

Interview with Anita Curry Jackson

\$ Okay. Let's talk about how life in South Memphis used to be. What does South Memphis mean to you exactly?

@ South Memphis to me. What does it mean.... I would say during the time I grew up everything was segregated. And by saying segregated uh we went to church. All the churches were segregated, all the African Americans. The school that you attended. If you were playing football the only teams that you played, they were only African American. So I really grew up in a segregated city. Uh you've been going downtown uh we would dress to go downtown because that was a big thing. And uh when we went there, we weren't allowed to try clothes on. So if there was something that we wanted or my mother would shop for,

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she went would have to bring things home, try them on and if they didn't fit you would return them. So uh and of course they had eating places in some of the store and you weren't allowed to eat at the store. Also, the Public Library. We could only go to the Public Library downtown one day a week and it was on Thursday. The same thing with the zoo. The zoo was only open to people of color one day week. So we're looking at how life may be for you but just looking at what it was like for me. The same thing riding the bus. If you got on the bus you had to go to the back of the bus. You go from the back to the front. However because of where I lived in South Memphis you really didn't have Caucasian riding the bus so most time we could sit anywhere on the bus but if somebody did get on, you were expected to give up those front seats

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for them to sit.

\$ What was going on in South Memphis during the fifties and sixties?

@ Well I started talking about some of that, that's why we're looking at things being very segregated. Another example I want to probably share is the newspaper. And the newspaper, most of the time you

could look and read articles of the newspaper and you knew what they were referring to. Either African American people and at that time we were called Negroes or Colored. Whether they were talking about Negroes or Colored or White people Caucasian people and the way you knew that is that white people, if they were writing an article, they would say Mrs. So and So or Mr. So and So Ms. For Negroes and Colored they just called you, you know, without a title to your name. Uh and then because of that, and really having a community that

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was social active, they decided they would boycott the papers. So they boycott the papers and that was one of the conditions. That they really had to give titles to all people, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

§ How is South Memphis different now than when you were growing up?

@ I think it uh has changed because when I was there, because of the segregated, you really had people living there of all social classes. So you had people who uh were at the lowest economic social level, you had the middle class, and you would have your upper class. But even the upper class uh, person of color or Negro, if we really looked at the social class, they would really be considered the upper middle class just in terms of

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the salary discrepancy that really existed. So for me, living in a community where you see all economic classes, you really have more support, more role models right in front of you because these people would be at your churches, these are the persons that taught at your school, you saw them in your community as well as ??????? .

§ What was the reputation of South Memphis and how has it changed?

@ I think it has changed. I think it has changed because I think uh now, things as more desegregated. I wouldn't say they're really integrated. I think it's still more pro to say desegregated. So people really can make different choices about where they want to live. They can also make choices or terms

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of careers and not be locked in whereas most people uh who are professional s, who are teachers or nurses, uh and as social ??? males would get the post office, primarily insurance companies and we did have the Black Bank Tri-State Bank.

\$ What are some places in South Memphis that makes it a good place to live?

@ I think what makes a place a good place to live is really having people who do themselves a ?????? and I think it really can create that culture again by being neighbors. Any place can be a great place to live. But I, what has occurred now is that this is everywhere. Sometimes they don't even know the person next door to the, uh

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Everybody in their own homes, they really don't come out and interact. I think as a nation we have to create neighborhoods and communities.

\$ Do you know of anybody who still behaves as they used to as a neighbor as you explained early on?

@ Um I would say here are still individuals who still live in this community because when I say I grew up here right across from Lemoyne Owen College, there was what we called the projects so I really lived in the house of the projects but if you're interviewing people, you're going to find a lot of people who lived in housing projects. Many of the families there were two family households. Some of the mothers who did

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the traditional family things until children were, when I say traditional, house wise. Household engineer until their children at least got into schools and that freed them up to live, work, and then to also be home when their children returned home. Ask me you question again. I think I've gotten lost saying some of these things. I want to make sure I answer your question.

\$ Do you know of any people that behave as neighbors as you explained earlier on?

@ Okay yes. And I said all of that to say the projects uh I know um you may not know them. They've been torn down and rebuilt. And so now there really are ????? what we would be an apartment as well as to uh being homeowners. And some of the people who lived there, generation chose to come back

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to this area and buy some of the homes that are right here on the same grounds the Lemoyne Owen projects were. And I shouldn't say Lemoyne Owen, The Lemoyne Garden uh exist.

\$ What was the rep... What is the best thing about South Memphis?

@ The best thing about South Memphis now, I would say uh, I don't know if it's the best thing but the reality is for Some Memphis' still predominately African Americans who live in this community. And you uh have some of the more established people who've been here for more than one generation who made a choice to stay in this community. And there's

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some very strong institutions here and I think we're looking for opportunities to continue to rebuild this community. You look at things like Lemoyne Owen College is still here. The major churches are still here. And you have Stax that's now ???? and also the uh Stax Academy so I think there are opportunities to really make all of our communities important. But we have to think of them as being important. I think sometimes there's just too much negativity that out there and playing communities against each other. Whereas when you do it not, I mean you're not really lifting up the city. That's what we all should all be doing.

\$ What do you think will make south Memphis a better place than it already is?

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think if we do more to uh market the community as an asset, and they're all assets, but I think we just use too much negative publicity on television. Because I think what they say is new is really not news anymore and I think before they start talking about all the negative things we need to be talking about all the exciting things that uh ?????????? our city and every neighborhood.

\$ Few renovations in South Memphis like College Park. Are you hopeful about the future of South Memphis?

@ I am. I was just saying earlier, just to know that you still have Lemoyne Owen College here, uh a number of churches like ????. continues to stay you're looking at Stax they're also

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looking at how to look at even uh how to revise uh Mississippi and ??????. There's another land markets at four way grill that's there. See when I grew up there were drug stores on the corner, there was a pharmacist there, and you would go there and buy an ice-cream so there you had an entrepreneurs. And you had your cleaners here. You had a theater there. Uh there's a candy store there. So if we go, if you go, and visit places like New York, people just have pockets of cities where you have development. And people don't play communities against each other, and they look at ways of really supporting that because with that, you know, you are um creating a strong, economic environment I think of ever being a community.

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\$ How would you compare living in bigger cities such as Chicago and Atlanta to living in Memphis?

@ When I moved from Memphis, when I've lived here for twenty-one years and I was going to school, I was in Cleveland, Ohio. I was very saddened. I was looking forward to going to the big city in the north and what I found was, uh it was as segregated as Memphis. I wasn't the Metropolis I thought it was. It was really a workmen's town because they made our steel there and so it was um a different industry. But It wasn't significantly different.

\$ We're almost done here. I know you got stuff to do and I don't want

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to use up all your time but, is there any advise that you would give to your people in South Memphis to know?

@ I would always encourage everyone to just maximize your potential. And even when you think, well when you reach the goal, you're reaching a goal with idea then now creating a new step. And so you just always have to be looking at the sky being the limit. And as you move through not being concerned just about you, but also about your friend and your neighbors, um and my hope is that each of you, that you be looking at college, getting a graduates degree, a terminal degree, being a physician or a PhD., and then looking at

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starting companies. But even as I say this, my hope is that more young people will begin looking at even high school is the time to be entrepreneurs, inventing things, and I think that we have to really show a change ourselves and even our education system. I don't think we push young people to use their talents. When you finish high school, you will be on your way, but I hope you don't measure your success by just trying to outperform your peer. Because, sometime that means you're outperforming them and you haven't done any work. You should always be making sure I'm always working hard. Because, if you're not working hard, that means you're not cultivating those brain cells that should be used.

\$ You're hardly working.

@ That's exactly right.

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\$ Is there anything else you would like to speak on that we haven't covered already?

@ I hope that I touched on some things, uh enough things through these parts. I thank your interest and I hope other who will be view this. And I really do think we have to look at the world and see that we are responsible, not only for ourselves but for our friend and our neighbor and our community and for the world. And with all of our talent and our abilities even in this country. I know we try to hold ourselves out to be models for other countries but sometimes we're pointing the fingers and we have not taken care of business here. Because we really should have more peace and we should be more prosperity for regardless of race, class, and ethnicity. So I just want to thank you

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for the um wonderful question that you asked. So I don't know if there's anything that you'd like to ask.

\$ Thank you for participating in the Cross Roads To Freedom Project.

@ Thank you.