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Nick Nuccio oral history interview by Otis R. Anthony and members of the Black History Research Project of Tampa, July 12, 1978

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Fred Beaton: —when you came here and where you are from?

Nick Nuccio: I was born in the city of Tampa, October 24, 1901, so all my life has been living in Tampa. I've never lived in any other part of the country outside of Tampa. I travel extensively, for business and pleasure, mostly, but my home is in Tampa. (clears throat)

I was, at the age of thirty-six (clears throat) I was the youngest member up to today, the youngest member of the city council. I was there for maybe seven years. Then from there I was elected to the county commission, and I was there for about twenty-two years. Then I ran for mayor and was elected. I went there for an expired term for three years.

FB: When was the year that you were first elected mayor?

NN: Let me give you a brochure that I've got—

FB: Yeah.

NN: —and then you'll—

Pause in recording

FB: (inaudible)

NN: Let me say this to you. You see, I wanted to build a clinic when I was county commissioner, over here in the black section, right off of Twenty-Second Street here on Twenty-Eighth Avenue, and I was looking for a piece of property there. And I found out
that Lee Davis—you've heard of Lee Davis?

FB: Yes, I know who he is.

NN: Lee Davis owned a lot, a couple of lots, right across the street from where he lived at that time. So, I went to Lee Davis and I told him, I said, “Lee, I want to build a clinic for your people. We’re doing it mostly for your people in this area, so they don't have to go down town to the clinic, you know.” And I said, “I'm interested in buying those lots for you.”

He says, “All right, let me talk to my wife.” So he talked to his wife and he called me back. And he says, “All right, we want—ordinarily we would sell those lots for two thousand dollars, but due that you want to put a clinic there, we will give it to you for a thousand dollars—for the city to buy it, that is.” So, that was in the daytime.

That same night he called me at home. He said, “You know, I’ve been discussing with my wife. If we're going to give it to you for a thousand dollars, we’ll just as soon give it to for nothing.” So he gave us the lots. So I built that clinic there, and I put an inscription of Lee Davis there. Well, everybody thinks that Lee Davis build that building, you know what I mean?

FB: (laughs) Oh, I see.

NN: Because I put his name there, “In memory of Lee Davis,” you know, and all that stuff in honor of Lee Davis that he gave us the property and this and that. But my name is on the plaque, too.

FB: I never knew that.

NN: Well, I've been talking to three or four people that know about that clinic, you know what I mean? And they all thought that Lee Davis was the one that built that clinic.

FB: (laughs)

NN: So anyhow, I was county commissioner for twenty-two years, after I got out of the city council. Ran for mayor for an expired term after Curtis Hixon’s death, and I was elected for a three year term. Then I ran again, and I was defeated. I ran for the county commissioner again, and I got elected. So two years after that, which makes it twenty-four years with the county commission. I ran again for mayor for a full term, and I got elected again.

FB: Who was your opposition in that?

NN: Huh?

FB: Who was your opposition in that race? In the last election for mayor?
NN: In the last election, (inaudible), who I put in the Housing Authority; we were very friendly; there was no opposition., because of (inaudible) be at the end or anything like that. (inaudible) and another Latin person, and some Anglo-Saxon, I don't know who it was. I don't remember now.

FB: Okay, so it didn't come down to just two people?

NN: No, no, no; it was about four or five in the running. So, that's been my political life. All my life over the years has been in public service.

FB: (inaudible)

NN: And for your information—I want you to know this bit if you are trying to write a black history of Tampa. I was the first mayor, first one—first person, rather—that put black people in policy making boards. I put Reverend [G.V.] Oates as a member of the Housing Authority, and I put Reverend Wilburn as a member of the urban renewal, you see. When I was mayor, the city of Tampa was the first city in the state of Florida that went to the housing—urban renewal rather; urban renewal.

I wanted to first start urban renewal, because it was getting predominantly black in Ybor City, but the federal government says no, it’s nearly 50 percent white and 50 percent black. They would not accept that, so I took in that (inaudible) project. You know where the (inaudible) project is on Seventh Avenue, where Nuccio Drive is? That’s how that Nuccio Drive came into the business. So I cleaned up all that slum area that was there. And Blythe Andrews [Senior] bought that property from the urban renewal—you know who Blythe Andrews is?

FB: Yes.

NN: —and put up those projects, those housing projects there. Now, the Housing Authority—the urban renewal, rather, urban renewal had the authority to sell it, with the consent of the mayor and the city council. We gave consent right away.

I knew Blythe Andrews; he is a very dear friend of mine, and young Andrews is a good friend of mine too. And so they mentioned publicly that street was going to be named Nuccio Drive, from Nebraska [Avenue] to Fifteenth Street. Well, after they did that, I didn't want to embarrass the boys, you know, and Reverend Wilburn is the one that mentioned it. I would have preferred Blythe Andrews Drive, you understand? I would have preferred that, but once they mentioned it, I didn't want to embarrass them. You know what I mean? Because they didn't have any authority to name that street anyhow; it was up to the mayor and the city council to name that street. You understand?

FB: I see.

NN: So being that they mentioned my name and it was publicized, you know, I went
ahead and took it to city council, I said, “It's up to you, what you want to do you do, but this is my preference, Blythe Andrews Drive.” But the board, being that it was mentioned in the press and whatnot, named it in my honor.

FB: In your election for mayor—let’s talk about the last one. Did blacks play any role in your election?

NN: Very much.

FB: What role did the black vote play? Can you tell us about that?

NN: I got the majority of the black vote.

FB: Can you tell us a little something about what went into that, in terms of who were the leadership, the kinds of people who were able to get into your campaign?

NN: All right. Blythe Andrews was very much in favor of me.

FB: This Senior?

NN: Senior wrote an editorial for me, backing me up, you know. Reverend [A. Leon] Lowry was behind me a hundred percent, like I said. Dr. Wilburn and Reverend Oates they were also behind me. All the ministry was behind me. I spoke to many churches, you know, black churches during that time—and after that, too, after I was elected.

FB: Were they acting as a organized kind of—nothing informal, or—?

NN: No, no. Just individuals; they knew me and knew what my attitude was towards the black people, you know what I mean, so they were very much in favor of me. Let me say this to you: There never was a black person that came to my office or to my home that was not received cordially. Now, the black people naturally, not knowing the system of government, they would come, three or four or five of them, in my office without an appointment, you understand? My secretary had orders that, regardless of whether they had an appointment or not, as soon as I got through with whoever I had in the office, to call them in. I gave them preference, whether they had an appointment or not, and the people knew about it, see.

I meet people every day. I met one yesterday at the—on Hillsborough Avenue, that supermarket; that Publix supermarket on Hillsborough and Twenty-Second Street.

FB: Yes, Twenty-Second.

NN: And he comes to me and he says, “Are you Mr. Nuccio?” I say yes. “Oh, Mr. Nuccio,” he say, “You don't know how much I did for you, you know, and I wonder whose man you were,” and he started bragging about it for about fifteen or twenty minutes.
FB: (laughs)

NN: It was all right, you know what I mean? I enjoyed it—I loved it, a matter of a fact. (laughs)

Then there was another black woman that was selling peanuts—sitting on a bench, you know, for a church—seventy cents a package. So my wife inside the store doing her buying, you know what I mean, while I was just fooling around there talking to people. So I said, “Give me a couple packs of those peanuts.” So she did. I say, “How much are they?”

“Thirty cents a package.”

I bought a bag. I say, “Who's they for?”

She said, “The church.”

I had seventy-five cents, I didn't want to get the change. “You give that to the church.” (laughs)

She say, “Oh, Mr. Nuccio!” I didn't know she knew me. (laughs)

FB: So that’s the kind of rapport you’ve always had with the community.

NN: You know that cemetery on Buffalo [Avenue] and Twenty-Second Street?

FB: Mm-hm.

NN: There was a woman, a black woman, that lived across the street. Now, it was strictly against the law, remember, because it's private property, but this woman called me and said, “Mr. Nuccio, that cemetery looks so pitiful.” I was county commissioner then, not even mayor. She said, “Mr. Nuccio, that cemetery looks so pitiful. The grass has grown so high. The people don't take care of it. I got somebody buried there, but I take care of my plot. Is there anything you can do?”

I say, “Sure, I’ll see what I can do.” So I sent a crew of men over there to clean that whole cemetery. From then on, every six months she would call me, wanted to clean it up. (both laugh)

I always looked at it this way: if it is morally right and legally wrong, I’d rather go morally right.

FB: Yes.

NN: You understand? God made your conscience and your moral right. Man makes laws,
and they change them all the time. So, that has been my philosophy in all my public life. I did a lot of things that was legally wrong, but I knew it was morally right, so my conscience was clear with it. I was happy to do it. And if I'm back in office again tomorrow, I would practice the same philosophy.

FB: Were there any elections that the blacks did not vote for you?

NN: No.

FB: Could you tell me about that?

NN: No, they always voted for me, always.

FB: You (inaudible)—?

NN: But the problem is this: at that time, remember—at that time; now I don't know what it is 'cause I haven’t had occasion to check it in the last ten or twelve years. You see, we got a large black population in Tampa, but they don’t take no interest in government, you understand? When I was county commissioner, for example, I had the black people, I had Ybor City; it was part of my district that I was elected on.

FB: We were on the ward system then?

NN: Mm-hm. At that time, for about eighteen years that I was there. Then after that they change it if you live in the district, but you run at large, you understand.

FB: Yeah, that's very important there, what you are saying.

NN: You got to live in the district, but you run at large.

FB: Okay.

NN: Well, all these people that's live over there in the Ybor City section, a lot of—predominately—not predominately black, but there was a lot of black people about fifty percent of the time. I never had any problem with them; they always voted for me. Out of eighteen thousand people registered at that time—remember, say, fifteen years ago—only six thousand would vote, all over the county. I'm not talking about the city of Tampa only, all over the county. Well, that's bad, it's wrong, you know what I mean?

FB: Yeah, that’s—

NN: Now, the only reason that we are getting a good percentage of the vote now is because of the projects, you understand? It's convenient to have the precinct right there in the project. It's convenient for them to walk over there, you know what I mean, and vote.

FB: We still are not getting a good percentage.
NN: I'm satisfied, you're not.

FB: Yeah, we’re still not (inaudible).

NN: So, it is necessary for some leadership, you understand, for black people to see that the people register and vote. To register alone is not enough.

FB: Mm-hm. Okay, let’s back up a little bit.

NN: Politics is a life. Any ethnic group—my group. I'm an Italian; my parents were Italian, from Italy, immigrated to the United States. I’m in the same class as a Mexican or Spanish, blacks, you know what I mean.

FB: So it's important for them to vote.

NN: That's right. See, the Italian people, when I was running for county commissioner—now they're scattered all over the city and the county, but at that time most of them were concentrated in the Ybor City area, around Twenty-Sixth Avenue, Lake Avenue, between Buffalo and Sixth Avenue, Palmetto Beach. But they registered and they voted, you understand?

FB: I understand.

NN: So I always could depend—for an example, every time I ran for office, what we call Ybor City, that's not Ybor City anymore now. We can say that's where Hillsborough [Community] College is. They had about four precincts there, and in every one of the precinct they had between eleven hundred to thirteen hundred voters registered.

Out of them twelve hundred voters, thirteen hundred voters that registered, I would get—or voted, rather—I would get between nine hundred and thousand. The other would a hundred, the other would get twenty, the other would get thirty, you know what I mean. But that alone was sufficient for me to assure my election. 'Cause when I was county commissioner, I had outlying territory. I had, for example, Gary, which predominantly was] Anglo-Saxon. I had Brandon, Valrico, Limona, Kingsway, Lake Thonotosassa—completely Anglo-Saxon. You understand?

FB: I see.

NN: The reason I used to get good votes from all those little communities was because I treated them nice. I was the first mayor to build sidewalks in the city of Tampa in all areas, remember.

FB: In all areas.

NN: Not only for, but how did I do it? Now, I didn't come because I wanted to enhance
the value of your property. I put a sidewalk in front of you. I did it every street that lead
to a church or a school where children could walk. I was criticized because I put my
name on it.

(both laugh)

NN: And how did I put my name on it? I'm going to tell you a little story, make you
laugh. There was an old man, he must have been about seventy-five years old—this was
about twenty-five years ago. And I was building sidewalks in Brandon. It was to go
through—past, say, a mile of orange groves, remember, at that time—but I built
sidewalks because it lead to a church or a school building. So this old man—I used to put
my name, instead of putting in the corner, like we see today—a contractor put that name
(inaudible) in each corner—I used to put my name every seventy-five feet in the middle
of the sidewalk, not at the corner of the sidewalk.

So this old man Fontaine says to me, “Mr. Nuccio, I’ve seen a lot of sidewalk built in my
time, and they put their name right in the corner, here and there.”

“Ah,” I said, “Granddad, I'm going to tell you. You got a good question there. You know
why I do that?”

He said, “No, that's what I want to know.”

“Because if the people of Brandon ever get angry with me, all they got to do is cut out the
little corner and patch it up. This way they got to cut the whole sidewalk up.” (both
laugh) He laughed. Overnight the whole town knew about it. (both laugh)

FB: So, could you tell us about some other contributions that you made to the black
community, and your contact and relationship to the black community? Particularly black
leadership; who did you view as black leadership during that time?

NN: Reverend Lowry and Blythe Andrews, tops.

FB: Reverend Lowry and Blythe Andrews, tops.

NN: Reverend Lowry still tops, and Blythe Andrews. Then I had lots to do with the—
what’s his name? I don’t remember now. Used to be stevedore, you know, and his son is
there now.

FB: [Perry] Harvey [Senior]?

NN: Harvey. And Blythe Andrews Junior; they had good leadership somehow, right now.

FB: Okay, uh—

NN: The most popular man that I've seen—that's popularity now—not that he’s big in a
way that he's had publicity, because he's been in the background—was this fellow Williams. He was coach at Blake High School. He was very popular with the young element.

FB: He was very popular.

NN: Wonderful person.

FB: I know I was one of those who respected him. I have a great deal of respect for him still.

NN: Wonderful person. I first met the man—I didn’t know him—when we had the riot here because [of the] frustration of young people on employment. It was a thing that was going on practically in many, many city in the country. The young people would hear or read about it, and naturally they got into their minds to do what they did, but it was through frustration, unemployment, you know what I mean, having nothing to do.

Today it’s different; the federal government sends in millions and millions of dollars to take the—now, I say this in a way—not that I’m pleased that we had situation, all that burning, on Central Avenue. I’m not pleased about that. But today, we can say it was for the best. Because today they demolished every slum thing that they had on Central Avenue. It was a slum, a street that you’d see in any city in the country. Nothing but (inaudible); the landlords, the owners of the property, never wanted to do a thing in the world.

And surprisingly, I’m going to tell you this, how I feel now—not that I know, understand, ’cause I don’t know. But I feel that I may have something to do with it, my being liked by the black people, that when that thing happened, a relative of mine owned the corner of Scott [Street] and Central. They didn’t touch that building.

FB: No kidding?

NN: They didn’t touch that building. I don’t know why. I don’t say it was because he was my cousin, you know what I mean? But they didn’t even touch that building.

FB: Ain’t that something.

NN: And he was very pleased about it. Now the city bought it for a park, with federal funds, you know. He wasn’t satisfied what he got out of it, because he read about Moses White getting so much. (laughs)

FB: Yeah.

NN: But Moses White had a business there. Naturally, he suffered from that business, and naturally, when you condemn a piece of property, you got to pay them for it, for the loss of business.
FB: That’s true.

NN: You establish a business with fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years, thirty years, and overnight you’re going to be cut off, that’s got some value to it. So as far as the money that Moses White got for his building, I think it was proper.

FB: Okay. You talked about unemployment and the frustration and conditions. Can we back up a little bit? You were here in Tampa during the era—were you here during the era of Jim Crow in the city?

NN: What do you mean, Jim Crow?

FB: Jim Crow, the segregation.

NN: Yeah.

FB: Can you tell us, like, just from your eye view, as a person viewing it, how did you view the conditions of blacks during Jim Crow?

NN: I lived amongst them. I was born on Eighth Avenue and Seventeenth Street in Ybor City. I was born there, all my youth [was there].

FB: Then you can probably tell us what the experience was—

NN: I lived amongst them, I’m telling you. It didn't affect me a bit in the world.

FB: No, not you personally, but I mean just viewing it, socially speaking.

NN: Well, today we found out that all of that was wrong, you know what I mean; all that was wrong. And that we can live together; it's no question about it. There's some part of it that maybe I don't fully appreciate. Take for example, just like I’ve had some of your people, black people, talk to me about it. Now, my daughter lives right across [from] the school. Why should they bus her ten miles or twelve miles away from her home? A little child, maybe six, seven years old. That is wrong.

I believe in integration. Let the school give the best education in the world. I got a granddaughter and a grandson that lives on Himes [Avenue] off Hillsborough Avenue, Himes off Hillsborough Avenue, remember, six miles away from there. They got schools right close by. One of my grandsons goes to Middleton [High School], another one goes to Hillsborough [High School], one of my granddaughters goes to Bryant [Elementary] School. Now, why all that loss of money, transportation and whatnot, and the child—the mother’s got to worry, you know what I mean? How she's going to be treated on that bus?

FB: So, during Jim Crow, was there segregation? For example, was there streetcars
during that time?

NN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, definitely so. Very definitely there was segregation far as the streetcar. We’re talking about street cars, that’s something in the past. That's—I would say forty years ago, before you were born.

FB: Okay, but see, that’s what I’m saying.

NN: Before you were born.

FB: I want you to take us back as far as you can take us, because this is—

NN: They had the streetcars. Black people used to sit in the back and the white people in the front. They had a line there. Now, they didn’t mean that if the black seats were occupied and that they couldn't go any further, but they had to start from the back, go right toward the front.

FB: I see. Okay, during your political life, what was the relationship between the black community and the police department? How was relations between them?

NN: Well, let me put it this way—

FB: Maybe I should explain why I asked this?

NN: No, no, I’ll tell you.

FB: Okay.

NN: Let me answer you this way. In all of my political life, when I was a member of the city council, like I say, for seven years, and I was mayor for more than seven years, the relationship of the police department and black people was perfect. Oh, you might see an isolated case, you know what I mean, where some body abuses another one.

When I was mayor—I don’t remember the name now. He had a beat on Central Avenue, and there was a drunk. And the black policeman—remember, rationally—and the man being drunk didn’t know what he was doing—[the drunk was a] black person, black too. He was trying to get away from him, and the policeman knocked him down, kicked him in the head, in the eyes, practically blinded him. So, naturally, a lot of black people came over [saying] it was abuse, it was (inaudible), you know.

Well, I reprimanded the man. He was very apologetic. He says, “I didn’t know what I was doing. I lost my patience. But I’m sorry I did it.” So, I don’t know. The chief of police suspended him for a little while.

FB: Can you remember how many black policemen there were—
NN: Eight.

FB: —during the time you were mayor?

NN: Eight.

FB: Eight. You don't remember the names of them?

NN: No. As a matter of a fact, (coughs) a couple weeks ago I went to see Dennis Ross at city hall, and a young man comes over by the name of Carr. Do you know him? C-a-r-r.

FB: Carr?

NN: Carr, yeah.

FB: I know a minister named Carr.

NN: No, this boy’s father was a policeman.

FB: Oh.

NN: And he’d seen me over there, because he worked for some governmental agency, right here for the city. And he came up there to see Mr. Ross, who is the administrative assistant, and he recognized me. And he was telling the secretary, because I was waiting for Mr. Ross, that they had some complaint about his father, and they wanted him fired. Some black people too, remember. “Mr. Nuccio was the one that saved him. If it wasn't for him, my father would have been fired. But he kept him there; today he's retired, and he's happy.”

FB: Oh, that’s good. That’s good.

NN: I always had a very good relationship with black people, very good. I’m proud of it too, to say that.

FB: Mr. Nuccio, what was your position with, say, Mr. Harvey and the International Longshoremen’s Association?

NN: Just friends. I was friends with Harvey, remember, Perry Harvey. What was his father’s name?

FB: Perry Harvey, Senior. I mean—

NN: Not with the young fellow, now; with the father. We were very close with the father. We used to meet together with Moses White, Blythe Andrews. They had a little organization, you know, that business organization, and they used to meet in the restaurant in the hotel on Central Avenue, and once in a while they would invite me to
attend their meeting.

FB: You don’t remember the name of that organization?

NN: Foundation of—something like that. I don’t remember.

FB: Were they political?

NN: Perry Harvey knows about it.

FB: Were they political?

NN: Blythe Andrews, Junior knows about it.

FB: Were they a political type organization, or social?

NN: No, no, just like a merchants’ association; just the businesspeople from Central Avenue.

FB: Was it the Negro Chamber of Commerce?

NN: No, it was not a chamber of commerce. They had another name for it.

FB: I see.

NN: But they used to meet—

FB: Was it the Foundation of Tampa Merchants?

_Side 1 ends; side 2 begins_

FB: —experience, what the campaign was like. How did you set them up? What kind of places did you hold the campaign? How did you go about that?

NN: Most of them were in the buildings adjoining churches. Then we used to meet in many homes. People used to get their neighborhood together, especially in the Belmont Heights area—not what they called Belmont Heights, but north of that, northeast of that. I used to meet there with people, meet in their homes; there’d be fifteen to twenty; they’d have a little coffee and cakes.

FB: So—

NN: I’d visit the projects, and I’d go from floor to floor and see everybody that was there. I used to do (inaudible) black people. And then they knew me, so I was kind of relieved, that I wasn't going to strange places [where] they not knowing me, because I knew that they knew me.
FB: Okay. Your last election, did you run for reelection?

NN: Yeah, and you know why they defeated me?

FB: Who was it that defeated you?

NN: [Dick] Greco.

FB: Greco.

NN: Young fellow, young man. You know why they defeated me?

FB: Why?

NN: Because the newspaper, the *Tampa Tribune*, never, in the history of my political life, ever supported me for an office. In certain elections, they wouldn’t say nothing one way or the other, either against or for me. But they never come out and endorse me. This last election that I ran and I was defeated by Greco, there was a trend for young people, you know what I mean, and he was a young man. He was twenty-eight, twenty-nine years old at that time.

The *Tribune* wrote an editorial a year before. I had had a stomach operation; it was fifteen years ago. And during the campaign they started a rumor around that I had cancer. It was fifteen years ago! And the poor fellow, they closed him up and they just don't know how long he's going to live. So this came to the attention of the newspaper. I’m satisfied. Because they wrote a editorial where they said, “Because of his illness and because of his age, there would be a hardship on the taxpayers if something should happen to him, and that we’re going to have another election.”

They never criticized me for being inactive. They never criticized not being progressive. Because you take—let me say this to you; you'll see it in that brochure. I built five bridges: Buffalo Avenue Bridge here, Broadway Bridge, the Sligh Avenue Bridge, North Boulevard Bridge, the Davis Island Bridge.

FB: I remember that (inaudible). It was right outside my house. Yeah.

NN: When we built that one big building, the first project, then they extended it—expanded, rather. The City of Tampa had a big piece of ground that we were using as a playground, and also rented as a civic building. I turned it over to the community, told them to do what they please, without no charge or without nothing.

So anyhow, going back again to why I was defeated, they went ahead and they said that because of my age.

They tried for forty years before I was successful, remember, to buy that Ashley Street
from Kennedy Boulevard to Cass Street, which was the railroad station there at that time. Then on the urban renewal, I bought from Cass Street to Seventh Avenue, which was a slum area of black people. Very slum area, nothing but drunks used to go there, and all kind of people used to go there. So, I was able to convince the Atlantic Coast Line to sell to the city that piece of property, after forty years that they tried to buy it. Nobody was able to do it. Well, I was successful.

I built the convention center there. I built—the library is in there in the urban renewal section, which is on the other side of Cass Street. I built a parking lot. I built swimming pools all the over the county—all over the city, rather—firefighter stations. Every improvement that you see in the City of Tampa today was done under my administration.

FB: I see.

NN: Because why did I do all of these things? Because I had read about them, heard about them, and everybody want success about it. I say, “Well, I heard about this, so let me try it.” So I went ahead, because I knew the people wanted it. In Sulphur Springs, for example, I expanded the library, doubled its size. In Palma Ceia, we were renting a little store building for a library. I bought a piece of ground and built a large library there.

FB: What were you able to do—

NN: (coughs) Right at this project, the (inaudible) Avenue project—you know, that busy section there is in the back there, that little shopping center. Well, I reserved a piece of ground there for a library. That library used to be on Seventh Avenue next to the Italian Club. I reserved that land particularly for a library.

FB: I see. So, overall, how did you view race relations in the city of Tampa? Not just you personally, because obviously you got along good with everybody. But how did you see race relations during your life here in Tampa?

NN: Very good, no problem. No major problem, let’s put it that way. In all my experience with law enforcement, I've yet to bring to myself and say there's been bad relationship between law enforcement and the Italians, the Spanish, the blacks, the Mexicans, or whatever it is. Tampa has been very fortunate, compared to other cities I'm talking about. We've been very fortunate.

FB: Do you think it was because there was not the poverty and frustration there, or is it because people had people like yourself to address their grievances?

NN: Well, it has solved the problem in the great extent because of the federal government coming in with many projects, millions of dollars worth of projects, both in the county and the city. That helped out a whole lot. So the frustration—because of that, it's not there anymore. Young people who want to work can go to work.

I remember I had somebody call me the other day. They told me they didn't have no way
of getting here. A black woman called me and wanted to put her son to work. So I said, “Well, I don't know, but let me find out. You call me back.” She happened to live in that area around Lake Avenue and Twenty-Second Street, somewhere around there. So I called the city, and they told me where to send this boy; he was a young boy. Right there near the project on Twenty-Second somewhere, they got a project for employment, so I send him there and the boy got a job.

FB: Yeah.

NN: It's very simple. Anybody that wants to work today, that’s no question in my mind that there are doors open for them to go to work, you know what I mean? If you don't want to work, naturally it's a privilege.

FB: How many blacks worked in city government during your administration?

NN: Oh, plenty of them.

FB: What were the jobs?

NN: Sanitation department—anything in that department was black people, predominantly black.

FB: Did you ever have the opportunity to put any blacks in management? Management positions, like supervisors, heads of departments, or directors?

NN: Yeah, we had some, but I don't recall which ones they were. We didn't have too many of those, though. Not as department heads, anyhow. Like I said, the most contribution that I've done for the black people was starting them off in a policy making group, like urban renewal and the housing authority. Today it has continued; remember today they have one black person in each one of those groups.

FB: How did you view urban renewal and its effect on blacks? You know, many blacks say that urban renewal was bad, because it dislocated a lot of people and they didn’t get housing. They never received housing back; some of them had problems in getting money payment.

NN: No, no, no.

FB: Is that true?

NN: No. Let me say this to you.

FB: Okay.

NN: I didn’t have one complaint about anybody that owned property. There were very few that owned it. Remember, there weren’t too many—like in Ybor City, for example,
they were all renting; most of them were renting. On Marion Avenue, the same way. Most of them were landlords that owned fifteen, twenty houses, thirty houses; another owned fifteen, another twenty, another thirty. But the federal government was watching all that, as far as urban renewal is concerned.

Everybody—I never—on the Marion Avenue projects, the Ybor City projects, which I initiated, the Riverfront projects, I didn’t have one person to come to me and complain that he didn’t get enough money. Now, I say this: there were very few property owners that weren’t due any. Predominantly, they were people that owned two or three hundred houses, not in one particular section but in the two sections. Like my cousin, for example, the one that owned Scott and Central that I was telling you about, he owned about thirty or forty houses where urban renewal took them on Central Avenue. When they took Central Avenue, they took about six or seven of his houses, too, beside Scott and Central.

FB: So you think urban renewal was basically good for the black community?

NN: Today it prove to be good, yes. Because what did they do? The areas were rotten, slumy, and they had to be completely torn down. You couldn’t repair them. Because of that, the government—you could not enter urban renewal. Remember, it was the law, and it is the law. You could not go ahead and get government approval of an urban renewal project, unless there was enough room for these people to go and live in.

FB: I see.

NN: That is the law today, and it was then.

FB: During the time that you—

NN: So I didn’t have no—honestly I didn’t have no complaints whatsoever about the few people that owned the property that they had to move out, because right away I knew several of them that went out and bought nicer homes than they had, beautiful homes, for the same money that they got from urban renewal.

FB: I didn’t see exactly what year you were mayor?

NN: On the second page.

FB: Mayor of the City of Tampa 1956 to 1959. Was there still segregation during that time in Tampa, during the time you were mayor?

NN: No.

FB: Blacks could eat at all the lunch counters downtown?

NN: Yeah, uh-huh.
FB: Were there any blacks working downtown in department stores as clerks or cashiers?

NN: Yes. Oh, yes, they were there.

FB: Were there many?

NN: I wouldn't say predominantly many, no, but there were some. In each store there were some black people, a black group of young women.

FB: You were in office during a great deal of the time when the civil rights movement was a national movement in this country, right?

NN: Yeah.

FB: How did you view that, from the perspective of a man in political office? Was this during the time that Reverend Lowry and those were out demonstrating for civil rights and this type of thing? Were you in office during that time?

NN: I don't remember Reverend Lowry demonstrating.

FB: You know, he was very instrumental in a great deal of the changes in terms of civil rights in the city.

NN: Yes, I know he was very much interested, but he didn't openly express himself, you know what I mean?

FB: Uh-huh.

NN: But he’s done a lot of good, and he's still doing a lot of good.

FB: You can't really remember the effect of the civil rights movement during the time in terms of blacks. Was there any kind of action?

NN: No commotion at all. It was a peaceful thing that when concessions that took place without no knowledge, without nothing. We go into national thing, not only here but nationally.

FB: Was there any time that your administration have to put any pressure on any other government agencies, like the police department or the fire department, concerning entering the black neighborhoods, or anything like that?

NN: To do what?

FB: About entering black neighborhoods. That was a problem that they were having in fifty-six [1956], in some areas of Tampa.
NN: I don't know of any problems that we had.

FB: Okay. (shuffles papers) We would like to sort of wind up the interview—

NN: You can take that with you.

FB: Okay. Appreciate it.

—by you just sort of giving us, as young blacks, some idea what you think is important for the black community to get involved in in the future if they are to improve things for themselves and improve their position in the city of Tampa.

NN: I think that the young people—first of all, my hope is not only for the blacks, but also the whites. That they would get a good education, that's my hope. Now, if they cannot get that education because of their inability to study or because they don't want to study, then I think that the industries and merchants ought look into that very seriously and give these young people employment, and keep them off the street.

FB: I see. Let me ask you something. There is a little controversy now about returning to single member districts. Some people are calling it returning to the ward system; they are saying it's bad. I have a lot of black community persons—

NN: I loved it. (laughs)

FB: Yeah. A lot of black community leaders are saying now that single member districts is the thing in the future for us, if we are to have any kind of political power in the city of Tampa and Hillsborough County. What is your opinion on single member districts?

NN: I loved it.

FB: Why? Why, as opposed to—

NN: All right, you are talking to a man that has had the experience.

FB: That's why I am asking you.

NN: I had as county commissioner for twenty-two years—no, no, for about eighteen years, maybe nineteen—I ran into district. My dividing line was from Nebraska Avenue east. I didn't have nothing to do with the Palma Ceia area. I didn't have nothing to do with Seminole Heights, Sulphur Springs. I was elected right there. And predominantly, who were the voters in those two districts? The blacks and the Latins.

FB: Oh, I see.

NN: So it was favorable to me, because I had the friendship of the blacks in the community, I had the friendship of the Latins, so I never had any problem. One election
particularly, I had seven people running against me, seven. Three Latins, four Anglo-Saxons. I beat them all in the first primary. (both laugh) You understand?

FB: Uh-huh.

NN: So, you are asking me what I think of the single district? (laughs) I wish it come tomorrow.

FB: Yeah. That's good to hear, because a lot of black leaders think that way now, too. I think Reverend Lowry is for it, and other people.

NN: Well, I say this: I'm not known. I always was defeated in the Palma Ceia area. Always, I never got anywhere there; whereas my opponent got a thousand votes, I’d carry a hundred votes, because they don't know me. Now if it was a district here—like I say, I was a county commissioner from Nebraska to east. Everybody knew me there. Palma Ceia, people couldn't do a thing in the world about me. Neither could the newspapers, as far as that goes.

FB: That’s right.

NN: But when the newspapers tells the whole county that reads that editorial, “He's too old, he's liable to die, he'll be a burden on the taxpayers to have to hold an election.” Do you believe they will tell you this? I'm seventy-six years old. I'll be seventy-seven before the year is out, in October. I'm still thinking of running for mayor again.

FB: No kidding!

NN: Oh, yes! Hell, I heard Claude Pepper yesterday—did you read the story of Claude Pepper?

FB: No, but I heard about it. He's an energetic man.

NN: I'm going to give it to you.

FB: Okay. I’d love that.

NN: I cut it [out]—it’s the most interesting story you ever have seen.

FB: I would love to have it. I’ve heard a lot of people talk about him.

NN: Remember, he was a very dear friend of mine. He is a dear friend of mine. When he was in the Senate, I used to go to Washington, and it was just like going to my home. He’s done me a lot of favors.

*End of interview*