White: This is Ruth White with the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage at The University of Southern Mississippi. It is 1:15 p.m. on Monday, October the twenty-ninth, 2012, and I am interviewing Richard K. Marsh. And if you will, just please state your name, for the record.

Marsh: Richard K. Marsh.

White: OK. And like I said, we’re going to go ahead and start with some background information. So if you could, tell me where you were born, and where you grew up.

Marsh: I was born in Gulfport, Gulfport, Mississippi here on the Gulf Coast. I grew up in what we call the Quarters, the first six years of my life, and we moved to an area, what we call the North Gulfport area. And that’s where I am today, remain today. I went to school at North Gulfport Elementary, North Gulfport Junior High, before middle school, before it was turned—it was a high school, but I think in 1970, it became a middle school. And they moved everybody, due to segregation, to Harrison Central High School. I stayed in North Gulfport till my eighth-grade year when I went to Harrison Central in my ninth-grade year, graduated Harrison Central High in 1980. And I went to Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, did two years there at Southern University Baton Rouge, and I came home and started working for Anchor Glass, which was known as Chattanooga Glass or Diamond Bathurst Glass, but its final name was Anchor Glass. I started on the bottom of the totem pole there and
worked my way up to relief supervisor, manager over the quality assurance
department, and from there, I got hurt about 1991 with a back injury where I had to
have two surgeries, stayed off until about [20]03. And I went to work for Harrison
County. After Hurricane Katrina, I contracted a viral infection, and it attacked my
heart. And I had to retire from there on disability, and this is where we are in our
present day, 2012.

White: And what do you do now?

Marsh: Now, I’m just retired. I’m retired. I’m a community activist. I deal with
various issues, dealing with the community and helping different people out within the
community. I am the chairman of the Gulfport Concerned Citizen’s Coalition, which
is a nonprofit organization. We a support group where anyone within any community,
anybody, that has a problem, we’ll help. We help them address their problem, such as
the Thirty-third Avenue High School Alumni Association, where they was trying to
save the buildings at Thirty-third Avenue High School, which is history. We helped
them with the Labor Department to pretty much save these buildings, historical
buildings. It is a historical black high school, well-known throughout the state and the
country, and what they were trying to do was tear down the buildings after Hurricane
Katrina. No one knew who had the lease or who owned the buildings, which we knew
the City of Gulfport did. The labor department ran a Job Corps facility there. We
came in and questioned the handling of the building itself. Why did you let them fall
in disarray when we know that even here where we sit now holding this interview,
Gulf Park USM [University of Southern Mississippi], has buildings out here that
they’re restoring with a grant that the president here secured, of twenty-six million
dollars? At the time when we started this fight for Thirty-third with the labor
department and the City of Gulfport, you had twenty-three million dollars on the table,
but you wanted to tear down these particular buildings because they was in a black
community.

White: OK. That’s why.
**Marsh:** That’s why, because they’re in a black community. These buildings wasn’t worth saving in the black community, but the buildings here at Gulf Park was worth saving. You know, you taking twenty-six million dollars to do eight buildings here that you only had three buildings to do at Thirty-third with twenty-three million dollar. Something’s wrong with that picture. And *those* are the issues in which we, I tackle as chairman of Gulfport Concerned Citizen’s Coalition. To take you back to some history, I was born in 1962, April 22, 1962. My experience when I was born in Gulfport, Central Gulfport, what we know now as the Quarters, I was born in Dr. Felix Dunn’s office.

**White:** Oh! (laughter) Is this a black doctor?

**Marsh:** He’s a black doctor on Nineteenth Street in Gulfport. He came to my mother, my mother on Easter Sunday and told my mother point-blank, “I’m going to church. I’m going to come back and see if you ready.” After church he came back, which he did, he came back. He said, “I’m going out to the ball game in DeLisle. I’ll be back, and we going to bring that young man into this world.” So around 6:30 thirty that evening or 4:30, he came back and picked my mom up, took her to his office, which was down the street. We lived on 2404 Thirty-first Avenue, across the street from John T. Hall Funeral Home, which is one of the oldest black funeral homes in the city of Gulfport, along with Lockett’s, at that time. And I came into this world on Easter Sunday evening, and he brought me back to my Nana’s house, which was Celeste, name was Celeste Cobbs, Celeste Robinson Cobbs (spelling:__________________________________). And I say that because her son was known as the “Flying Condor,” [John C. Robinson], and he left here and went to Ethiopia for General Sellassie. And he used to fly his plane to where on Twenty-eighth Street, what we know as Twenty-eighth Street, where the Mississippi Power Company is now. There used to be a clay road, dirt road, and that’s where he used to land his plane. But that was my Nana.
White: So you got to know him, too, a little bit?

Marsh: I didn’t know him, matter fact. I have some of the furniture. I have his desk in which he studied at when he was growing up. I used to have the bed. It got lost in Katrina, but some of the furniture that she has, the antiques is older than—(laughter), it’s old. I still have that furniture today, but she taught me a valuable lesson to understand and to help individuals that needs help. And my mother was a hard worker, and she was a maid for Hancock Bank, what we know now as a custodian or technician, however they put it, but she worked for Hancock Bank for many years. She retired from Hancock Bank. If you talk about civil rights era, I remember being six years old, five years old, going to the beach, where we had to go in front of the VA, and even then the police would come down there and check things out with my stepfather and uncle and them. Why are we here and all this. I remember those days. I remember going to Hewe’s Brothers where we—to try clothes on, where you couldn’t even, as a black child, you couldn’t go in the dressing room and try those clothes on. I must say, though, even with the Jones Brother Drugstore, we had to go to the back, the side door to pick up prescriptions. M. Salloum (spelling:______________________________) I remember. They were very generous and very nice, but their clothing store, you could come in. And they would help you. You could try your clothes on in the dressing room. They were sweet, sweet people, good people.

White: Was this a white store?

Marsh: It was a white store. They allowed it, but Hewe’s Brothers, we couldn’t. We had to try the clothes on right where the racks were. That was if we tried the clothes on. Things, also, I remember as a young kid, eight, six, lady who used to keep me, Ms. Julia McMillen (spelling:______________________________), her husband used to work, Mr. Willie McMillen used to work at Milk of Magnesia Plant. I remember riding the bus to downtown, where we had to go the back of the bus. I experienced that. Also I had a good doctor, my first doctor I ever knew that I had; I
sprained my wrist. And my mother took me to Dr. Fred Walker, although he had a section called the colored section. And with me spraining my wrist, I went to Memorial Hospital, and they told me it was just a sprain, but which I thought at the time. He looked over it, and he told me go back to the hospital and stay there till he got there. And he made a phone call. My wrist was fractured, and that’s the experience I had with Memorial Hospital at a early age.

**White:** And this was a white doctor that said—

**Marsh:** This was a white doctor who was good. And I got something. I’m not saying you know—we have some bad whites, as bad blacks, but we have some good whites, as we do some good blacks. So we have to evaluate and look at the situation. When I went to Harrison Central, they had to close the gate. We wondered why they had gates, a fence up when we went into Harrison Central. We soon found out in 1976. The Ku Klux Klan came. That we experienced, even on Highway 49 and Dedeaux Road. The Ku Klux Klan used to take up money on the highway there.

**White:** Can you tell me a little bit about what they did?

**Marsh:** Well, Harrison County Police closed the gate off, and we didn’t, we never knew because where we were, the distance where we were from where Highway 49, with Harrison Central High, we never did see it. But we knew with the presence of the polices, the county sheriffs that was up on the roofs and walking and driving around, we knew something was going on. I can’t remember the year *Roots* came out, but we experienced, you know, racist things happening on campus then. But you just took it in stride and tried to stay out of trouble and go on because (laughter) my mother told me, said, “Son, you go to school to learn.” And that’s what we did.

**White:** Could you give me some examples of, kind of, racism on campus?
Marsh: Well, when Roots came out, we had certain individuals that was fighting certain individuals. We had a young man by the name—I’ll never forget this good friend of mine—Willie Rice (spelling:__________________________________). Two white gentlemen, young students, start just jumping on him and beating him, and he would not fight back. In other words, turn the other cheek. That he did.

White: And that was kind of your philosophy, as well?

Marsh: Well, not so much as my philosophy, but it had to be because my mother didn’t play that. My mother didn’t play that. She, like she say, “I sent you to school to get education, not to go to school to fight.” And that’s what she instilled, and that’s what a lot of parents instilled in their children back then and today. When you say, “strong parents,” not only—I had a stepfather in my life, but my mother was my parents. And that’s why we say we have strong black women in the black communities today, and I appreciate that. And I appreciate those who had a dealing in my upbringing. As they say, “It takes a village to raise a child.” That’s exactly back then what we had, and today, we try to do the same thing. I’m in a group called the Mighty Mens of Valor. We mentor young black mens or young white mens, school age, from seventh to eighth grade in North Gulfport, seven and eighth grade school, which is a very good school. It’s a high-impact school, and we try to touch their lives. We try to do various things with them to keep them on the right track, to let them know that you just can’t be a class clown. You have to get your work; you have to listen to your teacher. You have to obey. Nowadays, kids, they don’t listen; they don’t obey. And I can’t say I don’t know where it’s coming from because it’s coming from parents not being strict with them. If I look—my mother could be across the room somewhere and looked at me; I knew I had to, you know, I had to straighten up. But today, a mother look at a child; they look at her and say, “What you looking at me for?” We have to get back to the old school of raising our children, and that’s something we’ve gotten away from.
White: Do you know, do you have any ideas of why that’s changed? Kind of a hard question.

Marsh: Well, history, I guess over the years, we’ve gotten too relaxed, I think, because we’ve forgotten where we come from, the struggles that we have had to overcome, and now, with people or individuals thinking that we have it made? No, we don’t. We don’t. Seriously we don’t. Used to, the churches, the black churches was the most popular and strong, strongest institution that we had in the black community. Now, I hate to say it; it’s a market. It’s a marketplace. Ministers are afraid to tell the people point-blank, “You need to raise your child the right way.” Ministers, I know we say separation of church and state, but sometime ministers have to step up and say what’s right and what’s wrong in the political world. And we don’t do that now.

Back then we did because if your child was arrested, the first one you called was the preacher, the pastor. Pastor’s nowhere to be found, some of them, not all of them, some of them. There’s some good pastors. And there’s some individual pastors, it’s about a dollar bill. I’m sorry to say that, but I’m telling you the truth. We have some very good pastors here on the Gulf Coast and some not so good.

White: So you think growing up during the kind of the civil rights era put everything in perspective for you and made you?

Marsh: I received my history from the barber shop. When I was growing up and as I was growing up, I had to go to a barber shop. We used to call it Mr. Peewee’s Barber shop, Mr. Archie Parker (spelling:__________________________), Mr. Napoleon (spelling:__________________________), Miss Dora (spelling:__________________________). And just sitting there to wait on a haircut, you heard different stories of what happened in old, in the past; and then they’d bring up how, what they did, and how they grew up. I mean, these gentlemens at the time were eighty, seventy, ninety years old, so I received a valuable history lesson from these individuals. That’s where I learned. I learned. I took those stories in because they were true stories of how Gulfport—and you talk about Handsboro
area; you talk about Magnolia Groves, Soria City, the Quarters, North Gulfport, Turkey Creek, DeLisle, Pass Christian, Bay St. Louis, Biloxi. That’s history. It’s history, and when these elderly gentlemen would sit there and tell the story of what they did—we had a semipro, professional baseball league, the Gulfport Panthers, and when you listen to these gentlemens tell you their stories: Ah! That really happened? And to experience some of those things and to go back and experience some of the things in my life, I had to say, “Well, that’s what they were talking about.” And I took that in, and my mother made me watch the news. And I learned a lot of my history, my world history through watching the news. As we go through the Middle East now, those are things that have been happening for years and years and years. And it’s going to continue to happen for years and years and years after we’re gone. But at the same time, we look at history, today, as it was yesterday. In the early [19]60s that I experienced when I was growing up, ’70s and ’80s, that we still live in a society that is pretty much racist. I hate to say it, but it is. It’s true. You look at the president race today. A lot of that’s based on race because we have a black president. A lot of people don’t want to speak it. But why not? It’s the truth, and God said, “The truth will set you free.” So let’s be real with one another. I just see you as a human being, and I hope you see me as a human being.

**White:** Definitely.

**Marsh:** And if I can help you, that’s what God put me on this earth to do is help you. But attitudes today, and as it was back then, “Nah.” We have to become more interested in trying to save our children, both white and black today. Like I say, you asked the question, “Why do I think it’s that way?” I don’t want to say people don’t care, but like I say, I think that people have gotten relaxed, too relaxed. That, “Oh, it’s OK.” No, no, no, no. It’s not OK for a young child to disrespect his parents or anyone. You don’t disrespect. I was always taught to respect my elders. And at the same time, my mother instilled in me, “Son, when you become grown, you still respect your elders, but at the same time, in a nice, respectable manner, you let that individual know that you’re a grown person now.” And it’s a right way and a wrong
way to approach and then make it aware, make that individual aware of what’s going on with you and anybody else. I value all the senior citizens wherever I see them at because still that’s knowledge. That is knowledge, and I try to get that knowledge and hold onto that knowledge, and at the same time, passing that knowledge on to the younger generation to let them know, “That’s wrong. You don’t disrespect individuals.” I know where I grew up in North Gulfport, we had a basketball court on the field behind my house, my mother’s house, and you playing ball, and you get up in there, and you think you grown. And we had a lady that lives across the street from the basketball court. Her name was Mamaw, Ms. Jessie Singleton (spelling:__________________________________). And she started a snowball stand, just for us kids. So we would have somewhere to go and get something and stay out of trouble, and we’d get out there. And we’ll start playing ball, and we think we grown, cussing and everything. But no sooner we see them come out, we’ll see our mothers over in the distance, we shut up. But today, these individuals don’t do that. You have a walking track by that court now, and grown women are out there walking, and men are out there walking for exercise, and these young men on the basketball court just cussing up a storm, disrespectful. But I think the people, such as the W.T. Guices (spelling:______________________________), Reverend McIlhaney (spelling:______________________________), Reverend Fox (spelling:______________________________), Reverend T.B. Borns (spelling:______________________________), and various ministers on this Coast that I looked up to. I looked up to these gentlemen, and they’re very just, different. Mr. Austin (spelling:______________________________), who started the baseball, little league baseball there in the Quarters at Nineteenth Street Community Center because we couldn’t go anywhere else and get this. And I thank them. I thank the L.C. Davis’s and the Amos Crouch’s, the Isaiah Fredericks (spelling:______________________________), Dr. Felix Dunn, Dr. Tate, and Dr. Love. These were people that was in our lives that we experienced. We had our restaurants like the Turner’s Cafè, or Clark’s place out of Turkey Creek, a swimming pool. We had these things, growing up, but it was a much, to me it was a much better
time, although racism and civil rights was back there, to me it was a much better time back then.

**White:** Really? So if I were to ask you the question, “Do you think things are better or worse today,” you would say maybe a little worse?

**Marsh:** A little. I feel they’re a little worse, not so much as, as racism, but racism exists. But it’s just, it’s just the turmoil among people in general.

**White:** So less a problem *between* the races as just all around?

**Marsh:** It’s all around, and like I say, we know that racism exists. But it’s a hidden racism, so to speak. They’re not out, out and out. How can I put this? They’re not just—

**White:** It’s not as overt, maybe?

**Marsh:** Overt, or *openly*. It’s just we know it’s a hidden.

**White:** Right.

**Marsh:** And sometimes it shines its ugly hand in there, and then sometimes it’s hidden. But we know it’s there. We know it’s present, but the way we go about our lives today, you wouldn’t know it because nobody wants to speak of it. Everybody thinks that everything’s just hunky-dory, and, “Let’s leave the past where the past is.” True, I understand that, but at the same time, you bringing it forward in a hidden agenda at the same time. Whereas in that, in the City of Gulfport, the black communities doesn’t even get their taxes returned back in the form of streetlights or a community center. Every community, pretty much, I said pretty much because I want to clarify that. Pretty much all of the black community centers in the black community of the City of Gulfport are closed. We may have one or two that are open,
but the majority of the black community centers in the City of Gulfport are closed. And this is 2012. OK? In the white communities? They’re open. That’s a difference. Where we see, where you doing various works in Bayou View, Florence Garden, and other places of this nature, white communities, we receive CDBG [Community Development Block Grant] funding. And you may get a hundred thousand dollars to spread among the black community or the blighted areas. Well, now they’ve seen a loophole where they can take some of that money and put it downtown Gulfport. That’s not a blighted area, not a blighted area. So when I said hidden agenda, these are the hidden agendas.

White: The loopholes.

Marsh: Right. These are the hidden agendas, and it shouldn’t be. It shouldn’t be. We all, like I said, we should all be on an equal playing field.

White: I definitely agree with you.

Marsh: Yes. And that’s pretty much—

White: Well, I guess we can come back a little bit to your childhood, and I wonder if you could tell me maybe, where, it was an all-black school that you were—

Marsh: Well, the elementary, and the middle school was an all-black school. When we got to high school, it was integration, and we, you know, hey.

White: Would you tell me a little bit about integration?

Marsh: It was, for me, I had no problems. I had no problems. I had accumulated friends because I played basketball, and accumulated friends, like the Paul Curtises (spelling:__________________________________), the Daryl Deschamps (spelling:__________________________________), the Robbie Fairleys
(spelling: ________________________), the Gene Stucks
(spelling: ________________________), the Mark Greens.

White: So you’re making white friends?

Marsh: Right. Yeah. Right, right. And this was the world, Jerry Helveston
(spelling: ________________________). It was Moran
(spelling: ________________________), and I had no problem with them. They had no problem with me, never got in a fight while I was in high school whatsoever. Never was disciplined in the office whatsoever.

White: So you didn’t have any problems with teachers, either?

Marsh: No! Teachers, like Ms. Warden
(spelling: ________________________), Ms. Nobles
(spelling: ________________________), Luna Berg
(spelling: ________________________), Ms. Porter
(spelling: ________________________), M.L. Richardson
(spelling: ________________________), the principal, Mr. Porter
(spelling: ________________________), who was a principal, Mr. Curtis
(spelling: ________________________), who was a principal, Doc Hoskin (spelling: ________________________), who I see often, there was my history teacher. Mr. Bird (spelling: ________________________), got along very well with those white teachers.

White: Really?

Marsh: Yes, um-hm.

White: And now, did you see anything happening to other, maybe, black students in the school?
Marsh: Well, you had some that I felt like was trying to adapt, in the instance didn’t want to adapt, same with white students. They frowned upon, “How dare you come to my school?” But that was the times. Those were the changing of times back then where we had to go through what we went through, and some made the best of it. Some made the worst of it. It’s like, you look to your right; you look to your left. Some of y’all going’ be here; and some of you not. And that’s just the way it was. We had a few tragic deaths coming in school, like a classmate of mine, Sammie Patton (spelling:__________________________________), Lucius Cook (spelling:__________________________________), Clarence Jones (spelling:__________________________________). We had instances where, we had tragic.

White: And what are these tragedies from?

Marsh: From schoolmates, whether they were in automobile accidents, or where they committed suicide, or various things such as that nature, but the pressure.

White: So you think this had to do with integration, maybe?

Marsh: I can’t say it had to do with integration. I just say it has to, to me, when it comes with the suicide, it had to do with the pressure of life, period.

White: Especially going through high school, in general.

Marsh: Going through high school, and it took a toll. It took a toll. The various things that may have happened in their lives, it took a toll. It took a toll. We had, even after high school, we had friends that did those things. I had a good friend. I grew up with his brother, Grady House (spelling:__________________________________), his brother Steve House (spelling:__________________________________) right
down the street, around the corner, just life in general. But that impacted everybody else because we were that close of a knit community. We were just that close.

**White:** Sounds great, yeah. Did you, when you went to high school—so you were going through high school, and this is when integration was kind of happening. Had you interacted with a lot of white children before that?

**Marsh:** No. I can’t say that I had, but on occasions, you would have like the Bartells (spelling:__________________________), the Bartells. Well, she was a teacher at North Gulfport. She dealt with the Mennonites, and we would go to Camp Landon and experience that culture and everything. Some of the students from North Gulfport, in the summertime would go to, I want to say Iowa. I don’t know why I want to say Iowa, but they would go to places like that with the Mennonites. But Ms. Bartell and her husband who was a carpenter would come out and set up tents and have church revival, and they would intermingle with the community. But my experiences when I played, when I was at North Gulfport, I played ball. We played against teams that had all white teams and everything and experienced it, and then once we came, those individuals that played against in junior high, we met up at the ninth grade school. And we played together. It was an experience.

**White:** Definitely yeah. So you were playing baseball all through elementary school?

**Marsh:** Basketball.

**White:** Basketball! I’m sorry, basketball, yes. Well, I wonder, could you tell me what you did at home as far as after school?

**Marsh:** After school, I think this is where, we don’t do enough of. After school I had chores. I had to come in. Whatever my mother had me to do that evening when I got in from school, I did that, and then I had to do my homework. I *had* to do my homework, and from that point on, sometime I would go and help her at work, and
sometime I would stay there and continue to do my studies and everything and do my chores. On the weekend, it wasn’t a weekend that went by that if I had to help cut grass, and we had a load of dirt, spread a load of dirt, hang clothes on the line. Kids today don’t even know what that’s all about. They don’t know how to work. Parents don’t show them how to work. My mother instilled in me and said this, “Son, I pray to God that I live to see you get fifteen. That way, you know how to clean. You know how to cook for yourself, and you know how to work.” And that’s what she instilled in me. I knew at the age of what? Ten? Even, what? Ten, nine? I knew how to clean a bathroom. I knew how to sweep a floor. I knew how to cut grass. I knew how to cook various things that she showed me how to cook in the kitchen. I knew how to iron my clothes, how to fold my clothes, how to fold towels. Kids today, parents do it. Throw it in the dryer. Throw it in the washer. Boom! That’s it! We don’t have that upbringing of the kids.

**White:** So do you think you had a lot less free time than they do now, maybe?

**Marsh:** I think I had a lot of free time because I, on the weekends, I played ball and did these things. In the morning, I got up, and it wasn’t no sleeping until ten o’clock on the weekend. I’m sorry. (laughter) Even in the summertime when we were off from school, this was even before weed-eaters. I had to clean the fence row, fence line, the grass under the fence. I had to clean that. That’s what she gave me. “This week, this is what you had to do.” I had to trim; I had to clean the flowerbed. That’s why I don’t have no flowers in my yard now (laughter) because I had to do those things when I was growing up, when we got out for the summer for school.

**White:** Well, I guess moving forward then, so when you graduated from high school, you ended up going to a university.

**Marsh:** It was Southern University in Baton Rouge.

**White:** Did you have trouble getting accepted there, or—
Marsh: No.

White: Not at all?

Marsh: No, not at all.

White: And did you have any problems with students in Baton Rouge?

Marsh: No. I had a great time. Everybody was, “Hey!” It was growing up. It was growing up.

White: So when did you become active in the civil rights movement?

Marsh: Not so much as active in the civil rights movement, it was active within our communities and within City government. I would say back in [19]90—well, go back then; we had a organization called the Civic Team, the North Gulfport Civic Club created a youth organization called the Civic Team, and I was part of that in my eleventh and twelfth grade year of high school. We had a project to where we, whoever got the most individuals registered for voting, once it was a hundred dollars or something, and they just, I can’t remember what it was. Well, in our school on our senior trip, we went to the courthouse, and I went, and then I got everybody to register that was in the senior class. So I got the most, and from that point on, I looked at it, “Well, that’s doing something.” And the people that instilled that into me were the, the Barnes (spelling:__________________________), Ms. Annie Pearl Barnes, Ms. Sarah Polk (spelling:__________________________), Ms. Jerrie Nettles (spelling:__________________________), the Isaiah Fredericks of the community, the Amos Crouch of communities, the Laura Crouch, the James Crouch, Ms. Inez Connoly (spelling:__________________________), Ms. Frances Fredericks, our former state representative. I looked at these individuals, and these are the things. We
had Fran, she’s now the city council for the City of Gulfport Ward Three, which is where I grew up and where I live at now; Ella Holmes-Hines, people of these nature, of this nature. You have to want to help and get involved. This is talking about your community, your people and everything. I’ve seen where I’ve had various people in other communities, like Ms. Santos (spelling:___________________________), who’s a realtor, that needed help in her community or needed various things, and hey, we’re there. I had great guidance, such as the Walter Thomases (spelling:___________________________), the Flowers Whites (spelling:___________________________), the Warren Whites (spelling:___________________________). My mother, Mamie, Mamie Marsh Hopper (spelling:___________________________) was a great inspiration to me, that instilled in me, “Son, help people.” And I guess that’s what the nurturing I got from her, of helping people, and that’s what I did. You had, also in my life, you had Ms. Davis, Ms. Thelma Davis (spelling:___________________________), her husband, Mr. Davis. You just did what you had to do to help people. When you talking about great schoolteachers who entered my life, I guess, at the right time to keep me on the right track, Coach Bobby Jones (spelling:___________________________), Coach Luckett (spelling:___________________________), Prince Jones (spelling:___________________________). These were individuals that kept me on a narrow—and see the thing about that: if you went to a church, and the church consists of your teachers, there wasn’t nothing you could do wrong, like the Ms. Thelma Gore (spelling:___________________________), the Percy Loves (spelling:___________________________), Ms. Creewell (spelling:___________________________), Ms. Anne Stephanie, Coach Stephanie (spelling:___________________________). When you talk about, when I say Coach Bobby Jones, and come to find out Coach Bobby Jones is at the same school my brother was, Thirty-third, he knew me. He knew my family, and when you think you getting away with something, and even when I was in junior high, in the sixth grade, a man came to teach at our school named Mr. Luckett (spelling:___________________________). “Oh, you don’t know nothing
about me.” Come to find out, my mother lived in Canton, Mississippi, where Mr. Luckett was from. Their family knew one another. So how can you do, pull the wool, and try to do things and get away with it when, hey, everybody knows your family. Everybody knows you. So I had people in my life to, to really corral me, and to, more or less, keep me on the straight and narrow path.

**White:** Right. So it goes back to that tight-knit community.

**Marsh:** Right. Even five, six, you had like the Annie Fitzpatricks Tartt (spelling:__________________________________) that ran the library there at Nineteenth Street Community Center, where they took their hard-earned money and bought books and bought things for the children. The Mr. Austins, you just had various people. Dr. Dunn, I can’t stop calling Dr. Dunn name because Dr. Dunn was a great influence on the black communities. Dr. Tate and Dr. Love, they did a lot. Reverend W.T. Guice, Famous McElhaney (spelling:________________________). I’m trying to think of his name; I can’t call this name, Mercer Seake (spelling:________________________). Then you had Reverend E.L. Fox at First Missionary Baptist Church, and you got Dr. Walker, who hadn’t been too long passed away. His wife, Ms. Dorothy Walker, Reverend Collins now, these individuals, when you live in a neighborhood in close-knit—because I could go from North Gulfport to Gaston Point. Before I get back home, my mom knew where I was. That’s how great knit these individuals were, how the community spanned. Like Ms. Dorothy Walker, my Head Start teacher, Ms. Malone, my Head Start teacher, these people kept up on their kids. If they knew your mother, they knew you and vice-versa, with my mother. You had the Ms. Dorothy Prior (spelling:_______________________), Ms. Walker in Gaston Point, Ms. Montgomery, Mr. Montgomery, Decesars Garnot (spelling:__________________________), which used to be a principal, and Mr. Barnes, Thomas Barnes (spelling:__________________________). I can’t forget him, assistant principal in North Gulfport. You just had so many people that knew you, and these people would sit you down and tell you right from wrong.
White: Um-hm. So they were sort of your mentors.

Marsh: Yes. And I guess that’s why I kept on the straight and narrow path because, in the same time, the same as I didn’t want to disappoint my mother, I didn’t want to disappoint these individuals.

White: Right. So do you think you could tell me a little bit more about some of those individuals, like Dr. Dunn, you said was really active.

Marsh: Dr. Dunn was active in the civil rights era. He was in the civil rights era. He knew Medgar Evers. Matter of fact, Coach Stephanie was roommates with Medgar Evers at Alcorn State University, and Doc, Dr. Dunn would just, and as I called him “Doc,” he just, hey, he was persistent, “Son, you don’t need to be in that crowd. Son, you need to, this is what you need to be doing.” And I respected him to the highest.

White: So you think that’s kind of what you try to do now?

Marsh: Yes, I try. I guess those individuals names that I’ve called, I try to emulate what their lives, part of what their lives used to be or was at that time and still is.

White: Reaching out to the children ____________________________.

Marsh: Right, reaching out to the children and just reaching out. The most important people in today’s society, to me, are the babies and the kids, and the senior citizens. We have to invest in our children the right way, and we have to be there for the senior citizens. And if we don’t do that, we lost. We’re losing generations, and we’re going to lose the most important generation, our seniors, if we don’t tap into that knowledge.

White: Right, because we don’t know how much longer they’ll be around.

Marsh: We don’t know how much longer they’ll be around, absolutely right.
White: You mentioned the voter’s registration that you were active in trying to get people to register.

Marsh: Yes.

White: Could you tell me a little bit about maybe some of the problems you had getting people to register?

Marsh: Well, I guess I go back to a teacher and what she told me, two teachers, matter fact, both last name of Crouch, Ms. Adrian Crouch and Ms. Peggy Crouch. “You got to count for something in life, and our vote must count for something in life.” They both told me those same words but different times in life, and I thought that was ironic coming from two sister-in-laws that they would say the same thing. And it was Ms. Brewer (spelling: ___________________________) who not so much—she was a part of the civic club, but Ms. Brewer and Ms. Fletcher would tell me, “Son, when it come time for you to register to vote, you got to go register. Your vote has to count.” And that stuck with me; that stuck with me. And I don’t know. For some reason, I think we take it as a joke. It’s not a joke; it’s a privilege. It’s a privilege. If you don’t vote, you don’t have a right to argue any point, what’s dealing with political or anything that’s going on in your community. If you vote, you have that right because you have put it on the line with those people, have fought and died for us, the Fannie Lou Hamers, people like that, the Medgar Evers. And if we don’t continue that legacy, then we just occupying time and space, to be honest. So the problems that I see of people not voting, I really, I don’t know. I’m just being honest with you. I don’t know why they don’t take it serious than what they should. We need to be prepared because don’t nobody, we really don’t know what life holds for us. Only God knows what life holds for us. This is his world. And we’re living in his world, but at the same time, he give us sense and the knowledge and the brains to put to use, to say, “Hey, if this is what I need to do, and I had forefathers, my forefathers fought for this, then I at least need to hold up to the image that’s saying that, hey, if
they died for it, I need to continue the legacy and get other peoples to register vote and for myself to go on and vote.”

White: Right. And so when you were working with the civic team, that’s kind of what you told—

Marsh: No. At that time, I was just trying to get to win the award. I was, what? Eighteen then. So I was trying to win the award, but as life went on and as I experienced things in my life, it came back to me, “Well, that’s what the fight was all about.” And that’s what the fight is still about, rights, your right.

White: So when you registered to vote, did you have trouble getting registered?

Marsh: No.

White: Nobody gave you a hard time?

Marsh: No, no, no, no. We over flooded the place, and I guess at the same time at the Harrison County Courthouse, they were just glad to see people coming to register because don’t get me ______________________. There were not only just blacks registered to vote. It was white students, too, so hey.

White: You just all lined up together?

Marsh: Right. And that was, so to speak, our mark on the beginning of our lives because you got to realize—

White: Eighteen.

Marsh: —eighteen, that’s the beginning of, that’s the beginning of your adulthood because you coming out of high school. What’s next? College, then life itself, and
that was the mark that we made, the class of 1980 from Harrison Central High School.
(laughter)

**White:** All right. Well, then, I also kind of wanted to bring it back; I meant to ask you this earlier. If you could, tell me maybe a little bit about your mom working at Hancock Bank.

**Marsh:** Well, my mother was a maid. My mother had a sixth grade education, but she was smart as a whip. Her street sense, even her knowledge of things, with a sixth grade education, it amazed me. She was built within the Bible, and she believed in the Bible. And she believed in her Lord and her God. And she worked at Hancock Bank, and everything was hunky-dory. She also did maid work, as I said before, domestic technician; that’s what they call it today. But she did maid work for the family, the Jones family.

**White:** Now, are these white families?

**Marsh:** Yes, ma’am. These are white families, the Datlocks (spelling:__________________________), the Gollotts—no. I take that back, the Golos (spelling:__________________________). Matter fact, one of the individual work was the plant manager at the Glass Plant where I later, later on in life went to work for, at the Glass Plant, but he was at another plant at that time. And a family, I can’t think of their last name, but the lady, she was so sweet, in Long Beach. Name was Ms. Nita, and she had a son named George. And they loved me to death, and anything that I may have thought I wanted, they provided to my mother. They were very sweet. All the families were very sweet. I must say.

**White:** So they never gave her a hard time?

**Marsh:** No, never, never, even helped her out when she had to go—my mother went in the hospital twice in her lifetime, one for, to remove all of her teeth and everything.
And the second time is when she got sick and went on to heaven. And that was the only two times my mother ever went in the hospital, but like I say, she worked for the Hancock Bank. And on some instances, some things that transpired that she just took, took it with a smile and went on.

**White:** Some things like, what?

**Marsh:** It was, when at the time, when Hancock Bank was building the new Hancock Bank and the new parking garage downtown Gulfport, instead of Hancock Bank doing those employees, those custodians right, I just don’t think they did them right in the manner in which it came down to their retirement. And I think they took advantage of them, and I know that my mother put twenty-five years in Hancock Bank and no retirement, no retirement. Maybe they opted out for whatever they wanted to get paid out and everything, but did they explain it to them? Did they tell them right from wrong, or what they needed to know? Did they take care of them like they took care of them? No, they did not. They did not. It was many a times I helped executives down to their cars because they could not walk; I won’t call any names. But I may write a book one day.

**White:** Yeah, because you remembered all this.

**Marsh:** I may write a book. (laughter) I may write a book one day.

**White:** About her experiences with Hancock?

**Marsh:** Yeah, and even me being there, helping her work. Like I say, it’s so many days I had to walk individuals down from the third floor, down the fire escape to their vehicles.

**White:** Really? Why were they going down the fire escape?
**Marsh:** They were too intoxicated.

**White:** Oh, my goodness. That is awful.

**Marsh:** I lived through those things.

**White:** Well, it sounds like she was a strong woman.

**Marsh:** She was a very strong woman. My mother was a *very* strong woman. I’ll never forget one day. Where we live at now, there’s a neighbor and her, I guess, her boyfriend or whatever came over and started whipping her son. My mother went out there and told that gentleman, “If you don’t take your hand off that individual, I’ll take this hoe and hit you upside your head.” My mother was very strong; my mother didn’t take anything, not from me, my brother, anybody. She was very strong. She stood her ground, and she told them exactly what time it was. And I get that, and that’s where I get mine from. I don’t have a problem; if you wrong, you wrong. And if I have something to say to you, I’m going to say it. And that’s just the way it is, whether it’s establishment or individual. I’m going to say what I have to say because if you treating people wrong or treating something to a point where you know it’s wrong, then I’m going to speak up. That’s the way I was raised.

**White:** Sounds like the way she was, too

**Marsh:** Exactly. Exactly, so like when I said earlier, yeah, I had a stepfather. My father died when I was seven years old. My stepfather died when I was eighteen. When I needed a male figure in my life, at that time, my mother was my father and my mother. What she instilled in me, to be honest with you, I don’t think no man could have. I hear a lot of people telling me it takes, “A man has to raise a boy.” No. Anybody that has that knowledge of life, and I mean knowledge of life, not the expectation of life, but that knowledge of life, can raise a child whether it’s a female or a male. And my mother did that, and I think she did a hell of a job.
White: And then, she had you and your brother?

Marsh: Yes.

White: Were there other siblings? Just the two of you?

Marsh: Yes. Just my brother, and I had a god-sister, Sharon Saucier
(spelling:__________________________________), who my mother helped take care
of. And that was it.

White: And then, it sounds like church life was really important.

Marsh: Church life was—Sunday school, church, BTU [Baptist Training Union], and
that went on, choir rehearsal during the week, during the summertime, Vacation Bible
School. That’s the way it was. And then when I got up where I could go out to little
dances, you think you going to sleep in in that Sunday morning? No. “If you can go
out, you can go to church. Get up and go to church, as long as you in my house.”
(laughter) And that’s the way I was brought up. That’s the way it was.

White: Right. And was this a community black church?

Marsh: This was every black church that it was in the city of Gulfport. The Mount
Bethels, the Progressive, the Little Rocks, Mercy Seat, Morning Star, First Missionary
Baptist Church, the Mount Olives, the Shilohs, the Mount Pleasants, the Saint Mark’s,
these are the churches that was there, even Saint Theresa. This is the way we were all
raised in the various communities. This is the way we were raised, the Riley Chapels,
Hansboro, the Mount Zion. This is the way we were raised.

White: The church is sort of the center—
**Marsh:** The church was the center of your life because if anything happened, like I say, if someone went out and got in trouble and got put in jail, for instance, the first person you call was the pastor. That was it, the *pastor.*

**White:** Right, which is not the case now?

**Marsh:** Not the case now. When it came time to voting, you would look to the pastor on whom you going to vote. I understand separation of church and state, but that pastor stood tall. “These are the individual that are helping us; these individuals you need to vote for. These are the individuals been out there on the ground and working in the community. These are the individuals we vote, and vote for.” You don’t have that today. We’re afraid for some reason to call it like it should be called from the pulpit.

**White:** Yeah. And now, I heard that a lot of civil rights meetings were held at churches?

**Marsh:** Yes. Pretty much that’s where your civil rights meetings was held, in the church, in the black church, and that’s—sometimes, like I brought up about Saint Theresa, you had a gym right across the street from Saint Theresa. And that’s where you would have your black concert, like you’d have people like James Brown, Ike and Tina Turner. Things I’ve heard, the Cab Calloways, the Mahalia Jacksons, come to the center right there at the Saint Theresa. It was the Big Band Era, so to speak, and I hate—my uncle and my cousin have some pictures of how they would dress and everything, but then at the same time, talk went on there, too. When you had the auditorium in North Gulfport, the Elks Club in North Gulfport, the Vernon Gilman (spelling:__________________________________) Elks Club in Biloxi, these was your center. The Elks Club, the lodges and places like that, along with your churches were where you discussed these things. Later on, we would have the civic club, your community center, some community centers where we’d go, Nineteenth Street, Isaiah Frederick Community Center where we discussed issues of the communities. Today,
and the preachers, and like I say the churches—the churches back then, that’s where you did it. That’s where you got your information from, not only at the meetings, but on a Sunday. If the preacher had something to talk about, he put it out there in his sermon. And then you went from there to the streets, and the people in the streets would get it. You had the creation of jobs, and one of the most and the best jobs for a long time, was the longshoremen’s. Pres[ident] Wilson Evans, he made it possible for a lot of our black men back then to provide for their families.

White: Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

Marsh: Mr. Evans, we called him, everybody called him “Pres.” He was the President of the ILA Union [International Longshoremen’s Association]. These dock workers that worked on the pier at the docks and everything, and you had the majority of your black men within the various communities of Gulfport was where they worked at. Although you had the cotton compress; you had the Glass Plant; you had the Milk of Magnesia Plant where you had the Willy McMillens (spelling:_________________________), the Cicero Tims (spelling:_________________________), the John Halls, and various other people, the P. Kings, is where they worked at, made a decent living, made a good living at the Milk of Magnesia Plant. At the Glass Plant where you had the Moffetts (spelling:_________________________), the Chambers (spelling:_________________________), the Hendersons (spelling:_________________________), and various other people that worked at the Glass Plant, where black men made good living. But the pier, the pier itself, the dockworkers, the ILA Union men were where the majority of the living of what the black men here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast where they worked at. And it also streamed over to Pascagoula, the dockworkers on Pascagoula, but here again, Dr. Dunn, along with Mr. Wilson Evans, they opened a lot of doors for a lot of people here on this Mississippi Gulf Coast along with Isaiah Fredericks, who was a state representative at one time. But those three gentlemen, I have to say, along with some preachers like Famous McIlhaney, Reverend W.T. Guice, Reverend Fox, they were
the Mississippi Gulf Coast. When you mention those names, that was power. That was power, and to have known those individuals, personally, hey, much respect to them, *much* respect to them.

**White:** Can you tell me a little bit about how they opened these doors?

**Marsh:** Well, you got to realize, OK, Mr. Isaiah Fredericks, state representative Isaiah Frederick was the first black, state representative to represent this area, first black. Wilson Evans, the jobs on the pier, they intertwined. They worked together. Dr. Felix Dunn, great NAACP president, a great doctor in the community, a great civil rights leader, Dr. Gilbert Mason, from Biloxi, also the same, identical thing I can say about Dr. Dunn, I can say about Dr. Gilbert Mason. Like I said, State Representative Isaiah Fredericks, he opened the doors for a lot of people when he became a representative. He died, and then his wife became state representative. But these individuals I’m saying, Isaiah Fredericks, Wilson Evans, Dr. Dunn, Mr. George Johnson (spelling: ____________________________), Mr. Jude Norman (spelling: ____________________________), these people, they had a place called the Quarters right there on Thirty-first Avenue where they call the place right beside the Pit, where they played dominoes. And they were leaders in the community, but they were everyday community people. And anybody could walk in there and play dominoes. They would be right there, playing they dominoes.

**White:** And they talked to them and everything?

**Marsh:** They talked to everybody. That’s how well-knit the city of Gulfport was. Dr. Dunn lived in the Quarters on Nineteenth Street. Wilson Evans lived in Gaston Point. Isaiah Fredericks lived in North Gulfport. Sean Johnson lived in Magnolia Grove, and various other individuals that would come up in that area and do and play dominoes and everything, and just hang around, hang around. You used to have, the communities back then in the [19]60s and early ’70s thriving with businesses. In that little area I just called the Quarters, you had a cab stand. You had two funeral homes;
you had the Pit. You had Blackstone Restaurant, the Pit Restaurant. You had clubs, little clubs; you had Riles (spelling:_____________________________). You just had it all. You had Hopper’s (spelling:_____________________________) Grocery. You just had a well-knit, even in North Gulfport. You had Ms. Jones; you had Ms. Sisters (spelling:_____________________________), Mamaw’s (spelling:_____________________________), different little outlets. In Turkey Creek, you had the same thing. In Soria City, you had pretty much the same thing. The various stores right there in the community. Handsboro, you had Turner’s (spelling:_____________________________) Café. You just, we had a community. We had communities within communities. And to see none of that there now, it’s just a shame. It’s a shame. I mean, it’s all gone. It’s all gone.

White: And it sounds like that’s what really kept the morality up.

Marsh: When you could go get a little, brown, paper bag of cookies for a nickel, a drink for a dime or a nickel, ice cream cone for a nickel, those were the days. That’s why I say, I cherish those memories, and I prefer those days than now because, as you say, we had it going on and didn’t even know it. We did. (laughter)

White: Definitely. Especially now that you can see how things have changed.

Marsh: Right. Um-hm.

White: Did you know anything about the unions when they were really operating?

Marsh: I had a uncle Charlie Carey (spelling:_____________________________), who worked in the union even before I was born, and I knew various people who worked for the union and worked on the pier and everything. I knew a lot of people, and I knew they had good jobs. Even I experienced working down on the pier. I was
never in the union, but when I would get out in the summer, high school, to make some little extra dollars, go down there and work on the pier, throw banana boxes, load banana trucks, the trailers and everything, and yeah.

**White:** Did you hear them talk about any problems they had to kind of combat?

**Marsh:** Not really. It was a pretty close-knit organization. If it was, they kept it to themselves because when I worked down there, it was all fun and play and work. They would jank you. One thing about the pier, you going to get janked. So hey, that was it, far as I knew.

**White:** OK. ___________________________ other questions to ask you. And now, that was your first job, was working on the, on the docks?

**Marsh:** That was, yeah. It was—no. Let me go back. You know how you used to have the CETA [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act] where in summer, when you get out for summer you go to work for government? It was a government program through the City or the county. I think it was through the City, through the unemployment office, and I got a job working in a cemetery. And I would ride; I was proud of that job. I would ride my bike to the cemetery, which was Evergreen, which was down the street to my house and everything. I would pack, get up and make my little sandwich and everything, go to my little job.

**White:** This is in high school?

**Marsh:** It’s in high school. Matter of fact, I think it was in the, when I was in the ninth, going to the tenth grade. And I enjoyed—hey, that was the job. Matter of fact, a classmate of mine, we worked. Daryl Frederick (spelling: ___________________), we worked that job, and the ironic thing about it, they came and got me off that job and said your parents makes too much money. (laughter).
White: Oh! What did you do while you were working that job?

Marsh: We cleaned the headstones, the grass from around the headstones and everything.

White: And then, when you graduated from college, what did you do?

Marsh: I graduated from college, came home, and started at the Glass Plant. Like I say, I started as a utility man and worked my way up to relief foreman. Well, I first started with the quality control and in the lab where I worked up to a supervisor in the lab, relief foreman, the super in the lab. Then they put me on the floor as a relief supervisor over about a hundred and thirty-eight people, and I did that until I got hurt, had back surgery. And matter of fact, the plant shut down and went to Mexico.

White: Oh! So you would have had to find new work anyway.

Marsh: Anyway, so and then in [20]03, I went to work for the county as a director over community centers. And like I say, after [Hurricane] Katrina, a viral infection attacked my heart, where they thought I was going to need a heart transplant, and I had to retire.

White: And now, you got hurt in 1991?

Marsh: In 1991 at the Glass Plant.

White: And then, in between ’91 and ’03, you were just recovering?

Marsh: I was just recovering from surgery because when they cut you open, it takes a toll, and you have to—things, especially when it’s dealing with your spinal cord and dealing with your nerves in your back, you have to regain a lot of things. And that was a lot; that was a long time. But still, it would put you in a situation where you
would actually be crying, and I, that was an experience I experienced with an individual, he used to work on the pier, matter fact. He had back surgery, and I heard him crying one day in the rooms there visiting his daughter, matter of fact. And I said, “What’s wrong with your dad?” “He had back surgery.” “He crying like that? Ain’t that much crying and pain in the world.” And when I got hurt, I had to call that man back and say, “Sir, I apologize to you. I understand now what you were going through.” And I’ve seen a time, when I would drive home because I would be checking on my mother. I would drive home when I was working at the community, director of the community center. I would drive home; I’d have to tell my wife to meet me in the emergency room. That’s how excruciating that pain was, and that’s how excruciating that pain can get and is some days. Some days you have good days, and then some days it’ll sneak up on you. And like, see, my surgery was done in 1991, and I have some days where now my surgery come back on me where I’m crying. It hurts. It hurts. But God is good. And that is life, so, hey, he gives me strength. And I carry on.

White: And you got hurt while you were working?

Marsh: Yes, I got hurt while I was working at the Glass Plant.

White: Now, did you have any problems with maybe some of the white workers there? Or even with the black workers?

Marsh: No.

White: No problems then.

Marsh: No problems other than when they promoted me to relief supervisor. Some of the white workers didn’t like it. Some of the blacks thought I was supposed to be lenient on them. No. “You got a job to do. I have a job to do. Do your job.” Simple.
**White:** Did you have any kind of like, violent, anything happen?

**Marsh:** Oh, no.

**White:** Just complaining.

**Marsh:** No, no, no, no, no. Just complaining, whining, more or less whining, but no, no.

**White:** And then did the white workers, kind of, tell you, you didn’t have a right to tell them what to do?

**Marsh:** Well, I never had that problem because they knew that I was still union, and the same time, I knew how to write them up. And that was that. I kept it real with them. “You be real with me; you do your job. You have a job to do eight hours. I have a job to do eight hours. When the manager come out, the manager of the plant come out and look at these boards and look at the production, they not looking at you. He looking at me. Do your job; we good.” And that was it, and they knew that even I had a brother working there, too. My brother worked there, and if I got on him, they felt like, “If he get on his brother, you know what he going do to us.” So hey, that’s just the way it was. Yes, ma’am.

**White:** Now, did you witness any kind of violent Klan activity or any violence between whites and blacks at any point in your history?

**Marsh:** Back in 2002 when we had the issue with the Confederate flag, when Jason Whitfield (spelling: ____________________________) took it on his own to protest and go sit out on Eight Flags on the beachfront, I didn’t witness it, but when I came, when I would come around, we would have stories where snakes were thrown where he was at and everything. You had some individuals come. I’m not saying they were the Klan. I don’t know who they were, but the Sons of Confederates or who
it was. But [they] would come and set up their camp with their Confederate flags. I never saw any violence. Name-calling, then I was there. Police had to come out and try to cool it down, but I’ve never seen or witnessed the Klans or anybody fighting of that nature. Name calling’s been around. Demonstrations, I’ve been to; I’ve done. It was just, the history, just the history, the history of racism, you see it. Any violence, no, I can’t say I witnessed or been a part of any violence.

**White:** Just obvious racism.

**Marsh:** Yes.

**White:** But not, yeah.

**Marsh:** Um-hm, yeah.

**White:** And then, do you have people calling you names, as well?

**Marsh:** Yeah. When I was down there with the thing, I got called a couple names. And that was that.

**White:** Do you think it was because you were trying to make things change?

**Marsh:** I think we wanted change. We wanted change. That flag did not represent what it, what they claim it stood for on Eight Flags. The Eight Flags was supposed to be the different, like the French and Spanish colonies and stuff of that nature. That flag had nothing to do with that, what it stood for, Eight Flags stood for, and Jason Whitfield took a stand. And at the same time, he took a stand, we had different rallies and different—where we spoke at different events, such as City Council. I don’t know if it was City Council, but I know it was at the Board of Supervisors where Dr. Dunn chose me to speak and represent the Gulfport Branch of the NAACP to speak to the Board of Supervisors to let them know, we should be removed from that. That’s just
like in Charleston, South Carolina, where you have, where the boats came in, the slave boats came in, yeah, you still have that, where they walked through. You still have the place where they corralled them at, but now, that’s a market. That’s a market. You don’t see any, you don’t even see Confederate flags there. So if they could do it there in Charleston, South Carolina, why can’t you do it here? That’s the concept that we had with the—at that time, and you hear often, “These people, those people, your kind.” What are “these people?” What are “your kind?” We all people. So why is that phrase constantly used? We need to get away from that.

White: Right. And now, you said you participated in some demonstrations.

Marsh: We had, like I say, we had—

White: When was this?

Marsh: This is back in 19—no, no, excuse me; I’m sorry, 2002.

White: Um-hm. And this was about the flag?

Marsh: This was about the Confederate flag on the beachfront down at Debuys Road. We had rallies at Jeff Davis Junior College [Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Jefferson Davis Campus], where we spoke on the issue. I think, if I’m not mistaken, I don’t think—I want to say Governor William Winters. I’m not for sure. I’m not for sure now, but we had a issue on that. And that was when the referendum was put on the ballot to vote for that Confederate flag, whether or not for the state to fly the Confederate flag. So various things such as that.

White: Did you participate in any, I don’t know, maybe earlier, when you were in high school or in college?
Marsh: Well, in college we protest Ronald Reagan coming to LSU [Louisiana State University].

White: Really?

Marsh: Yes. Ronald Regan came to LSU, and instead of coming on Southern yard, he went to LSU. But at the same time, our band was supposed to go and play at LSU, and we boycotted that. Matter of fact, we stood in front of the bus to keep them from leaving, from going; didn’t go to jail. But had my mother knew that, I’d have got a spankin’ still.

White: Oh, did you? (laughter)

Marsh: I said I would have; I would have.

White: Oh, OK.

Marsh: Those are the things I did. That’s some of the things I did. That was the boycott we did with that, with Ronald Reagan. Here, just like I said, various things such as dealing with the flag, and earlier before then, I participated in where the City of Gulfport wanted to run a sewage line through predominantly black communities. And the communities, it served no purpose to the communities. You ran a pressure line through our community, but here our sewage is backing up in our houses. But yet, you going to run a pressure line for a developer, and you claim you was running it for the casino. But later on, we find out it was for a developer. A developer had bought some property, which was wetland. We stopped that. These are the things that we jumped into to stop it. But you ran that sewage line, but you offered us nothing. We didn’t even have streetlights or sidewalks, and I said something to the nature that you going to give us something. We didn’t want the line period, but we fought for it. That’s where the Gulfport Concerned Citizens Coalition originated from, out of that struggle, and eventually we got sidewalks. And we got streetlights, but still now, this
line is causing so much havoc, *still* to this day. This was back in 1998, back then, and those are the things that I participated in. And till this day I participate. I used to serve on advisory committee for the City, dealing with CDBG money, funding for the various communities where we thought funds should be allocated. I’m a big supporter of right. If the community needs certain things, the City’s responsibility is to provide these certain things, along with the county, too.

**White:** And then, that goes back to working with the Thirty-third Avenue High School.

**Marsh:** Avenue High School, right, right, to save those buildings, right.

**White:** And now, have you had any trouble since you started being active, actively trying to restore it?

**Marsh:** We have. Well, we went up against the City of Gulfport, individual that *lied* to us. We kept asking, “Where was the FEMA money? Where was the FEMA money?” We were told lies.

**White:** So this was from [Hurricane] Katrina that—

**Marsh:** This was Katrina, it got dam[aged]. Well, it was, yeah, it was, yeah because it was a active Job Corps facility at that time, right before Katrina, and after Katrina, the buildings were damaged. Well, one building, the oldest building was torn down. Nobody could tell us who tore it down, but yet, the City of Gulfport owned the property. You leased it to the Labor Department. Labor Department, “Who has insurance policy on it? “We have no insurance.” “What you mean you have no insurance?” Labor Department said, “We self-sustained.” OK, the City of Gulfport, “Where’s the FEMA money?” After we fought and fought and fought for the twenty-three million dollars that Senator Thad Cochran, in good faith, sent down, it was the Labor Department along with Job Corps who thought and took it on themselves to say
we’re going to tear these buildings down. Kenneth P’Poole with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, he saw where the buildings could be saved. We brought different architects and engineers in. McElroy (spelling:_________________________________________________________________) and Williams came in; a black architect from Jackson, Mississippi came in and said, “Hey, these buildings could be saved.” We had an engineer here; I can’t think of his name right offhand and forgive me for that, here in Gulfport, who walked through and saw the buildings could be saved.

White: So you have all these people telling you it can.

Marsh: All these people tell me. They want to say, “No. We can tear down the building.” The Labor Department, Job Corps, “We tear down the building. Tear it down.” For what? If you can spend twenty-six million dollars on eight buildings out here at Gulf Park [USM Gulf Coast Campus] to be restored, twenty-three million dollars ought to be able to restore three buildings, but yet, you want to tear down the buildings. But yet, nobody knew who had the insurance policy or where the FEMA money went to after Katrina. Come to find out when negotiation was closed, we found out where 4.5, 4.2 million dollars of FEMA money, but somebody was trying to keep money and keep it hid from us. And it didn’t sit well, so we went on an active protest to save these buildings, historical, black high school buildings within our black community. We wanted to save. You saved Gulfport High when you made out a federal building. You went in there and did the façade, and that’s all we was asking. Go in there and gut it out and save it for us just like these buildings here. Oh, no!

White: And so is that still something you’re working on?

Marsh: Right now, we’re getting ready to go back through Section 106 with the Interior Department and the Labor Department. Senator Thad Cochran has said that he can reallocate more money or other monies to do this project, and we’re going to hold him to that, which I think he wants to get done, but we had some people within
the City of Gulfport in administration that wanted to see these buildings torn down. On good faith, we took the mayor at his word. We took the City administrator at his word, but for some particular reason, some things got screwed up. I’m a person; I call it the way I see it, and that’s just the way I saw it, and so did a lot of other people. I felt like if Gulfport High is worth saving and these buildings down here in Gulf Park are worth saving, our community buildings are worth saving. The historical value that we have there is worth saving.

**White:** Could you tell me about what those buildings were like, were before ________________________________ history?

**Marsh:** You had the administration building. You had the classrooms; you had the gym, the cafeteria. You had the older one, the building I mentioned of as being one of the oldest buildings, that was the elementary building that started out back in, I want to say 1950. And Jimmy Willard (spelling:______________________________), who was the president over the alumni association along with Gayle Tartt (spelling:______________________________), dealing with the Quarters organization, when myself with the Gulfport Concerned Citizen’s Coalition and the rest of the alumni, we got together, and we formed a coalition to say, “Hey, this is what we need to do.” We created some partnerships with the Interior Department in Washington, DC, to where they helped us out. They showed us a lot of things that should be, that wasn’t. At the meeting with the Labor Department and the Job Corps Department, they wanted their way. They didn’t want to concede. We gave in; we said that, “Give us the façade. Gut out everything else.” “Oh, no. We still want to tear the buildings down. We can’t do this.” “What you mean you can’t do this? You doing it down here. You did it at Gulfport High.”

**White:** It’s the exact same thing.

**Marsh:** Thank you. So they didn’t want to concede in any way.
White: And this was, an all-white high school originally?

Marsh: This was, this here, this college has been here since before [Hurricane] Camille. Back, if I’m not mistaken, I want to say this has been since—this has been here. I think these buildings are older than Thirty-third. Gulfport High was a all-white school at one time. Gulfport High was a all-white school at one time and then integration. Matter of fact, Thirty-third was a all-black school, but when they integrated, the kids from Thirty-third had to go to Gulfport High. But Gulfport High was older than Thirty-third. So why couldn’t the kids from Gulfport High come to Thirty-third since it was a much newer school?

White: That is odd. And then, Thirty-third, did it just close?

Marsh: It closed for a while after they segregated. Various things, factories wanted to come there. There again, Dr. Dunn and Reverend Guice and Famous McIlhaney and them stood their ground and said no. And then the Job [Corps]. They were instrumental in bringing Job Corps to the city of Gulfport. So that’s, they secured, if I’m not mistaken, they secured the contract with the Labor Department with Job Corps here, and that was in early, I want to say, [19]78, ’79 when Job Corps first came here and everything.

White: Yeah, right. Well, if we want, I think we can go ahead and start filling out some of this biography sheet, and then some of the questions will come up with it. So I’ll put your name down later. And you were born here in Gulfport?

Marsh: Born here in Gulfport, April 22, 1962. (A portion of the interview, discussing the current address and phone number, has not been transcribed in order to protect the privacy of the interviewee.)

White: And then, can I get your spouse’s name?

Marsh: Janice I. Marsh.

White: It’s Janice, J-A-N?
Marsh: J-A-N-I-C-E.

White: And date and place married?

Marsh: December 14, let me think about it, (laughter) 1991.

White: That’s probably a good thing when you can’t remember the year.


White: All right. And then were you married in Gulfport?

Marsh: Yes, married in Gulfport.

White: Can you give me her birthdate?

Marsh: Her birth date is eleven, twenty-seven, fifty-eight.

White: And then, where she was born?

Marsh: Oh, she was born in Gulfport, Mississippi, Gulfport.

White: How did y’all meet?

Marsh: Through mutual friends, mutual friends. I was dating someone else, and we met, conversation, started talking. And after didn’t go right with the first young lady I was with, we met back up. And I told a friend of mine, “That’s going to be my wife.”

White: Was this in high school or college?

Marsh: No, no. This was after college, after college and everything

White: When you were back—

Marsh: Back home, when I got back home and working at the Glass Plant and everything, and I was standing outside. I said, “That’s going to be my next wife.” And sure enough, that was my wife.
**White:** And then it has been now for—

**Marsh:** Has been, right. Um-hum.

**White:** All right. And just some major occupations for you. I know you’ve said some of them.

**Marsh:** The Glass Plant, Anchor Glass.

**White:** Anchor Glass Plant.

**Marsh:** Harrison County.

**White:** And what were you doing there?

**Marsh:** I was the director over the community center, Isaiah Frederick and Good Deeds Community Center, Isaiah Frederick Community Center and the Good Deeds Community Center. And now, I’m retired.

**White:** And those are really your two big jobs.

**Marsh:** Yes, um-hm.

**White:** And you were the director for those?

**Marsh:** Yes.

**White:** And then you of course went through elementary school, high school, college, bachelor’s degree?

**Marsh:** No. I got associate’s degree

**White:** Associate’s degree, OK.

**Marsh:** Criminal justice

**White:** Criminal justice. And when did you get that?
Marsh: That was in [19]84, ’85.

White: And it says “principal activities and interests other than livelihood.” So it sounds a lot like, kind of giving back to the community.

Marsh: Giving back to the community, community activist, and just giving back to community.

White: And do you do anything else for fun?

Marsh: Sit up under my car porch, watch my bull mastiff tear up my yard (laughter), other than—

White: I know you used to play basketball.

Marsh: Used to play basketball; I can’t do that no more. Enjoy my grandchildren, enjoy my grandchildren.

White: OK, yeah. How many children did you have?

Marsh: I have three daughters and one son, and I have three granddaughters and two grandsons.

White: Nice-sized family

Marsh: Yes.

White: And you were never in the military?

Marsh: I was in Army Reserve.

White: OK. And then, what was your rank there?

Marsh: I served as a E5 and went on to ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] for a little while for a second lieutenant.
White: OK. And if you don’t mind, talking about a little bit about why you joined the Army Reserve.

Marsh: Well, I joined the Army Reserve when I was still in high school. I joined it. Matter of fact, I went to basic training when I was in eleventh grade and went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, came back, did my senior year and did Reserve. Then I left there and went to Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, where I received my medic [training]. I got bit by a brown recluse, and I stayed in the military for, I think, three or four years after that. And I got out, went to work for the Glass Plant.

White: OK. So this would be all through high school and then into college.

Marsh: Yes, um-hm.

White: Religious affiliation?

Marsh: Baptist.

White: And you told me some of your civic activities and professional organizations. So we’ve got the Mighty Mens of Valor.

Marsh: Mighty Mens of Valor. I am a Mason. I am a thirty-second degree Mason. I’m a Shriner, Knights of Templar Royal Arch, ______________. I’m a member of the NAACP, member of the North Gulfport Civic Club, and a member of the Harrison County Executive Branch of the Democratic Party.

White: Definitely active in the community.

Marsh: Yes, ma’am. And the chairman of the Gulfport Concerned Citizens Coalition.

White: Gulfport?

Marsh: Concerned Citizens Coalition.

White: And you’re the chair.
Marsh: Yes, also a member of Kingdom CDC (spell out ___________________
______________________________).

White: OK. And then have you ever gotten any awards or medals or anything?

Marsh: I’m trying to think. I received—I can’t remember. I’ve received a couple
awards. (laughter) I received the AKA [Alpha Kappa Alpha], I can’t think which; I
can’t remember the chapter. It was Outstanding Citizen Award. I think it was. I can
call you back and give you that.

White: That’s fine, yeah. You have my phone number. Any time you want to call
and add anything.

Marsh: OK. I received a award from the Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church,
for working in the community, and I must mention the chairman of the Mighty Mens
of Valor and the Kingdom CDC, Bishop Anthony Thompson
(spelling:______________________________), who is—hey, we grew up
together. And he’s a minister now, and he’s doing a lot of great work in the
community to try to help reach poverty-level individuals, to start businesses, to look to
entrepreneurship, and to deal with these kids and everything. So I have to give him a
props out for him and everything.

White: OK. All right. And then this is just going to be a little bit of your family
history. Can you give me your children’s names?

Marsh: OK. My oldest is Tameka Collins (spelling:_____________________________).

White: Her date of birth, whatever you can remember?

Marsh: July 4, I want to say [19]76, ’74. I want to say. After that one is going to be
Deaque Marks.

White: How do you spell it?

White: OK. Marks?

Marsh: Marks, M-A-R-K-S. She was born March 22, I think it was, 1984. The next one’s Latoya Marsh, M-A-R-S-H. She was born June 2, 1984. Mind you, I didn’t know about the first one.

White: Yeah, that’s [19]76

Marsh: Eighty-four she was born. Both of them born in ’84.

White: OK. So Tameka?

Marsh: I’m trying to _________________________________ my wife. Tameka’s a stepdaughter, but I’m still like this. I’m like this; she’s still my daughter.

White: Right, absolutely.

Marsh: Terrence Marsh (spelling:______________________________), he was born November 8, 1985.

White: Nineteen eighty-five, OK. Is that all of them?

Marsh: That’s it, three girls, one boy.

White: And your father’s name?

Marsh: My father’s name was Kenneth, Kenny Charles Marsh, Kenny Charles Marsh.

White: And do you know where he was born and when?

Marsh: He was born in Laurel, Laurel, Mississippi.

White: OK. Do you know when?

Marsh: 1918, April 18, 1918.

White: OK. And kind of some of his major occupations?
Marsh: He was a seamstress in the Navy.

White: OK. And was he deployed when you were growing up at all?

Marsh: Like I say, he died when I was seven.

White: Oh, that’s right.

Marsh: He was a vendor operator. He went around with the vendors, like say, services, cigarette machine, jukeboxes, pool tables in various places. Places they had, he would operate those and work on them.

White: OK. And it just says, if you know any background on your father’s family, if you can tell me anything about that?

Marsh: Matter of fact, I just went to a family reunion this past year, this past August and got to know my family.

White: Oh, wow!

Marsh: And that’s for the first—on my father’s side. Well, I’ve known some of them, but to really know where my grandfather come from, I just found that out.

White: Where?

Marsh: In what they call Pachuta, Mississippi, Pachuta up and out from Meridian in that area. Chapel Hill, a church there named Chapel Hill, my grandmother and my great-grandmother and some others on the Marsh side was founders of this particular church. So I’m experiencing my genealogy now, on that side of the family and everything, as we go along.

White: And then, your mother’s maiden name

Marsh: My mother’s maiden name was Mamie Lee McNeal, McNeal, M-C-N-E-A-L, McNeal.

White: N-E-A-L.
Marsh: Yeah.

White: OK. And then her date and place of her birth

Marsh: February 5, 1924, place called Fanning, Mississippi, out on the Ross Barnett Reservoir.

White: OK. And then, do you know when they were married?

Marsh: Ooh.

White: I know it’s a trick—it’s a tough question.


White: Do you know where?

Marsh: Here in Gulfport.

White: And then, your mom, she worked as a maid.

Marsh: Yes, as a maid.

White: And then, for Hancock Bank.

Marsh: Right, um-hm.

White: And did she have any other occupations?

Marsh: No. That was it. Well, no, she worked as a maid at the Gulf Coast Apparel, where they made women’s shirts. Yeah.

White: All right. And then it says background of your mother’s family.

Marsh: Chicken farmers, they had land in Fanning, up in what you call Rankin County. That was it, farmers.

White: In Rankin County, and so they raised chickens.
**Marsh:** Yeah, they had a chicken; they had chicken farms. They did farming, but they raised chickens where they sold them to Sanderson Farms, right there.

**White:** And do you know, when they got, when her family was able to get that farm?

**Marsh:** Ooh, it came by her uncle. My mother was adopted by her aunt and her uncle. Her mother died when, I think, she was six years old, something like that. My grandmother, from what my mother told me, my grandmother was raped.

**White:** Oh, that’s awful. Well, it sounds like, they still had a nice farm, though.

**Marsh:** Yeah, sixty-three acres of land.

**White:** Wow. Do you know if your family still has any of that?

**Marsh:** They have, right now I think they have dwindled it down to about twenty-three acres.

**White:** It’s still awesome that they I have some of it, though.

**Marsh:** Yeah, right, um-hm.

**White:** And have you gotten to visit it?

**Marsh:** Yes. I, from time to time I go up there and visit my uncle who still lives on it. I have some cousins who live there with him, and his sons and daughters live about three or four miles from where they live at and everything, but yes I still do.

**White:** That’s a nice family history. OK, well that’s the last question. This is just the additional notes, so if you want us to write anything else down, I can do that, or if you want to talk about anything else.

**Marsh:** I’m thinking I’m good unless you have any more questions.

**White:** I, pretty much, you covered this list, just not in order, but that’s not a problem at all. And I can’t think of anything else right now.
(end of interview)