

M: I'm here with Sheriff David Shoar of the St. John's County Sheriff's Office [as well as Joel Bolante, Chief-of-Staff for the Sheriff's Office]. I'm going to ask him questions about the Civil Rights Movement. It is October 26, 2005. First off, Sheriff, when and where were you born?

S: I was born in Springfield, Massachusetts on October 28th, 1961.

M: What's your educational background?

S: I'm a high school graduate. I have my two year degree. I have an Associate of Arts degree from St. Johns River Community College. [I] graduated Cum Laude. [I] graduated with a four year bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from the University of North Florida, Summa Cum Laude and graduated with a master's degree from the University of North Florida, Summa Cum Laude.

M: According to your website, you moved to St. Johns County when you were 18?

S: Yes.

M: What year is that exactly?

S: 1980.

M: Why did you move here?

S: My mother and father had retired here and I came and visited and I just fell in love with St. Augustine.

M: When you first moved here, where did you live?

S: In the southern part of the county, St. Augustine Shores.

M: What kind of area was that? What were your neighbors like?

S: It was a middle-class [community], a lot of retirees pretty much.

M: Where do you live now?

S: I live on Anastasia Island.

M: What's that area like? How would you describe it?

S: Well, it's a beach community. [It's] a very pleasant area, down by Crescent Beach.

M: Have you lived in any other places in St. Augustine?

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S: No.

M: In your job you have a lot of interaction with various people. What are your interactions with other races like?

S: What are they like?

M: What context are they usually in?

S: Oh goodness. What context are they usually in, in different races?

M: Yes.

S: [My contact with them is] just normal day-to-day living. Everything from, I recently had trauma surgery and had an African American orthopedic trauma surgeon, to just day-to-day.

M: This is more about African Americans, this research project. Over the years, most African-Americans had jobs simply as menial labor, service oriented jobs. Since you've moved to St. Augustine, have you seen that change over time?

S: I don't know that I could say that I've seen it change. I think what I've seen change, Matthew, and I have no empirical evidence to base this statement on, but I do think that a lot of our African American community is leaving the St. Johns County area. I think there's been African Americans who have moved into the professional jobs in St. Johns County, certainly, and certainly there's still many in the service area jobs, but I think more important than both of those is that I think we've seen a lot of, especially our younger generation, leave St. Johns County.

M: Actually, a lot of the people I've interviewed today, I interviewed Pastor Simmons today too, he mentioned the same exact thing. Why do you think that may be?

S: I've actually asked the question. In fact, our Chief-of-Staff is with us over in Tallahassee and there was an African American female working the desk at a hotel. She was working on her master's, she was finishing up her master's from . . .

B: From Florida A&M.

S: From Florida A&M in counseling. I asked her the question, I said are you coming back to our community? Her answer to me was, I mean she kind of laughed and said, "no I'm not." I said why not? Her answer, and Chief, I think you were standing there, if I remember correctly, it was the fact that it was the job opportunities. Wasn't that what she said? It was the job market and the job

opportunities. I mean, she was going to move to Orlando. This was a girl, a bright young woman that was born and raised here.

M: In the area you live now, how many people are of different races? How integrated in your neighborhood?

S: [It is] not integrated at all. I live on the island, I would say its ninety-eight percent Caucasian, white.

M: I'm sorry, I'm just jumping around a little bit here. When did you start your career in law enforcement?

S: 1980.

M: When you started, you started here in St. Johns County?

S: Yes.

M: What was the police's attitude towards different races? Was there an attitude?

S: I have been a law enforcement officer for twenty-five years, and I have never witnessed either overt or covert racism in the classical sense. I would say that was law enforcement's attitude, and I think that was the question?

M: Yes.

S: Members of our community, and this isn't really a race issue, but the members of our community that are in the lower socio-economic rung, if you will, always seem to require a disproportionate amount of service from not just law enforcement, but from the fire department and the paramedics. In that sense, I think the attitude, whether it's positive or negative, and I can't really tell you if it's been positive or negative, except to say that there is an awareness, if you will, that those people in the lower socio-economic area require more service.

M: Those people just happen to be black?

S: In many cases, in St. Johns County, that is exactly correct. Now that does not translate into a negative attitude by law enforcement. It's an awareness. I don't know if that's a fair characterization or not.

B: Yeah, I agree.

M: In your time in St. Augustine, this is not so much as a criminal justice officer, but as a citizen, have you seen or experienced any racial tension or discrimination?

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S: I cannot tell you today, as I sit here, I cannot specifically give you an example. I am certain that at some point in my last twenty-five years of living here, I've seen racial tension in some venue. I can't give you a specific area or a specific event, but I certainly have. Discrimination, I'm sure I've seen it at some point, but I can't be specific and say that on such and such a date, this occurred. Certainly there has been some. I'm certain I've seen [some]. It may have been something as simple as noticing a store security officer paying attention more to an African American customer who's shopping, because that store security officer has profiled African Americans as being more prone to shoplifting. It may be something as innocuous as that, which is not innocuous actually. Its actually far from innocuous, but specifically, no.

M: You get kind of a sense that you've seen it at some time?

S: I got a sense that St. Johns County is a microcosm of the rest of the country, where there is class awareness and there are class differences, which translates to race differences. Is that a fair answer?

M: Yes, it seems like a fair answer. We're focusing on West Augustine right now. There seems to be a lot of money and effort and talk going into improving West Augustine, with the Weed and Seed program and the Community Redevelopment Area, especially the Weed and Seed program, which would be more of a law enforcement aspect. What does the St. Johns County and the St. Augustine Police Department do to improve that?

S: Well, I've got some very mixed feelings about the role of government, especially law enforcement, in making communities healthy. I believe a community's health is determined by that community. The whole notion that law enforcement goes in and weeds out problems and seeds it with something better, or government does that, to me is a little bit frightening. I don't know that the community, the African American community, really wants us to go in there and "weed out" problems. What we can do is partner with that community to come up with solutions. Part of that may be the development of programs, part of that may be the establishment of a drug abuse treatment center. There's a lot of things. But make no mistake about it, that law enforcement's efficacy, in terms of assisting a community achieve a level of health, if you will, that it wants to achieve is limited.

M: What you're saying is that they may be focusing on the wrong things? Or they're making you focus on the wrong things?

S: No, neither one of those statements are accurate. The premise is that the West Augustine area is a blighted area. I mean, if you drive through it, that becomes readily apparent. What I am suggesting, is that in order to take a community like that and help it achieve its level of health that it wants to, you need a holistic approach. Too many times we rely on law enforcement, we rely on the U. S.

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Army, we rely on different entities of government to fix issues or to fix problems that really require a holistic approach, not the least of which is the people that live in those communities. Fair enough?

M: Yeah, that's fine. You mentioned the partnerships, St. Johns County is trying to enter into partnerships with the local communities. You mentioned drug treatment centers and some other things. Can you give me any specifics?

S: Well, when Weed and Seed first came up, my initial response, Matthew, was, okay, you want us to weed out problems. That can be a dangerous notion. It's okay to weed out problems, but is there an infrastructure in place to deal with those problems? For instance, teen pregnancy. For instance, sexually transmitted diseases. For instance, drug addiction and alcoholism. For instance, mental illness. Are there those social agencies in place in St. Johns County to deliver a service to ameliorate those problems? I would say to you, we are lacking in that area. St. Johns County is lacking in that area. I may get beat up for saying that, but I'm gonna call it like I see it, and that's the way I see it. The answer can't be as simple as send the cops in and arrest every black male between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five that's hanging out on the street corner. That is certainly not the solution. That is certainly not what that community wants. What that community wants is a support mechanism and an infrastructure, a social infrastructure that can help them deal with those issues. That's a pretty good answer.

M: In the Civil Rights Movement of 1964, it's sad to say the police played an active role in enforcing segregation and keeping it around. When you started working here, did you notice any of those attitudes still lingering?

S: No, not at all. I did not. Probably the bigger challenge when I came on, Matthew, was not with the races, it was with females. When I came on in 1980, and Chief, to a certain extent this applies to you, women hadn't quite made it into our profession yet. Excuse me, they had, but not locally. That presented some real challenges for us as a profession. I am happy to report twenty-five years later, a quarter of century later, we have made it light-years [better]. They have not only made it into the profession, they've become vital, vital members of our profession. Did I see remnants of segregation when I started in 1980, 1981? No. Did we have officers on the department back then that grew up in an environment where there was the Jim Crow laws? Certainly. Did I hear anything translated in the workplace about that? No.

M: That kind of segways into my other question. For some reason or another, there currently are no African Americans working in the St. Augustine Police Department, and talking to Pastor Simmons today, he said there were very few working in the Sheriff's office. Why is that? Is lack of qualified applicants?

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S: Absolutely. Our biggest challenge, and we talked about it earlier about people leaving, we just hired fifteen deputy sheriffs, one Filipino American, one Hispanic American, two females. We have an absolute absence of, and I'm not going to even use the term qualified, because sometimes that's a code word for some people that qualified means [racism]. We don't have African Americans putting applications in. Forget about qualified or unqualified. I struggle with this, I came from the city police department, I don't know if you knew that.

M: Yeah.

S: This was a constant struggle for us. I'll say this on tape, and I've been a law enforcement officer for twenty-five years, and sometimes I get asked the question, not in this context, but I've been asked this question by members of the media or by people in general, how many African Americans do you have? The way that question is asked, there's almost an implication on occasion that because there is a small number, it presents a prima facie [a Latin expression meaning "at first sight"] case for a racist or a discriminatory department. I take great offense to that. What I tell people is we can't even get African Americans in the front door to submit an application, for whatever reason. We've done very well with women, we've done very well with other races. African American men and women in St. Johns County have been difficult to recruit. Typically what happens when we do recruit, they stay for a year or two and then go seek employment at a bigger agency that pays them more money.

B: That is our primary problem with African Americans.

S: That is our primary problem.

B: Over the years, we have recruited and we have hired African Americans, but they don't stay very long. They go to Jacksonville or another [city].

S: Or [they go to] a state agency or a federal agency. It is a difficult, difficult challenge.

M: Out of curiosity, do you find that problem with non-African Americans? Do they tend to stay around?

S: I guess the answer to that would be, it doesn't seem to be a problem in the other races. Recruitment [is the problem] in the African American community. One of the things I did as police chief was I partnered with the churches, the African American churches. They had no better luck than I did. In fact, we had better luck. It's just a challenge.

B: You know, your question is a good question. Based on just my experience, and I've been here twenty-two years in this agency, and from what I observe, they

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leave because they have more opportunity to leave than a Caucasian. Many other agencies that pay more, they're doing the same thing we are. They're trying to recruit African Americans and when they find them, they take them. They take them, unfortunately, from us.

M: Also unfortunately, within the last year or two, there's been one or two charges of police brutality against police in the area. I know you were at a meeting about a year ago I guess, with the man who was tasered and died. What is the police response to charges like this?

S: To charges of racism?

M: To charges of racism or police brutality, I guess most of them probably stemming from race.

S: I believe that there are few professions that are as well policed as policing. I believe that we monitor, we investigate charges of either brutality, excessive force, or racism and that we take action when action is indicated.

M: Like I said, you were at that meeting about a year ago before you became Sheriff.

S: Yes.

M: What was the attitude of the participants in that meeting? What did the people who came to the meeting expect or want?

S: You know, I don't really know what the expectation was. I think it really was a recruitment. They were trying to start a chapter of the NAACP. The bottom line is you have an African American male who died during contact with law enforcement. I don't know what the people at that meeting were seeking other than to vent some frustration. I think there was frustration at that meeting if I remember it correctly. I think many of the people who attended that meeting wanted to have more of a voice, if you will, and maybe a better relationship with law enforcement.

M: Talking to Pastor Simmons today, he mentioned that after that event, I think it was Sheriff Perry then, and black leaders got together and decided to have more active partnership and dialogue between each other. Has this dialogue been maintained over the last few years?

S: I think its begun, I think its been maintained. I had lunch with a black pastor today, I think it has. I spent my lunch today working on a scholarship fund for the first individual that was killed in Vietnam, who happened to be an African American from St. Johns County. I think it has begun. I place a premium,

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personally, on treating everybody with dignity and respect, regardless of race, color, creed, sexual orientation, or anything like that. I think its come a long way.

M: In the 1960s, the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizen's Council were very active in this area. They seem to have, at least died back or become much less vocal since then. Do you know of any such organizations that still exist in the county?

S: No. Do you?

M: Actually, Pastor Simmons said he had a pretty reliable source that there is still a Ku Klux Klan in the northwestern part of the county, which surprised me.

S: I don't know. We've actually had a Klan demonstration here, but they were all out-of-towners that came in back in the early 1990s. About once every five years seven or eight of these yahoos will come in from somewhere else in the state. I've never heard of a KKK group in St. Johns County.

B: You mean active groups.

S: Active groups, no.

M: [We're] changing tracks a little bit. Obviously one of the big charges prior to the time frame of my investigation is that the city government wasn't allowing blacks into city government, to work there.

S: When was that occurring, you said?

M: Prior to 1985.

S: They were letting African Americans in city government to work there prior to 1985.

M: The charge was, according to Dr. [David] Colburn whose book I'm basing most of this off of, there was very little representation of blacks, not just in elected positions, but in the city government to begin with. My question is, currently do you see more African Americans getting professional jobs in the government, do they seem them becoming more active in government?

S: I get the sense that there is. I do. I get the sense that there is. I know that there's an African American city commissioner.

M: Yes, Errol Jones.

S: One of the difficulties is county-wide representation on the county commission. I

happen to think, it is my opinion, that St. Johns County, and this may be in direct contradiction to others, I think St. Johns County is very enlightened. I think St. Johns County, compared to many communities, is very enlightened, and that we promote and we hire and we elect based on attributes other than race, which is a good thing to say. Joel, I don't want to bring you up, you're sitting here, but the fact as our number two person here in the Sheriff's Office is a minority. I don't mean to hold that up, and he got where he got based on the right reasons, which are qualifications and what have you. I think St. Johns County is a very enlightened, in many respects, a very enlightened community. I've gotten a little bit concerned with our district, county wide elections, as opposed to single district. It takes a tremendous amount of resources to run a county-wide campaign, and I think that places a good portion of our African American community at a disadvantage. I personally would like to see single-member districts, for a lot of different reasons, one of which it would equal the playing field for minorities getting elected to county government.

M: Once again, switching tracks a little bit, you have children and they go to school here in the county?

S: Yes.

M: The St. Johns County School system was integrated in 1970. Right now there's a fairly big discrepancy in quality of schools between Nease High School, which is almost completely white, and St. Augustine High School, which is a much more mixed school. Is it your impression that the school system is equally fair to everyone and this is just due to housing patterns and economics?

S: I think our school system, if there's any discrepancies at all, its remnants of where the schools were built, when they were built, and where people live. I have a friend who wanted to donate a significant amount of money to Nease High School to build a field house for the baseball team and couldn't unless he could do it for all the schools. That was School Board rule. They've certainly done everything organizationally to ensure fairness. We know separate is not equal, we know that that's a flawed theory and it shouldn't have taken us the Supreme Court to tell us that, though they're the ones that initially told us that separate but equal was a valid theory. They were eventually were the ones that told us it was a flawed theory. We know separate is not equal. Our schools are integrated and if ones in better shape than the other, its by virtue of the population shifts. I mean, new schools are being built in the northwest, now the next question is what's the race of the people who live in the northwest? I don't know.

M: Who do you see as leaders of the black community?

S: In St. Johns County?

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M: In St. Johns County and St. Augustine?

S: Names?

M: If you would like to give me names.

S: Clyde and Haddie Jenkins, Mr. And Mrs. Otis Mason, there are several. Those are two good ones.

M: It's kind of false to call a big group of people a community, because everyone has they're own goals and ambitions, but what do you see the black community trying to do in St. Augustine? Do you see them focused towards any particular goal?

S: I don't know. It would almost be disingenuous to try and answer that. I do know that for the lower socio-economic classes, which are disproportionately African American in St. Johns County, it is becoming increasingly difficult to live here because of cost of living, cost of real estate, cost of doing business. I can't sit here and tell you as a community, the African American community is just trying to survive and live here. I can tell you that the lower socio-economic classes in St. Johns County have a unique set of challenges by virtue of the fact that its becoming very expensive to live in St. Johns County.

M: Just a few more questions. Have you noticed or known of the city government or city organizations doing anything to encourage diversity or integration in the last few years?

S: Oh, absolutely. Its kind of like the elephant in the living room, I can't give you examples. [Have we been encouraging] diversity in the workplace?

M: Diversity in the workplace, diversity among interactions between people.

S: I don't know what government's specifically doing other than we constantly try to recruit minorities into the work force.

M: What do you see for this area in the future? What do you see St. Augustine and St. Johns County becoming in the future?

S: In terms of [what]?

M: Race, socio-economic status, even just what do you see it looking like in the future?

S: I see St. Johns County as continuing to become a more and more affluent community. I'm not sure what race that will attract or not attract. The fact is that St. Johns County is a wealthy county. The net worth of people that live here, the

median income of the people who live here is high. I see that as continuing to increase. I see property values continuing to increase, and I believe that there will be a set of unintended consequences that comes with that. [I'm] not sure exactly what those are. One of them might be that my fifteen year old daughter and twelve year old son will not be able to afford to live here. But that's what I see as the challenges in St. Johns County.

M: My final question: Is St. Augustine still a segregated town?

S: That's a difficult question. I mean, let's face it, the housing patterns that we have in St. Johns County are historical artifacts. If I was to tell you that we have full integration of our neighborhoods, that would certainly be misleading. When you say segregated, there are different forms of segregation. One is forced. One is unforced. One is an unintended consequence. I would say that we in some ways are still segregated by virtue of history. I mean, West Augustine is a historically black neighborhood. Lincolnton was and now we have gentrification occurring in Lincolnton. That's changing. Do we have institutionalized segregation? No. Do we have voluntary segregation? Yes. Overall, the answer would be no. Only because the word segregation conjures up a quasi-official segregation, we don't have that.

M: Thank you very much Sheriff Shoar.

[End of Interview.]