

Interview with Clarence Senior

July 17, 2006

Interviewer: Rudy Davenport

Davenport: And hopefully, it will be preserved in such a way that it will last. I mean, this is the first step, the interview, and getting the interview on tape. And if we don't get it all this morning or get it right this morning, so on, we'll come back and do what's necessary to get it right. And hopefully we can cover a few things.

Senior: All right.

Davenport: I'm just going to rewind it for just a minute, just to make sure it's getting both our voices. (break in tape) This is an interview on July 17, with Clarence Senior of Springfield. And the interviewer will be Rudy Davenport. Good morning Clarence, how are you?

Senior: Good morning, Rudy.

Davenport: Good, how are you?

Senior: I'm pretty good.

Senior: I think we've covered just about all that needed to be covered, it's really a very simple project. It's the African-American History Project of Springfield, Illinois, and it's an oral history as a first step of trying to capture as much historical information as we possibly can. We match it with others who have given us oral histories, and all of the interviews that we get are going to be transcribed and made into hard copy, either a microfilm or whatever, and made available to researchers. And the repository will be the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield. So it's pretty important that we do this work, and pretty important that we do it as completely and as correctly as we possibly can. There's nothing formal about it, and I'm probably doing most of the talking that I'm going to do during this interview, because this is really your prospects on historical things that happened in Springfield, some not so historical. But maybe later researchers will find them to be very historical. So we never know about that. But with that said, I'm just going to give some prompting questions, and maybe through your answers to those you can either elaborate, let me know. If I say something that you know is absolutely not correct, please feel free to correct me, because that is what this interview is about, it's trying to get an accurate record of the historical implications of what has gone on in Springfield in the recent past, I should say. That's going all the way back to your lifetime, and perhaps the lifetime of your parents who were in Springfield. Incidentally, were your parents in Springfield?

Clarence Senor

- Senor: Yes. My father moved here from – I think it was East St. Louis, by way of Virden, to Springfield.
- Davenport: And your father's name?
- Senor: It's Alphonso.
- Davenport: Alphonso, and about when was that, Clarence? If you had to give a guesstimate.
- Senor: I can't really nail it down, but it had to be in the 1920s, the early '20s.
- Davenport: Early '20s, and he came by way of Virden, you said?
- Senor: Yes.
- Davenport: And were you the only child in the family?
- Senor: No, I had a brother older than me. He was two years older than me.
- Davenport: And you were born in Springfield?
- Senor: Yes, I was born and raised in Springfield in 1929.
- Davenport: OK, and your brother?
- Senor: He was born here in 1927. His name was Alphonso, also.
- Davenport: So you both grew up in Springfield?
- Senor: Oh yes, they called him Dude, that was his nickname most people knew him by.
- Davenport: I see. Now, I know that (phone rings) do you have to get that?
- Senor: No.
- Davenport: I know somewhat about your history, but I don't know a lot about your early history. I don't know about your early – all the way back to preschool, pre-elementary. That's relevant in Springfield, if you can recall.
- Senor: Well, I can remember from the time that I was four years old up till the present day, that we used to live on Mason Street, in a house, a double-plex house, I guess they call it a duplex nowadays. And we had three rooms. We had a living room, a bedroom, and a kitchen. And we had a flat stove in the kitchen, and then we had a pot-bellied stove in the other part of the house.

And my mother and father, we all lived in the same room. You know, the three rooms. My brother slept on the couch, I slept in bed with my mother and father. And when it got cold, we all four slept in the same bed, back there in those days. We did what was comfortable at that time. And we had an outside privy, you don't remember anything about that, do you?

Davenport: No, I don't.

Senor: Yeah, we had outside toilets. And it was terrible in the winter time when you had to do the number two. Yeah, that wood was cold. I can remember that. And we used to take a bath in a number three ten tub. I'd take a bath first, and then my brother would follow me. And we'd go ahead on, and they'd take the water out and dump it. We didn't have no inside plumbing hardly, just what was in the kitchen, just a little. And we didn't have any sewers or anything like that back there on Mason Street. I think the number was 1637 East Mason Street.

Davenport: That's good, even the number.

Senor: My grandmother lived right across the street, Ella Senor.

Davenport: What was her first name again?

Senor: Ella. She lived at 1634 East Mason Street.

Davenport: And where was she from? Did she come in from Virden also?

Senor: Yes, they all come in from Virden that I know of, that I can trace back to. And my daughter Candy and I are doing a little work on pre-history, and trying to find out how things progressed back there in the '30s and '20s. And the teens, and we're slowly working on it. We're going to find out something sooner or later.

Davenport: Yes, well we'll probably – if we ever touch base with your daughter, I'm sure that we will be touching base with your daughter.

Senor: Yes, that's Candace.

Davenport: Yes, I think your wife was already interviewed, and there might have been another person on this project, but they did mention the name, seeing if they wanted to get as many as possible at this. But that's wonderful. I'm glad you told me about that, just able to coordinate some of the things that we have. So was that the first home that you remember in Springfield that you lived in?

Senor: That's the first one I can remember.

Clarence Senor

- Davenport: And what about school? Did you remember any preschool?
- Senor: Yes, I think I started at Palmer School, and then wound up at Lincoln School, when we moved from 1637 East Mason Street to 1512 East Carpenter Street. When we moved into East Carpenter Street, we had a bathtub, we had an inside privy, and we had a basement. And we lived there for a few years. And then we moved from there to 908 South 19th Street.
- Davenport: And where did you go to school there, do you remember?
- Senor: I went to Lincoln School then.
- Davenport: Lincoln was an elementary school?
- Senor: Yes, Lincoln was an elementary school. It's located right today where it was when I went to school there.
- Davenport: Give me some idea of what the years were that we're talking about.
- Senor: That was in the '30s, around '35, '36.
- Davenport: And after Lincoln, that was your elementary school?
- Senor: Yes, and then I went to Matheny School for a while, and then I went to Iles School for a while.
- Davenport: All of those were elementary schools?
- Senor: Elementary schools, and then I went to Feitshans.
- Davenport: OK, Feitshans High. And I can imagine the years in that would've been like '41 maybe?
- Senor: No, it was a little later.
- Davenport: '43 maybe?
- Senor: Yes, somewhere around there.
- Davenport: Anyway, Feitshans probably has some records of you there.
- Senor: Yes, I've got a record book; I've got a yearbook here somewhere. We pull it out every once in a while and look at it.
- Davenport: Good. That's wonderful. What activities were you involved in at Feitshans?

Clarence Senor

Senor: I played sports, football, basketball, track. And then I quit school when I was in 11th grade. But I went back to school in 1968 and got my GED.

Davenport: Good for you.

Senor: When I was working on the fire department. So at the insistence of my wife.

Davenport: Well good for her, good for her. I remember you on the fire department; my first recollection of knowing you.

Senor: Yes, that's when I met you, when I was there, and you were down on Adams Street?

Davenport: And my first wife Mary Frances, you know.

Senor: Yes, she was from Riverton, wasn't she?

Davenport: They were from Buffalo.

Senor: Yes, that's right out there.

Davenport: But you knew them, and you know me. And I'm certainly interested in how you progressed, and how you did things so that you could become a fireman. That's the history – a lot of that that we're interested in, because we're still working on some things, like with the fire department, as well as with the police department. So some early history of the fire department is very, very important to us. You started in '68 you said?

Senor: '63.

Davenport: '63 with the fire department?

Senor: Yes, with the fire department in 1963, May 8, 1963.

Davenport: Good, you know the date. How did you find the fire department at that time? Were they receptive to you and welcomed you with open arms?

Senor: Well, some people did and some people didn't.

Davenport: That's just about the way the world is now.

Senor: Yes, you know, people have their habits. And some guys in the fire department were good, and some weren't so good. And there were some guys that I worked with that were very good people, and then there were some guys that just, you know, just didn't like it.

Clarence Senior

Davenport: I can well understand that.

Senior: So you just learned to work around that type of people. Go and do your job, because when you work for the fire department, you work for 24 hours on and 48 hours off. You are around these people more than you're around your wife for 24 hours straight. So you learn their habits, and what you don't like you stay away from. And if you get along with the guys, then everything's fine. And like I said before, people have their habits. And you learn a person's habits, and if you don't like what they're doing, you just stay away from him, which I practice today. If I don't like what you're doing to me, I just stay away from you, that way I don't have to have a confrontation with you or anything.

Davenport: You didn't have any problems getting on the fire department, did you?

Senior: Well, I had a little problem getting on the fire department. I took the test, and I wound up ninth on the examination, and when it come time for me to be on the fire department, they tried to put a kid up in front of me. That was about the Veterans Points. And I had to file suit against him in order to stop the progression that they were trying to do to me. And I won, so therefore I got to go to work on May 8, 1963. And they rescinded that order for the kid that they were trying to put up in front of me.

Davenport: Then let me congratulate you on two points. First one is standing up for your rights, and the second one of course is filing a formal complaint, or a lawsuit or however you did it. Because for every one of those that do stand up for their rights and file the official papers, so that whenever there's probably two or four that just would've walked away, and that would've been the end of it. But you made it better for a lot of people coming after you, because of what you did. Some of us have to bite the bullet, and as I call it, put the stake in the ground.

Senior: Yes, this is true.

Davenport: And you have to accept the consequences of it. But this is, I think, a part of the historical perspective that we want to capture also, what some of the early people had to go through to make the way for us today that we're able to do things.

Senior: That's true. Some of the guys that I worked with were real good guys. But there were other guys that weren't worth a nickel. That's people's thinking though.

Davenport: Yes, we can change the law sometimes, and we do. But changing the thinking is problematic. Maybe it will come. Everything seems to follow along eventually, people do get in step with the times.

Clarence Senor

Senor: That's true.

Davenport: I know that when I was a boy, you know, things are much better than they were when I was a boy.

Senor: Oh yes, things are much better here. I remember before I went in the Navy in 1951, how some things were, and they were better when I got back home. But people particularly moving here looking for something that's not ready, the guy was telling me how bad it was up here in Springfield, and I went down south when my son was in college, Herman. He was at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and Conway, South Carolina, and he went to Coastal Carolina College down there. And our first trip down there was something to behold.

Davenport: Right in the heart of it.

Senor: Oh man, what are you talking about. We were in a flower shop down there, and this lady wouldn't wait on my wife, one lady wouldn't, and another lady had to come out and wait on her. So they tell me about the happenings up here. Don't tell me about the happenings up here, tell me about the happenings down there where you come from, because you can't come up here and change things.

Davenport: So, sometimes where you look at our hometown, they have a lot of criticism until we see somewhere that's –

Senor: Until we go somewhere else, and we find something –

Davenport: Because we really don't have it all that bad. I mean, nothing is perfect.

Senor: No, nowhere.

Davenport: There's always work to be done, and I'm sure you found that out. Tell me a little bit about the early days on the fire department when you were working your way up through the ranks. You went through probation?

Senor: Yeah, I went through probation.

Davenport: And the next step was what?

Senor: I just moved one step, I went to engineer. That's where I stayed at. That was a pretty good job.

Davenport: OK, that's it. I didn't know the ranks. So that helps identify it. So that was pretty good, pretty good pay?

Senor: It was a good job. A very good job.

Clarence Senor

Davenport: Able to raise your family.

Senor: Oh yes, and I'm reaping the rewards off of the pensions now that I get from there.

Davenport: Sure, that's not a great deal.

Senor: Every month, I realize how fortunate I am to have money coming in at age 76, and look forward to my paycheck every month.

Davenport: Well, I think that we look back too at whether our parents (break in tape) it's interesting because just being black in America makes you have to go search for it.

Senor: And we lived hard. We lived hard. I mean, when I was a kid, we lived hard. Didn't have fans, didn't have air conditioning, didn't know what air conditioning was. The only air conditioning we had was when we opened the windows and let the air come in.

Davenport: Yeah, so that certainly is a part and parcel of who we are today. So it's good that you're able to – and like me, reap the benefits. And I'm sure that's added to our longevity. There's no way in the world without adequate healthcare and everything that we would even come close to living as long as we have.

Senor: Yeah, some people never got to go to school.

Davenport: That's right.

Senor: We were lucky, we got to go to school, and my kids, I was tough on them. I told them they had to go to school.

Davenport: Cause you knew how important it was.

Senor: At least until they got through high school. After they got through high school, you know, they're pretty much on their own.

Davenport: Can't control them anyway.

Senor: No, you can't control them. After they get 15 years old.

Davenport: Your story parallels some of the heroism that I see in our race. I mean, I just want to make sure that if whoever does research here, whether it's 50 years or 75 years, 100 years, it wouldn't make any difference, know something of the character of people that lived in Springfield that happened to be of color.

Clarence Senior

Senior: Back there in the '30s and the '40s, there weren't too many good jobs around here. I know my uncle my uncle Earl worked down at the Springfield Cafeteria, I think they called it. And he had to go in the back door in order to go to work.

Davenport: He couldn't use the front door.

Senior: And there were places here in Springfield that we couldn't go.

Davenport: Now, even customers, black customers couldn't go in the front door of a place?

Senior: No, they didn't allow you in a place like the Springfield Cafeteria, or Art Venture's, or most of the restaurants downtown. I remember my mom used to take me into Kresge's downtown. They had a service bar in the front, and a cafeteria in the back. You couldn't eat in the cafeteria, you couldn't sit down at the cafeteria lunch counter, and you couldn't eat at the service bar. But you could order food and take it out.

Davenport: Oh, I see.

Senior: But you couldn't stand there and eat. Not for a while, not until later on in years, you know. And I always wondered why. I didn't know why, just a young kid when my mom took me to Kresge's. And she says, well, we just can't eat here. And I didn't understand it then. But as I got older, and realized what it was all about, then I understood. There's a lot of places downtown that we couldn't eat. And the shows, we used to go. There was the Orpheum Theater, the Tivoli, the Lincoln Theater, and the Roxy. And you could go to those shows, but you had to sit in the balcony.

Davenport: I see.

Senior: And the Orpheum Theater had all the good entertainment that would come through here, Count Basie and Duke Ellington, Stan Kenton, and Whiteman, I think was his name. My mom used to take me down there to see those people when I was that age. And we had to sit up in the balcony. And we couldn't go to the State or the Strand. They wouldn't let you in. Or at the Senate Theater. And then there was a cafeteria down there, right next to the Senate Theater called Strong's Cafeteria. Only thing you could do was work in there. You couldn't eat in there. Oh no, you couldn't eat in there.

davenport: Well, some of those were just going out of business when I came here. They were just on the way out because I came here at the time of the Civil Rights revolution, at the end of it. So it was 1969 I think, when I finally moved here. But it was the only thing then that was a holdout were the taverns, some of the taverns just didn't appreciate you.

Clarence Senior

Senior: Yeah, well I can remember when our state legislators that were over at the State House, senators and everything. When they came down here, they couldn't stay in the hotels, they couldn't stay in the Lincoln Hotel, the Leland Hotel or the St. Nick. And they had to stay in private homes. And these were state legislators. And this went on for years. And I remember this because of Corneal Davis, you know.

Davenport: Oh yes, I remember Corneal Davis.

Senior: I met him. In fact, when he came down here, he used to go to our church, St. John's AME Church.

Davenport: Yeah, he goes to Quinn AME in Chicago.

Senior: So he made a couple of speeches there when I was a young kid. And I heard him speak. And finally I met him, you know, after I grew up. And we talked about him staying at Mrs. Stewart's house, down on Jefferson Street. It was something. And then I grew up. As I grew up, I started working at the Leland Hotel as a busboy. And the blacks couldn't stay there then, and I was about 14, 15 years old. And I bussed dishes for a while. And then one day you look up, there's a black guy coming in and staying at a hotel, after things changed.

Davenport: That's about the time I got here.

Senior: And things got better.

Davenport: The civil rights – they called it a revolution and it was, because at least official segregation diminished, and it wasn't government sponsored any more the way that it was in the past. So there were quite a few things.

Senior: Well you know, going back, as I remember, as the war progressed from 1941, Fiat-Allis and Sangamo and Pillsbury Mill, and other places, they hired very few blacks. Most of them were janitor jobs. Like down at Pillsbury Mill, and it was called Allis-Chalmers years ago. And they had mostly black help, and then when the war come through here, they had to change it and start hiring these people.

Davenport: Yes, they had to do war production. And I think they had different laws saying that they couldn't segregate because of the war, from the federal government. They were looking for full production, period.

Senior: My mom did day work, and then when the war come through here, she went out to Illiopolis, and worked out there for, I guess, two years. On the day the war ended, they closed down the plant.

Davenport: That was the end of that.

Clarence Senior

Senior: Yes, she used to come home, she's have her hands would be yellow from that gunpowder and stuff that they worked in, and she did all right for two years, and then she had to go back to doing domestic work.

Davenport: Same thing with my mother-in-law here. In fact, she often spoke of the good days at Illiopolis that they had, but there were very good days for people who were thirsty for good jobs. Just for an opportunity. And they got it for a while. And then they were able to manage, and some of them even saved enough to buy little houses.

Senior: Yes, that's true.

Davenport: Like my mother-in-law, so they were struggling, but they took advantage of their opportunity and able to move on. But that was part of the early days, and I think that you certainly have seen changes in the fire department over the years, I would imagine, some changes.

Senior: Yes, but you can't change people's minds. That's the weakest part of a person, is his mind. I grew up with a lot of guys around here in Springfield, and went to high school with them. And you'd be surprised at what some people do to you when they're with their friends, and they went to school with you and they don't want to talk to you, you know. They don't want to recognize you.

Davenport: It's all situational.

Senior: It's something that it's – it's really for those people, because I'm getting ready to say hi, how are you doing? And they turn their heads.

Davenport: I just cannot see that part of it.

Senior: And all of us were poor together around here in the city of Springfield, they had the coal mines. And some of the guys I went to school with, their fathers worked in the coal mines. And they lived like regular people in house, outhouse, and they seem to have forgotten where they'd come from.

Davenport: Well, you know, it's the same – the leaders are the ones that set the tone.

Senior: That's true.

Davenport: And the leaders set a tone of power and acceptance. People may not like it, but they fall in line behind it. Because nobody likes to be left out.

Senior: That's right, we have no choice.

Davenport: Have no choice. When I came, I was able to get a job because as I said, it was as the Civil Rights movement was at its peak, and I got mine through

affirmative action, stood on the shoulders of people that marched and fought and died. And they passed the civil rights, but I'm the one that received the benefits from it because I was able to get a job, come down here, or otherwise I would've been long left out in the cold, not being a native of Springfield and not knowing my way around, it would've been virtually impossible to find a job otherwise, but with my qualifications, and with affirmative action, they had to meet those numbers if they were still going to get government contracts, and of course state work is government, so that's – that was helpful. That's my personal experience. And each one's a little bit different, but I can see that once the door is open it makes it possible for others to come through that door. Then the [unclear] people are going to have to close it themselves.

Senior: Yeah, but politics plays a part. There's public politics and then there's private politics. I don't care what group you belong to, church, schools or anything, the people in charge are going to hire whom they want to hire.

Davenport: They always have.

Senior: They always will. And there's two things, public politics, and private politics. Because once a person gets in charge they're going to hire who they want to hire. And if they don't like you, they're not going to hire you.

Davenport: That's true. There was one time, you know, it was public policy not to hire you. Because even leaders didn't want the stigma that they were giving favoritism to black people, and that was part of it.

Senior: And when you get right down to it, if it don't be for politics, the black man starves to death. I don't care what they say.

Davenport: They've got to.

Senior: And if you take a black man, and you find him building something somewhere, you can bet there's some money behind him, and it don't come from black people.

Davenport: No, it doesn't. But it comes from a leader somewhere. It's someone saying this is what's going to happen.

Senior: That's true.

Davenport: Somebody makes a decision and says what's going to happen.

Senior: They sit there and talk about – oh look at what so and so is doing. Well, investigate the background and see where the money comes from. Somebody has to put it up.

Clarence Senior

Davenport: Money talks.

Senior: Yes, And bullshit walks. I have to say that, that's all there is to it.

Davenport: Yeah, it does. So it's very meaningful, and I think that every contribution helps, and certainly you know, we never know about history and how it's going to play out. Because you have to look back over time. But I've covered the points that I wanted to cover in this interview, and I didn't know if you had something that you would like to add maybe about your later years.

Senior: Well, as I grew older and found out the makings and breakings of the United States of America, I found out that its people, regardless of what they say, it's people that are in charge of certain things that run this country. No matter who is elected president, they still run this country, and that is money. And if you investigate, back into the backings of people, way back in their background, you find out that the money is still running this country. I don't care whether it's Democrat or Republican. The people that invest the money in this country run this country, regardless of who is president. And I'm going to say a couple of –

Davenport: Yes, please do.

Senior: I'm going to give out a couple of names now, which I shouldn't do. But a kid I grew up with and went to school with, Irv Smith, he's a nice guy. He came from this side of town. He was poor. We were all in this race together, and he grew up and become educated, and he did a pretty good job of helping people on this east side of town. Him, and Bill Cellini. And it all starts with politics. I don't care whether it's in church or where, it's politically run. The people that get in charge make the decisions.

Davenport: Yes, yes. Always have and always will.

Senior: And what's the first thing they ask you for? Money. And I don't care what they do, they can't do anything without money. They can go up there and chant and go on and do everything they want to do, and then in the end, what did they say? We need your offerings and wish cards now. And that's the way it's built.

Davenport: Well, you're about the same age that I am, I'm born in 1928.

Senior: Yeah, and I'm '29.

Davenport: So we went into service in just about the same time. I went in 1951.

Senior: I did too, I went in January.

Davenport: I went into the Army. The Army that I went into in 1951 looks altogether different, race wise, from the Army that I see today. If I had told people that they would've had – well, we only had one general that I remember when I went in, and that was Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. And he was a Brigadier General. Now, there's a multitude of black generals. We've even had five star black generals. And that was unheard of in my time. So if I had to look at an institution and reflect upon a change that has taken place, that probably was because the leaders made it happen, change the personalities in that particular institution, I think. The Army to me is a good example. If we do get good leadership in there, what happens. And when I say good leadership, I mean from a racial standpoint. Some of them are pushed to it when they see casualties coming out of Korea and Vietnam, and you see these people complaining about those casualties, and they really don't mind seeing some black casualties, if you please. That does make opportunities. I understand, you know, that part of it also. But to me, that's an example, I think, of an institution that's changed. The other institutions, I watch the police department and the fire department in Springfield, and those institutions are moving at a – I'd say a turtle's pace.

Senor: You've got that right.

Davenport: As far as changing.

Senor: Yes, sir.

Davenport: And I would like to see change as exemplified by the military take place, because I don't see that much difference between those uniformed services and maybe the uniformed services of the military. But the military did it because it happened at the top. They said this is the way it's going to be. That was the way it was from then on. There wasn't any discussion over it. That was it. So here, what it would take to bring about meaningful change in those institutions in Springfield, I think is going to take somewhat the same thing. I've been involved in maybe trying to change the city government, and did, to an aldermanic system. But the jury's still out on that.

Senor: Yes, they haven't made a decision yet, have they?

Davenport: They haven't made the decision yet. We have the system, but they haven't made a decision on what it's going to be.

Senor: Haven't made the final decision...

Davenport: But as I said, things take light years sometimes, especially in Springfield, I think.

- Senor: Well, mostly anywhere. If people tell the truth, I was in California, and it had its pros and cons in California. I was all up and down the coast of California when I was in the Navy. And you run into problems no matter where you go. Because people are people all over the United States of America. Plus in Japan and China. I was in Japan and China, and in Hawaii. I've seen quite a bit of the world, and I enjoyed it.
- Davenport: How long were you in?
- Senor: I was in two years.
- Davenport: Two years, I was in two years also. And I got the chance to see Europe. So they gave me some travel that I otherwise would not have had, certainly not at that young age.
- Senor: That's true.
- Davenport: But anyway, I was able to do it. But you know, being black in Europe, you have some problems there too, because it's throughout the world. But you're pretty observant, and would you say Springfield is better off?
- Senor: It's better. You've still got these individuals that think different than other people, so you have to just bypass these types of people.
- Davenport: Well, I have to ask you a follow up question too. Do you think racism will ever be ended in Springfield?
- Senor: No. I remember – yes, I remember this lady that was the head of Brown, I think it was, Brown University.
- Davenport: Oh, Brown University.
- Senor: Yeah and she was –
- Davenport: Ivy League school.
- Senor: Yeah. She was president I think. And this guy asked her a question about segregation and she sort of made a statement like no matter how high you go, no matter where you go, no matter what kind of education you get you're still a Negro. And said they treat you like that regardless of how much education you got. These are small-minded people, education has nothing to do with feelings. You have a feeling for a person or you don't have a feeling for a person. Education has nothing to do with it. Only thing it does is they just hide it more when it's on an educational level, see. And every time they talk about a person that's been educated, they always bring in the race issue, well she's black, or he's black. You don't hear them talking about he's Irish or he's

Italian or Scottish or Polish or anything, all they do is just say he's white. They put us in a lone category.

Davenport: That's what makes the question so intractable. You wonder why you were in that lone category, why we are so important as to warrant that category. It seems that certainly we're more trouble being black – I mean I'm talking about to the entire population, what they're spending to keep us in that category rather than providing us with equality of opportunity and moving ahead so that we would not be a burden on society.

Senior: I like what they say about diseases and things that happen to the human being, every time they come up with something it's always prevalent in a black person. Like this prostate thing on men.

Davenport: Prostate cancer.

Senior: Yes. Well, if it's one in every three, or one in every five, then that means if you're a man and you have prostate cancer that you've used that thing. So it doesn't make no difference what color you are. Disease doesn't have a color on it.

Davenport: No, never has, never will.

Senior: No, and they come down, talk about black people this and black people that. But when you go to the hospital who do you see in the hospital?

Davenport: It's the whites.

Senior: Yes, I hate to say that, but that's true. High blood pressure. I worked on a fire department. Over half of the people on the fire department had high blood pressure, maybe more like 75% had high blood pressure. And they always talk about black people this and black people that.

Davenport: You're a category by yourself.

Senior: Yes, it doesn't happen to other people.

Davenport: Yes, purposely they make you a category by yourself.

Senior: Yes. And they talk about drugs this and black people with drugs and everything. And when I'm sitting here on my porch and I see these people driving up and down the street, looking for drugs and things like that, a lot of white people are in cars looking for drugs over here on this side of town.

Davenport: Oh yes. But in spite of all of that, in spite of how we have been maligned and people are still maligning us and lying –

Clarence Senior

Senior: Yes.

Davenport: In spite of all of that, we see, if someone had told me that a black woman would one day be a county officer , Clerk of the...

Senior: Circuit Court, Circuit Court.

Davenport: Circuit Court. When I came here, that had been told me, I wouldn't have believed it.

Senior: No I wouldn't believe it either.

Davenport: You understand?

Senior: That's true.

Davenport: Progress does happen. The only way that we can tell it happens, you can call it the Jackie Robinson effect, call it whatever you want to, but in spite of records keep falling down and somehow, someone in position, as you say of power said that that's the way it's going to be. And once that takes place we see it. And that opens up the door for another – role model for someone. So you can't say that it can't happen, because it happened in my lifetime, I saw it.

Senior: Yes, I did too.

Davenport: So they can do that, become a county officer, and that is something and keep going and state officer, all the way up. So I guess I only have one lifetime, you wonder if it's going to happen in my lifetime. That's the way it is.

Senior: Well, I think television has brought out a lot of...

Senior: Truth happens. See things happen on television, and you can't believe. It used to be that you had to listen to people tell you these stories. But now that television is here and you see it for yourself, you're able to pick out the good and the bad. You can tell when a guy's lying and when he's not lying. And I always wondered as a kid, going back, I always wondered why they didn't have any blacks up in the major leagues when I was a kid. Because they used to have all these black professional Negro teams come through here. Out here at Lanphier Park, my dad used to take me out there, and we'd see, and these guys would perform, could hit the ball out of the park, had good pitchers and everything. And I always wondered why didn't they have any blacks up in the major leagues. Well, the answer is for itself. Because they were good, and see, these guys today are playing against the best guys that ever played. Back there in those days in the '20s and the '30s and the teens they didn't have the best ballplayers on the field, they had some of the best, but they didn't have all the best. And I'm getting particular now, because because of Hank Aaron,

Clarence Senior

Barry Bonds –

Davenport: Yes, their records are gone everyday.

Senior: Are going every day, see.

Davenport: Every day.

Senior: If you sat there and go back and look at the records and how these guys advanced from the first year till the 20 or 22nd or 23rd years, these guys have produced. Regardless of what they're saying. And they talk about the steroids in baseball. How come they let Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa –

END OF SIDE A, START OF SIDE B

Davenport: Part and parcel of being selective of who they want to – or how they want to persecute people because of color, if that is the way.

Senior: Yes, that's right. Well, this guy Jose Canseco told these people about the steroids in baseball and the big commissioner of baseball turned his head when it came to Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa using steroids. And he says he didn't know anything about it. Well, it was in the man's book. He read the man's book, so he had to know something about it. So he just turned his head because these guys were drawing people into the stadiums.

Davenport: Money becomes.

Davenport: Money becomes the master.

Senior: Money becomes the ruler.

Davenport: Money becomes the master.

Senior: And now they're talking about they're going to investigate about steroids. Well, let's go back to when Sandy Koufax was playing baseball. And before he could perform he had to have a cortisone shot in his arm, which is a drug.

Davenport: True.

Senior: A steroid. And several times he got cortisone shots in his arm so he could pitch.

Davenport: No one thought anything of it.

Senior: Go back to when Dick Butkus was playing and all these guys were playing.

Clarence Senor

Davenport: Pain they call it.

Senor: Pain, yes.

Davenport: Go back out on the field, but I'm optimistic, and as I said right now I'm going to be optimistic, but again I want to thank you for the interview. And as I said maybe – I'll cut this off.

END OF TAPE