

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Nicole Florence, MD

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Tumultuous 2020 Oral History project

Interview # T20-A-L-2021-060

Nicole Florence, Director and bariatrician at the Memorial Wellness Center, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Tumultuous 2020* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: November 15 & 29, 2021 Location: ALPL Recording Studio, Springfield, IL

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Amanda Riggenschach, project manager *Tumultuous 2020*, ALPLM

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript being
processed.

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 2:04 + 2:09 / 2.07 + 2.15 = 4:15 / 4.22 hrs.

Session 1: Childhood in predominantly white neighborhood, education and career

Session 2: Experience with the COVID-19 pandemic

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on January 11, 2022.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Nicole Florence, *Tumultuous 2020*, T20-A-L-2021-060

Biographical Information/Overview of Interview: Nicole Florence was born in 1969 in Champaign, Illinois. She moved when she was eight with her parents and two sisters to Springfield, Illinois, where her maternal grandparents lived. Florence's parents moved their family into the Washington Park neighborhood, which was predominantly Caucasian. She attended Springfield High School and though she excelled academically, racism throughout the four years showed her that she was not accepted by the Caucasian majority. Upon her graduation from Springfield High School in 1987, she attended the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana to pursue her goal of becoming a physician. At the university, she was able to explore African American culture in a way she had previously been unable. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Biology in 1991. She took a year applying to medical school to work as a phlebotomist. After that, Florence attended Southern Illinois University in Carbondale for medical school. She was often the only African American woman in her courses. Throughout this time, and into her residency, Florence describes the way she had to work harder in order to get the respect that was afforded to her Caucasian male peers. After the completion of her residency, Florence worked to build a private practice at Memorial Hospital, which after twenty years became the largest practice in the Memorial system. She also became involved on a part-time basis with the Memorial Wellness Center.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Florence was beginning to start the transition to working at the wellness center full-time. Throughout the second session of the interview, Florence describes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on her personal and professional experiences. She describes her disappointment in her final appointments with longtime patients being cancelled or moved to Telehealth. Florence details her personal experience with COVID-19 and the long-term health impacts it had on her. She also detailed the work she does in the African American community to ease the distrust of the medical field, which includes public speaking engagements and vaccine clinics.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Springfield, Illinois; Washington Park; microaggressions; African Americans; healthcare racism; Memorial Hospital System; Memorial Wellness Center; COVID-19; COVID-19 pandemic; vaccine; vaccine hesitancy

Notes to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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