stuff instead of supporting sometimes our own.

KF: Yeah. Wow. That's a very interesting point.

MB: So, I didn't move out of the community. And, my girlfriends used to tease me, talking about, "Why don't you rent that house out, take the equity, and buy another house? Why you still here?" They would say that, and they moved to Yorktown and other places, and beautiful houses. But, I'm still there: I'm still in my same community.

KF: Good, good for you. Backtracking a little bit, I'm adding in some things from what we've talked about. Earlier, you said that you got to meet the President, President Obama?

MB: Oh yes.

KF: How, how did that come about? How was that experience?

MB: One of them same little boys--I've been knowing him since the 3rd grade, in an all-black elementary school, Dunbar, then he went to the all-black high school I went to, Huntington--he was there with me, even though he's the same one, too, that went to Newport News High. I think, he said for one year. And, he had a racial incident, too. He thought that, I hope I'm quoting him right, alluded to what he did, he said that some white girl was trying to date him. And, you know, apparently, back then, dating wasn't widespread, like a black guy dating a white girl, at the white school. And, he was able to fend her off, but he thought it was a set-up.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Yeah. But, anyway, what happened was, he kept telling me--. He's not in the same the community as me. He moved somewhere else in an apartment. But, he kept saying, "Why don't you volunteer to work with President Obama's committee?" So, that meant I had to call all these people to make sure they vote and make sure they're registered; and, that's what I did. So, when you call x-amount of people and do x-amount of political work, they give you what they call a V.I.P. ticket. That allows you to get close enough, Katie, to shake the president's hand.

KF: Wow.

MB: So, what happened with me, I shook his hand, and--you can see how much I talk--I started talking with the president. So, I said, "They told us leave the books at home when he came--I think it was the University of Richmond's Robinson Center." So, they said, "Leave the books home, don't carry no big bags." I said, "Mmhmm. I'm going to carry his mother's dissertation." So, here, Katie--. Did I put that down in my [pre-interview survey], because I don't want to re-tell the story?

KF: I don't think so.

MB: Ok. Well, anyway, I came in to meet the president with his mother's dissertation from the University of Hawaii. So, Duke University had published it; and, I got the name of that from a biography of his mother, done by Janny Scott. And, it said her dissertation had been whittled down from 500 pages to 300 pages, and it had been published by Duke University. So, I went through Barnes and Noble and asked them to order me a copy. So, anyway, I had the President's mother's dissertation. So, I'm shaking hands with the President and, before that, before I got close enough to shake hands, I had been trying to tell the Secret Service men, could they take it and tell the President just autograph it. And, they kept saying, "No, no, no, we're not

autographing anything." After the fifth Secret Service man, Katie, then one finally took the book. So, by that time, I get to the President, I'm shaking hands. And, they got this thing too that, "Let him put his hand out, don't grab him like that." So, you had to wait 'till the president extended his hand. So, anyway, I said, "President Obama, I have your mother's dissertation." He said, "Are you serious?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Are you joking? Are you kidding?" I said, "Yes, I have it, and will you autograph it?" Katie, by the time I said, "Would you autograph it?"--. You know that smile he has. He took that smile on to the next person and I never got a yes or no. So, after his speech, after everything was over with, about an hour later, I said, "I wonder is he going to autograph it." Seems like it may have been two hours later, Katie. Out comes the Secret Service men with five books. I remember mine was the last one he gave to me. So, he said, "The president said that some of those pictures of him in the book, in his mother's dissertation, really capture what his mother did." He looked through it, and he had signed it. And, that's his signature.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: And, he said that he was going to tell his press secretary to order a copy of it for himself.

So, I said, "I wonder, is the president going to actually tell one of the secretaries--." I think one of the press secretaries' names was Josh Earnest.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Press secretary. Lo and behold, eight months later, Katie, I meet the President again. You know, having did this for him and gotten the V.I.P. Ticket. The President must have been at Phoebus High School this time, closer to home. And, I remember standing in line, waiting and shaking his hand. And, you know what I asked him? "President Obama, do you remember me?" He said, "Yes, I remember you." I don't know if he was lying or not, Katie. He said, "Yes, I

remember you." I said, "Did you order your mother's dissertation?" He said, "Yes, I did." And, then he had to go on to the next person. I said to myself, Lord knows, "I had a chance to ask him again." What I need to do is email Josh Earnest to see whether or not, checking his emails, whether or not the President asked him to order the dissertation. And, you know what it's on. It's on how she empowered women in Indonesia to take their craft, develop their own crafts and industry, so that they could have an economic basis. That's what she did.

KF: Wow.

MB: She was always empowering women. You know, giving them a sense of self-esteem with their crafts.

KF: That's great. That is an awesome story.

MB: Yeah. President Obama.

KF: And you also said that you traveled a lot?

MB: Oh no, not as much as I can. I don't know what it is. Oh, I bought a timeshare, Katie, so all this traveling, I'm spending thousands of dollars [on] this place, this place. If I work my timeshare, I won't have to be doing that. So, I found out I bought a timeshare that I need more points to do the kind of travel that I want to do. Like, I want to go to Spain on the timeshare, instead of hooking up with Hampton University and going through Go Ahead Tours. So, I'm trying to make that timeshare work for me. I've only owned it one year.

KF: Oh.

MB: So, I got to read that big ole encyclopedia book they give you, probably look at some DVDs, probably take some tutorials. But, I may be in Spain in July. I don't know yet, but I may be. Yeah, I just travel because, you know, I'm thinking about something Nikki Giovanni said a long time ago to my students. We did a satellite lecture with her. She was at Virginia Tech, and

my students were at ODU, in the computer lab. And, she said, I will never forget what she said, she said, "Don't buy things," she was telling my students. She said, "Buy experiences." She said, "Buy experiences." And, I always think that when I treat myself to a trip, I'm buying an experience.

KF: Definitely.

MB: And, then I can weave them, the experiences, into my plays, my little community plays. That's another thing that keeps me in the community. Katie, once you retire, certain things you do: you're never bored, you're never, "Well, what am I gonna do?"

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Community plays keep you busy forever. And, the last one I did was devoted to the father of black history. Young folk were in it, and what I did was gave them all these details to know he's worthy of his birthday, was worthy of celebrating, too. Just like we celebrate 4th of July, his birthday, December 18th, 1875 is worth celebrating. But, in it, after coming back from Argentina--. I would never [have] put a tango scene in that play, if I had not seen tango in Buenos Aires in Argentina. You see, I never would have done that. Certain little things I infuse in it, solely based on the experience I had in that country. And, it works. It works, because the little boy says, he says, "Come on, let's tango like my mother and father. They're forever taking tango lessons." So, I tell you. That experience helps.

KF: Good.

MB: Travel helps.

KF: What's your, what was your favorite place to visit?

MB: Probably, the safari in Tanzania.

KF: Wow.

MB: Yeah, because I saw the guy who was the safari guide, Katie, he looked just like my father, just like my father. That's why I said to myself, I said, "My mother has that round Indian face in West Africa, from Ghana; and, my father has a long angular face with the high cheek bones--that's East Africa." So, I said, "I'm very fortunate, I have a parent who probably can trace her lineage back to West Africa, on the mother side, my mother, and then my father can probably trace his lineage back to East Africa, Tanzania, on the east side. So, I have the both."

KF: Wow.

MB: West and East. That's my favorite place. And, people think that when I say I went on a safari, we stayed in five-star tents. They think I was able to shoot big game; that was a \$8,000 safari sponsored by UVA. Nobody's gonna shoot big game with \$8,000. I guess if I had to shoot big game, add another \$10,000 to the trip, and I certainly wouldn't have been able to go. But, we didn't shoot any game. We spotted game. And, we would take pictures, you know, like a lion eating a gazelle. And, then, oh Lord, some of the elephants came up to the Land Rover that we were in.

KF: Really.

MB: And, yeah. And, that big ole trunk like they were examining it. You know, they just, you know, being inquisitive. I saw enough, zebras for--. Oh, and wildebeest, oh. Monkeys, it was--. Oh, Lord. And, then my favorite animal, you got to remember why I went to Tanzania. I got this, I had this thing on my bucket list to see rhinos [rhinoceroses] in the wild.

KF: Huh.

MB: And, that was fulfilled because when I went into some animal reserve called Ngorogoro [Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania, Africa], they had a mother rhino following her little

baby. And, I was able to get a picture of it. So, I said, "Oh Lord, I finally saw the animal I came for." The mother rhino with the little baby rhino; and, that was in Tanzania.

KF: Oh, ok. Awesome. So, I'm curious to hear a bit more about your thoughts or experiences regarding the impact of the civil rights movement, in this area. So were you, for example, involved in any civil rights organizations?

MB: You know what, my sister belonged to B.U.C., Black Unity Congress. She wore an Afro. She was one of the first of my momma's five girls to wear an Afro, my sister. She passed away from diabetic complications two Augusts ago. But, she wore the little Afro. And, of course, you know, we had Afros. But, I remember--. I'm still in communication with Linwood DeBrew, who was very instrumental in starting Black Unity Congress. And, I think it was tantamount to the Panthers, the B.U.C. They called it BUC-- was tantamount to the Panthers in Oakland, California. I think that's what it was. And, I remember not ever going to any of the meetings. I was a college student, back then. And, I remember my sister's husband--the sister who just passed--her husband was very active in it. In fact, somebody gave him the distinction of being, even though they divorced, he was one of the five guys that they said really taught them about black history and what it was to be a strong black man, my sister's ex-husband. But that I remember. I said--. And then, somehow, they had some kind of incident where the police and them got to fighting, or something. Nobody was killed, but somebody was beat up by the police. I'm trying to remember now. My father, I came from a family that was not pro-civil rights.

KF: Oh.

MB: My father made a comment about President Eisenhower when he was in the Army--he was in the Army for two years, so he could feed my oldest sister and my mother. He stayed in the Army just to get the check. And, he said, Eisenhower met the troops; and, he said he shook

everybody's hands except the black troops. This would have been World War II. So, that's the image my father had of Eisenhower, if I heard him right, 'cause I would have been a little teeny thing back then. My father had a very negative attitude toward anything dealing with civil rights. And he had a saying that was very denigrating, very pejorative. I wouldn't say that to anybody in terms of raising a child. He said, "A nigger ain't shit." That was his favorite saying, "A nigger ain't shit." And, then, by me being the timid type child, I never challenged him. I don't remember my mother challenging him like, "Skinny--" that was his nickname, "what are you talking about?" And, I said to myself, if I ever had to be face-to-face with my father, if I had a chance to go to heaven and came face-to-face him, he's in heaven, I'm in heaven, I'm gonna tell him some black history. "Daddy, daddy, I mean, we are, oh Lord, the beginning of civilization, the oldest human remains," which I saw when I went to Tanzania. The oldest skeletal human remains. The oldest skeleton that walked upright was found in Tanzania. Tanzania is in Africa. In the Olduvai Valley. Then, you know, we wouldn't have a car industry hadn't Africans started melting steel and iron. You know, it started there. You know, so, when you said, "A nigger ain't shit," oh, Lord. I don't know whether he was echoing the sentiment of people around him, their feelings, or whether or not it was coming from his soul. You know?

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: And, then, when Afros came out, you know, everybody wanted to sport an Afro like Angela Davis, he used to say, "looking like a gorilla." He didn't say gorilla, [he pronounced it] "go-rilla," 'cause, you know, he was from West Virginia. So, that didn't make us feel proud either, was like your own father picking on you. And, my mother, Katie, bless her heart, she had a saying. She inspired me to do, you know, well. She had that saying, "Once a job is begun, never leave it until it's done. Be the labor great or small, do it well or not at all." That was her favorite inspirational

saying. But, on the other hand, my mother would get depressed, you know, every now and then. Any mother would get depressed if you don't have the money. Or, if your husband (59:25) every now and then, you know he may be squandering some of the money, instead of bringing it home. She would say, "If I had any color to come back, I'd never want to be born black." I heard her say that several times, "I never want to be born black." And, I used to ask my mother, I said, "Momma, you graduated from high school, but if you had money to go to college, what would you want to be?" You know what she said? "A French teacher." And, I got to thinking about that one day, Katie, a long time ago, I said, "She wanted to be a French teacher because she had that ex-patriot blood in her." She'd been mistreated so much in North Carolina and in the United States, she wanted to go, just like Josephine Baker did, she wanted to go to France where, back then, they claim, you know, there was no color difference. She wanted to be, in her own mind, she really wanted to be a little ex-patriot. Yeah, she said, "I want to teach French."

KF: Huh.

MB: Yeah, so I was--. We didn't talk about it on TV, even though as a child I remember seeing the police with the billy clubs. You know, like they have in *Selma*? The film *Selma*?

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: I remember seeing that, but I don't remember my mother saying she was going to a town meeting or my father saying that he was going to go to a meeting, you know, to see what, you know, what you could do even in Newport News. I don't remember them being political at all.

KF: Oh, ok.

MB: I guess when you had to--. I guess the basic thing [was] they were working and trying to eek out an existence, you know, an income; that just took all their psychic energy away. I'm not making any excuses for them, but it was like I grew up in the most apolitical house. Lord knows,

we're sitting down at the table eating this elaborate, breakfast my father cooked. You know, every now and then would cook a big ole breakfast. Nothing came up with civil rights, nothing came up about Martin Luther King, nothing came out about Jessie Jackson, nothing, zero. I was eighteen when King was killed. [pause] I don't remember any kind of family discussion. I remember that's the first time we ever marched as a big group, that I can remember. In school, we marched as a big group across the bridge; they let out school early. This would have been April of '68.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: And, it was a big ole march: peaceful, nobody was fighting or anything, Katie. No gun shots or anything like that. But, my family, right, apolitical, you know. Yeah, so, and--. You know, some folk, you, you know, you hear of them being brought up, you know, they went to schools where teachers galvanized them to march, galvanized them to be a part of civil rights. But, I seemed to have missed that. But, it's never too late.

KF: Yeah, never too late. Well, what was the march, after Martin Luther King passed away, what was that like? [After the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. a march was held in Newport News across the 25th St. Bridge to commemorate King]

MB: I remember us holding hands, and this was April, this was a spring day. Think he died April 3rd, 1968 [*sic* April 4, 1968]. And, that's the first time I ever remember anything being done, civil rights wise, in that whole school. And, I was there from '63 to '68, [which] was when King was killed. Yeah, April 1968. [pause] Yeah, so--.

KF: Did you know what King had been doing and what he had done, were like you aware of his--?

MB: Yeah, I was aware. Like I knew this was the guy fighting for civil rights, I knew that. Yeah, fighting for civil rights. But, I didn't want to, I didn't read anything about him. I remember my mother had one of his books, *Strive Toward Freedom*.

KF: Huh.

MB: Yeah, I remember that. So, in her own way, she was still trying to keep abreast. Yeah, she did have that book. I remember meeting his daughter years later, twice. I met her twice, Bernice King. Yeah, Yolanda--. Let's see, yeah, Bernice is the only child I met. I remember her speaking at a church. And, then, later on, she was part of the Southeast Community Parade that we had then so. Actually, it's done by a guy in SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], Andrew Shannon. And, every year he has this big community parade; and, he always has somebody of importance, you know, black, to bring in. And last year, Coretta Scott King's daughter, I mean, their daughter, Bernice King. She's Reverend Attorney Bernice King.

KF: Wow.

MB: And, she was sort of like, one of the mascots. Yeah, so, I am a member of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, done by the father of black history [Dr. Carter G. Woodson]. And, he started that organization in 1915, Katie. It's still going strong. I was instrumental in getting the Hampton Roads chapter established. That was like three years ago. Had to go to Pittsburgh to get the charter with the president, at that time, Elois Morgan. And, we're still going strong. And, one of our missions is to get children involved in their civil rights history. Yeah, I had to correct one of the presidents, the present president. She said, "Our children," in a recent meeting of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. Nobody says that long title, Katie. It's called ASALAH. That's the acronym spelled: ASALAH.

KF: ASALAH, mmhmm.

MB: So, we had a recent meeting at Hampton Public Library. She said, she said, "We need to work on helping our children know their history." You know, civil rights history. She said, "We need to work on helping them." She said, "Because our children don't know their civil rights history." And, I had to stop her there. I said, "Madam President, some of our children don't know their history. We cannot be a victim of the stereotype going around saying that our children don't know their history, when there are some black kids out there who have been acculturated and acclimated toward their history. So, we cannot say our children don't know their history. And, she said, "Jewish kids know their history, and Native American kids know their history, but our children don't know their history." And, she said it with such, (1:05:29) it was so adamantly said, like it was a fact.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: You know, but, I had to correct her and say, you know, "What impression does that give, when they, when children, young children hear her say that?" There are some children out there who know some of their history, you know.

KF: Yeah.

MB: And, it's our task to let them know some more. But, to make that blanket statement, "Our children don't know their history--" [pause] Yeah, so.

KF: So did you ever attend any other protests or demonstrations other than the march?

MB: [pause] Yes. You know, Katie, you're bringing back my memories. In January 2000, I was part of 15,000 folk that marched in Columbia, to protest the Confederate flag.

KF: Oh.

MB: That's what we did. And, that, what I'm finding out, is that that Confederate flag was not totally removed. It was removed, it was moved around the corner. So, what I'm hearing is, and I'll have to check with some of my Columbia friends and, you know, the N.A.A.C.P., whether or not the fight to boycott South Carolina is still on, because the flag didn't really move away totally from the capitol. It was just moved around the corner. I'm not sure whether or not South Carolina is still being boycotted among the, you know, N.A.A.C.P. people. Yeah, so that was the last protest I remember marching in. It was 2000. It was January, one cold January. [pause] Ooh, that's fifteen years, oh Lord.

KF: [laughter].

MB: Fifteen years, but by me being active in the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, I'm still carrying on the civil rights struggle in my own way. And, I present each year at the conference. They have an international conference. I presented in Raleigh, I presented in Pittsburgh on whatever theme they had for that year. You can do research--. You do a research paper, research presentation. I presented in Jacksonville. I presented in Memphis. I presented in Pittsburgh. So, I'm still, you know, trying to fulfill the mission of the founder, which is to disseminate black history, promote it, and research it. Yeah. That's his mission. He was born in Virginia, too. The father of black history. He was born forty miles from Charlottesville--where I went to school--in a place called New Canton, Virginia.

KF: Ok.

MB: The specific county was Buckingham. Yeah, so, a Virginia man produced--was the father of black history. I'm proud of that.

KF: Yeah. It's always fun to see what Virginia people have done throughout history. I love it.

MB: Yeah, because you'd think it would be somebody in a bigger city. But, he came from this little tiny town, New Canton, near Charlottesville. Saw a need to study black history, having been trained, you have to remember, at Harvard. Yeah, he went to Berea College, 1870 something. [1903]

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: He was twenty years old when he graduated from high school. Then, he went on to college, dropped out one time because he didn't have the money, went back. Then, he went on to get his Master's from the University of Chicago, all in history. And, then he went on to get a Ph.D at Harvard, in history.

KF: Wow.

MB: Yeah, so--.

KF: A Ph.D at Harvard?

MB: Yeah, at Harvard.

KF: Wow.

MB: He was Harvard trained, just like our president, President Obama.

KF: Alright. What do you see as the most important accomplishments of the civil rights movement?

MB: The most important accomplishments of the civil rights movement, I think, is the--. I would say the esprit de corp is shown. You got x-amount of people banding together with a common cause, and that common cause is to get more people to vote, to take out the voting restrictions to integrate the schools, integrate all the facilities of life. They got to band together. They got to plan a strategy. I think that's the most important thing that came out of it. That things can happen when you band together and plan a program. They can happen. Oh, they can happen. Oh, that's

the thing that people--. And, then, I hear some blacks say, "We don't ever stick together. " We're talking about ourselves: "blacks don't ever stick together. Well, they're like crabs in a pot, I mean crabs in a basket, once one get up to the top, the other crab pulls the other one down." Such a negative image, and I always say, "What race of people marched on Washington in 1963?" You had almost, what, a quarter of a million people. These were black people and other races: they marched on Washington. That was planned by black people. That was a big march. That's coming together. Don't forget how we did march together. We did band together, and we did accomplish it. The Civil Rights Bill of, what was it, '64 or '65 [Civil Rights Act, 1964] would not have been passed had we not had that big march, that peaceful march on Washington, which should have been 1941.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: You have to remember, the march should have been in 1941. But, what happened, they talked, Truman, or either Eisen-- it was Truman. Or, either Roosevelt. [Roosevelt] talked A. Philip Randolph out of, you know, carrying the march. You know, promising this, promising that. And, then, years later, '63, it did happen. And, I don't know about Dr. Puaca, had she told you all of the logistician behind the civil rights march? The guy who really worked out all the little wrinkles and details to make it peaceful, Bayard Rustin?

KF: I don't know if we went that in-depth about the march.

MB: Bayard Rustin.

KF: Yeah, mmhmm.

MB: Yeah, a lot of people don't know. You know why he stayed in the background? He made an agreement with King that he was going to stay in the background. He used to do all the logistics, you know, making sure they got enough water, enough this, making sure they weren't cussing at

the policemen, you know, inciting the policemen to start cracking heads. He was the force behind "non-violent direct action." And, the reason why he stayed in the background--and folk don't know as much about him as they do King, they know more about Rosa Parks--is because he was homosexual. He was an active homosexual.

KF: Oh.

MB: Active. His husband, his boyfriend is still alive. Yeah.

KF: Wow.

MB: So, he was active back then. He was a Quaker. And, he was allowed to be a homosexual back when he was a teenager. I studied his life in detail because at one of the national conferences on black history, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, I presented a paper on "The Life of Bayard Rustin: A Model for Training Our Future Youth To Lead Movements." And, I used his life, the way he was brought up, as a model for parents getting their teenager getting involved. Like how do you make a child aware of the need for civil rights? What's the best way to do that? I'm pretty sure, I don't have any children, Katie. But, I'm just thinking that I had to give my child a spiritual growth, spiritual upbringing; and, I have to give my child a civil rights upbringing. So, what's the best way to do it with not making that child real bitter, you know?

KF: Yeah.

MB: Oh, I got to get back, I got to get even...

KF: Mmhhh.

MB: Bayard Rustin's life is a good example of how to do it. But, you have to remember, it started in the home.

KF: Mmhhh. It does. That's such a good point. I'll have to look him up and learn more about him.

MB: Yep, Bayard. It's B-a-y-a-r-d. Bayard Rustin, R-u-s-t-i-n. Yeah, he's the force behind that civil rights. King used to walk around with a gun. When he came to King's house, the first time he came to King's house, King had a gun under the chair. He said, "That's not the way to do it." Not only was this guy against fighting and killing folk to get your civil rights, but he was for getting rid of nuclear arms. He was--. Oh Lord, he was good at that. He was a pacifist. Didn't want anything to do with fighting and carrying-on. Bayard Rustin.

KF: What do you regard as the unfinished legacies of the movement?

MB: Ooh that's a good question, unfinished legacies. I'm thinking about A. Philip Randolph who created the first union, black union, with the sleeping [car] porters. I think one finished, unfinished legacy is the economic legacy. Yeah, because you can have all the civil rights in the world, but if your income is steadily widening, between the majority income, you're going to have some problems. So, I think the most important legacy that we still have to fight is the economic legacy. Yeah. Economics. Like in my community, God knows, Katie, the jobless rate--. I think [the] general jobless rate, unemployment rate, is 5% national. In my community, it's got to be 40%.

KF: Oh, wow.

MB: Yeah, every bit of 40%. So, that economic factor. You know, if you weigh the two, the economic factor, the civil rights factor. Weigh those two together, wow. [pause] Yeah, so, there is evidence that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

KF: Yeah.

MB: Yeah, that's evident.

KF: What are the most pressing problems facing African-Americans today?

MB: Economic is definitely one, still. Complacency because I think some kids--notice my pronoun, "some"--some kids are still raised in environments like, "We got a black President, right? We got a black Attorney General, right? Everything is ok. There's really no need for the N.A.A.C.P." But, Lord, didn't we have a rude awakening: Michael Brown, Eric Garner, the other little boy that was shot, the little twelve-year old. I forgot his name-- Rice, Tamir Rice. That's an awakening, and it shows that we still have to have that barometer of civil rights. You know, we still got to be aware that the fight is not over.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Yeah. Trayvon Martin is an awakening to remind us. Yeah, so civil rights problems along that line. And, I'm finding out that, in terms of going to these international conferences on black history, that there is such a term as "the criminalization" of the black community." I thought police brutality, I knew it was to be talked about, but I did not know it was so widespread. Police brutality going back, oh Lord, black folk that were killed by the police going back to the '40s. Some research had traced it, the statistics, in a certain black areas. These were New York areas, and they had traced the increasing police brutality. Yeah, they have a term "the criminalization of the black community." That's still facing us. And, that's one thing, in terms of how our very communities, and then the evidence of black-on-black crime. Lord knows, you are six times more likely to be killed by somebody of your race, as a black person, than in the majority race. Six times.

KF: Wow.

MB: That's a disturbing statistic. My house has been broken in, Katie, in the last ten years, in one ten-year period, three times. Every three year, in a ten-year period, somebody white was breaking

in my house. Yeah, so the community, taking back the community. And, then some black folks, some have been caught up in this drug thing, thinking they can get rich dealing with drugs.

[pause] [pound of the table] They need to know that need to know that they are only making the majority forces, that are controlling the drugs, richer. And, when the stuff goes down, the lower drug dealers are going to catch the flack.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: You know, that kind of stuff. Yeah, the community--. You know, the homicide: they got to do something about that. You know, and then, you know, the implications are that I can kill my black brother but I'm not going to get but five years. Nobody--. I know not to kill a white man because they going to throw the book at me.

KF: Yeah.

MB: So, those two things, the economic factor and the community factor, the homicide, black-on-black crime. And, another thing, too--how can I put it?--how we prepare our children to lead future civil rights movements. That's something that the black community needs to address. How do we prepare them to lead future civil rights movements? I remember reading about Arthur Ashe, when he was alive, and his wife. They were rich black folk living in California. They found out that their children were not being given black history in school. You know, it was like, "Oh man, when are my children going to get some black history?" They formed little parent groups, after school, to see that their children got a black history component, you know, in terms of their education.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: So, I don't know how far that that went. But, I said, "Lord, you know, that parent is responsible for the first entrance to civil rights history." You know, it's indoctrinating your child,

the parent. And, then, beyond that, the parent has to work toward the school, doing the same thing, because, I remember, I was on a committee, I don't know if you've heard of the Contrabands that were in Hampton. They were black ex-slaves. And, they said--. And what happened was this. They didn't want to fight for the Confederate. They had run away from slavery, and they said, "We're not going back to the Confederate." Well, by that time, Virginia had seceded from the Union. So, the general, General Butler, at Fort Monroe, said, "They don't-- I don't, I'm not sending them back to slavery. Virginia decided to drop out of the Union. So, I'm going to make them Contraband. They're going to work for the Union." You know, so that kind of stuff, history needs to be taught and the local history in the Hampton public schools. You know, when you talk about Virginia history, why is the Contraband left out? Because the Contraband later led to the Emancipation Proclamation. And, you know, if you look at some statistics as to how we won the Civil War, when Lincoln allowed some black troops to fight, they fought like, oh Lord, extra hard.

KF: Yes.

MB: And, it turned the tide. So, you know, that kind of history, United States Colored Troops. You know, a lot of black kids probably never heard there was such a thing as the United States Colored Troops. But, when we allow them to have that history in school, the fact that Richmond, I heard, was liberated by the United States Colored Troops. They got there first. And, Wesley Wilson is supposed to be writing a book to clarify the history because it's a rumor that they got there first, and the white troops want to receive recognition. So, they told them to get out of the way, and let them march in first. That kind of stuff.

KF: Yeah.

MB: Yeah, so, that, you know, how are we going to prepare our children for civil rights? And, then, you know the latest thing on President Obama and civil rights. Our President, bless his heart, even he was a victim of racism growing up in Indonesia. And, I'll tell Janny Scott's story, because he allowed Janny Scott to interview him and write the book about his mother, Stanley Ann Dunham. But, Stanley had a girlfriend to come over to the house one time--this was in Indonesia--and, she said, "They're throwing rocks at Barry." Back then, they called him Barry. And, so, President Obama's mother said, "Oh yeah, they're throwing rocks at him?" And, he was dodging like that each time, he was dodging and dodging. And, then, she said, "They calling him "nigger" in Indonesia." And, in Indonesia, like, they got another name for "nigger" there.

KF: Yeah.

MB: And, you know what his mother said? Stanley said--they called her Ann--she said, "He can take it." And, he was eight years old then, being taunted with rocks and being called "nigger" in Indonesia.

KF: Wow.

MB: She said, "He can take it." So, now, what I'm finding out is that he doesn't share too much of his personal civil rights and encounters with racism. But, what I'm finding out, Katie, you probably read the same news article, he did sit down--not on a national level--on a small level with some young folks, some millennials like you. I call you a millennial. He sat down with them, and he told some incidents in which he was a victim of racism. Somebody thought he was a waiter instead of a politician. And, then somebody threw him the keys, thinking he was the valet.

KF: Wow.

MB: Yeah, so, he's--. That's one complaint they have about our president: that in running the affairs of the country, he hasn't done enough to promote, to propel, civil rights. And, I'm saying that's the media's interpretation of it. I've not talked with the leading civil rights worker. Who knows what he's done behind the scene. But, that's--. You know, by him being African, and, you know, and white, I'm pretty sure that eats at his heart, because they said, you know, he's the president first, civil rights leader, second. You know, that's what they say. But that is something.

KF: Yeah, that is something. I haven't--.

MB: Because he's got two more years to do what he's going to do when it comes to his civil rights legacy. Two years.

KF: Is there anything else that you'd like to contribute or something that you think we may have missed in the interview?

MB: I don't know, I've talked--. Let me see what time it is. Oh Lord, Katie, I'm talked, it's almost six o'clock, isn't it, 5:25 [pm].

KF: Yeah, that's ok. The interviews are hour and a half to two hours, so we're right on schedule.

MB: Oh, are they? Ok, so I thought maybe I was, you know, too--. What's the word? Too gregarious.

KF: No.

MB: Not gregarious. Too loquacious, because gregarious means talking a lot and not talking about anything. But, loquacious means just talking long, significant talking, lengthy. So, I'm loquacious, as opposed to gregarious, I hope [laughter].

KF: No, definitely. You hit the head, the head, nail on the head with everything. It's just been great.

MB: Yeah, Katie. I'm so glad I did agree, and I was kind of asking Dr. Puaca, "When was the interview going to take place?" I think I may have emailed her about twice, maybe.

KF: Oh, yeah. She told me. She was like, "Don't forget to call her when you come back from break." And, I was like, "Ok, I won't."

MB: Yeah, yeah. So, I'm glad I did do that. I like Christopher Newport. I had fun teaching those two writing classes. So, I'm hoping Dr. Filetti will call me back when she needs an extra instructor.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: Yeah, I've already emailed her.

KF: So, there's nothing else you'd like to add or anything?

MB: No, no, I wouldn't like to add--. [pause] No, I just--. Oh, I'd like to know how President Obama is preparing his two daughters, Sasha and Malia, to lead movements, too. You know, he's a first, a big first. What is he telling them, and First Lady Michelle? What is he telling them, because you know how much trouble--. The mayor of New York got in trouble when he--you know, he's married to a black lady--and, he made a comment that he had to tell his son, half black son, not to trust the police, you know. And when he did that, the police, you know, he and the police are, you know, arguing now because they said he should not have said that in the public.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: That he tells his son, you know, "You've got to act like this, that because they may crack your skull. So, you got to act so and so, because you know how the police are." Yeah, and I am wondering what is he [President Obama] going to tell them [his daughters]. Somewhere, I saw that they were kind of picking on them about their dress, and about them looking bored. But, they're young girls.

KF: Yeah.

MB: "They sure didn't look like they were interested," something "they look like they were going to sleep on." They were being criticized. But, I'm just wondering how is he going to prepare his child, because his mother got up 4 and 5 o'clock in the morning and made sure he knew some black history. You know, when he was living with her in Hawaii and Indonesia, she did.

KF: Mmhmm.

MB: So, I'm wondering, you know, how they are going to prepare their two daughters, the civil rights aspect of them, you know. Well, anyway, that's the only thing.

KF: That's a very good question. Alright, well, thank you so much for agreeing to do the interview.

MB: Ok, Katie. I didn't talk you too much did I?

END OF INTERVIEW

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