Interview with **Dorothy Graham**
Date: December 7, 1989
Interviewer: Madison Davis Lacy, Jr.
Camera Rolls: 1134-1136
Sound Rolls: 161-162
Team: A

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #1134]
[sound roll #161]

00:00:15:00

Camera crew member #1:

Thirteen.

Interviewer:

All right. Let's do over now.

Dorothy Graham:

OK.

00:00:19:00

Interviewer:

Let's start by telling me what, what it was like growing up in Overtown. Paint me the best picture you can paint. The most fond memories you have.

00:00:28:00

Dorothy Graham:

Well—

Interviewer:

Take me—

Dorothy Graham:

—let's see. We—I'm an only child and I grew up in a house with my mother and my grandmother because my father died before I was born. And we had neighbors and friends. My grandmother had her friends. My mother had her friends. And they were always in and out of our house. And my uncle lived next door with his family and my aunt lived down the street, and we were within walking distance of everybody, it seemed. You walked to church and you went to all of the churches, depending on the time of day. If you wanted to go to seven o'clock mass, you did. And then you went to Sunday School, and then later on, you went to other churches. Like, you went to league in the evening at Bethel because that was the best, that was the best league in town, you see. And you were on those programs. You sang or you recited. That was something that was very important because it got you in front of the public and you learned to talk on your feet. I don't think children get that anymore. Not Black children, anyway. They're, they're not taught to get up and talk, to recite. And this helps ever so much, you know, thinking and knowing what to say in a meeting, political meetings or any, anywhere, you're not afraid.

00:02:18:00

Interviewer:

When I say Overtown in its heyday, people talk about it in such romantic terms. Wax romantic for me. How do you remember it?

00:02:27:00

Dorothy Graham:

Well, I remember being invited—I wasn't, my mother was invited to dances, and you didn't go to a dance unless you were invited. I remember the Lyric Theater, which is now to be a very special place because it's a historical landmark now. It was owned by Geder Walker. You saw plays there, there were movies that came there. [motorcycle passes] People came from out of town, actors and actresses, and they lived at the hotels that were here in town, because they could not live anywhere else. There were nice restaurants. Second Avenue buzzed. It was—that was the central business section. Third Avenue was business also, but Second Avenue was the place [laughs] where, where the special things went on. School was very special. Booker Washington High School was one of the best high schools in, maybe in the South, but definitely in the state of Florida. And, well, Booker Washington has turned out some very fine people because of the kind of teaching that went on there, the kind of

understanding. They were indoctrinated with certain things, certain things you're supposed to do, and certain things you're not supposed to do. For instance, I went to school there and I knew that I had to behave myself, I knew that I had to bring home good grades. My mother told me she paid taxes to pay the teachers, and the teachers were supposed to do what she could not do; therefore, teachers had better not need to reprimand me anytime at all. And so I was never reprimanded in school. But that doesn't seem to be the way it is now.

00:04:58:00

Interviewer:

Now, where in Overtown did you live? You described it for me as being a place where people owned their homes.

Dorothy Graham:

Yes, if you didn't own your home, you rented a home, but you lived in that home—

Interviewer:

Try starting over.

00:05:13:00

Dorothy Graham:

—for a long time.

00:05:15:00

Interviewer:

Start over once more [beep] and tell me where that was, Miller's Addition.

00:05:18:00

Dorothy Graham:

I lived in Miller's Addition and that belonged to I think it was Dale Miller, it was a Dale Miller tract. My grandmother bought several lots along there so that all of her children would be together. My grandmother was Bahamian and my grandfather died. And then she moved first to Tampa and then to Miami. She moved here about 1910 and this is where we lived. And her children married and lived not far away. I didn't know what in-laws were because this is my aunt and this is my uncle, and I didn't know the difference, you know, between what an in-law was because she treated everybody the same way, they were all hers. If people went to work, they didn't have to worry about their children because they knew their

children would be fed and taken care of by the time they came back. Then, you know, they worked very long hours. They served breakfast, and they served lunch, and they served dinner. And after dinner, they came home.

00:06:34:00

Interviewer:

Stop down for a second.

[cut]

00:06:39:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

Fourteen.

00:06:42:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about that area that you lived in.

Dorothy Graham:

Miller's Addition belonged to Dale Miller and people bought their homes. Most of them were women, I don't know why. But most of them were widows who were in there. And we owned our home. At first [background noise] the house that I

Camera crew member #2:

I'm—

Dorothy Graham:

—lived in was a bungalow, like a three bedroom house.

Interviewer:

We're going to have to start one more time. We had—

Camera crew member #1:

We're still rolling.

Interviewer:

OK. Pick it up and do it again. Miller's Addition.

00:07:22:00

Dorothy Graham:

Miller's Addition was settled primarily by women who were widows. The house I lived in was very much like all of the others. A three-bedroom house and afterwards, about '24 or '26, in there, we did that house over, and it became a two-story house.

00:07:49:00

Interviewer:

We have to cut again, I'm sorry.

[cut]

00:07:52:00

Interviewer:

[inaudible] the camera. I'm sorry.

Camera crew member #1:

Fifteen.

[slate]

00:07:56:00

Interviewer:

Start there.

00:07:57:00

Dorothy Graham:

Miller's Addition was a section, I think, like, north of 14th Street, and it ran up to about maybe 20th Street, I'm not sure, and women lived there for the most part. Women without husbands because all the husbands were dead, I, I've never been able to figure that out. And there were a lot of grandchildren, and daughters, and sons. Where I lived, we had a very, at first, we had a very large yard, and then afterwards we built in there more houses for rental purposes. So people who lived there had always lived there whether they rented or whether they, or whether they owned their homes. And when I had to move from over there, I happen to now live in a section with the same people that I lived with across town. It just worked out that way. This house became vacant, and they told me about it, and I ran out here for it.

00:09:17:00

Interviewer:

Stop for a second.

[beep]

00:09:21:00

Male camera crew:

We gotta change—

[cut]

[camera roll #1135]

[sound roll #162]

00:09:25:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

Camera crew member #1:

Take sixteen. Marker.

[slate]

00:09:33:00

Interviewer:

All right. Now, tell me how you and your family came to find out that you were gonna have to move from where you lived.

00:09:40:00

Dorothy Graham:

The house was in my mother's name and she received a letter saying that, I don't remember now exactly what it said other than, By the right of eminent domain, or something to that effect, we would have to move. And other people, they compared notes, and other people got the same kind of notice. There were some meetings at, of course, at Booker Washington, the auditorium, the largest auditorium in town, where people expressed their disbelief that they had to move and they were told that they—city officials told them that they had to move. I went downtown to find out. I took a day off from school and I went down to find out why. I didn't get much satisfaction but I was told that they were coming through and that we would have to find out someplace to go and that they were going to pay us for the land. Now, we had a twelve-room house with three baths and we rented rooms upstairs. This was my mother's income. But that was not to be considered. How much you would get, I don't remember how much they said approximately, how much each foot. So I came back and I talked with my mother and I said, I guess we'll have to start looking for someplace to go. Now, you didn't know where to look because you knew there were sections of town where you did not live. So I went to the bank. I had mortgaged the house in order to do the house over about two years before that. And I told the woman in the bank that she had to help me find somewhere to go because I felt that the bank could have stopped this if they had been thinking about it or had wanted to. And she explained to me that there wasn't much that they could do but here is a list. And she gave me a list of places, then I went around mostly in the evenings and weekends. And I had moved back to Miami because my husband was supposed to move back down here with me. And then we decided instead to get [doorbell rings] a divorce. Well—

00:12:25:00

Interviewer:

Stop down.

[cut]

00:12:29:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

Seventeen.

00:12:33:00

Interviewer:

So how did your mother take all of this?

00:12:37:00

Dorothy Graham:

It was very rough on my mother. You see, it was her house that she and my grandmother had worked for. And it meant that everything we had had was being just taken away. Even your shrubbery that you had cherished and had planted and—you couldn't take that with you. You weren't being paid very much. And at that time, you see, colored people, Negroes, or—as we were then called. We were not very sophisticated. We did not know who to go to or what to do in order to even get the amount of money you were entitled to for your land. This hurts and, and it, it brings up memories that you want to forget. I, I don't know how I can get you to see that but it hurts to even think about it. And we looked night after night, and day after day, and I had a little Black book with every house I looked at. And I finally found this house but my mother never got over the fact that we had to move, that her name was taken off the deeds to a house, and somebody else's name, it was my name, because she was too old to start buying a house, so my name was on the deeds to this house. But now, we had mortgaged that house in order to renovate it, you see. And it meant that whatever we got, whatever we owed the bank, had to come out of that. And then what was left over, we would buy another place. However, a lot out here, this house is on two lots, and that was just about enough to buy two lots in this section, the amount that I got for the house Overtown, you see. And my son, Michael, it was time for him, about time for him to go away to school. So I had to get out of there in order to be able for Michael to go to school, get settled, before he could go to school. And it was just devastating. My mother died in '81 and I think by then she was just about to the place that she was accepting the fact that this was just as much hers as it was mine, even though her name wasn't on the deed.

00:15:50:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop down now.

[cut]

00:15:57:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

Camera crew member #1:

Eighteen.

[slate]

00:16:01:00

Interviewer:

OK, tell me your, your, your feelings about integration.

00:16:05:00

Dorothy Graham:

My experiences here in Miami in schools, teachers were proud to teach school. They were careful about the way they looked, they were careful about the way they acted, they were careful about the way they dressed, and children emulated this. With integration—well, when I went to a junior high school, we were not integrated then. It was a school that had been built for an integrated community but the Whites moved out and left it practically all, a Black school. We had teachers that came looking like slobs. One in particular, I remember—these are junior high school children, big for their ages, big boys, and this teacher wore a dress with no underwear and she would sit on her desk, and these big boys are there in front of her. That would never have happened with, with an all-Black school, you see. There are certain things children learn, more is caught than taught. Do you understand what I mean? And those boys, twelve and thirteen year old overgrown boys, they do not need to see half-dressed people, you know. It's—they're developing and it's, it's not good for them. But I don't—

00:17:56:00

Interviewer:

Stop for a second.

[cut]

00:17:59:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

Nineteen.

00:18:02:00

Interviewer:

You began with, I don't think we profited much from integration in this area. Start again.

00:18:06:00

Dorothy Graham:

I don't think we profited much from integration in this area. I think we lost too many of our better teachers. When they sent me to Palm Springs School, even though they said that they did an objective selection, you know, just— they did not specify who they were going to select. I'm a Delta and I went to Palm Springs, and we could hold a committee meeting at, at Palm Springs any day in the week. We had that many Deltas who had been selected to go there. And you know Delta women are supposed to be highly scholastic people. So I know that was bad. So that left our schools bereft of the better teachers. Before, while at Booker Washington, teachers were very careful about the way they dressed, the way they acted, the way they conducted themselves. They were particular about the demands that they made on children and this didn't happen anymore. They could do as they pleased, you see, when the White teachers came in. Whether they were afraid or whatnot, it seems to me as though it's a, a very well-planned method to keep Black children from progressing. When Black children are not allowed to stand up and recite, they do not learn how to stand up and speak for themselves in any situation. They don't learn how to think on their feet. And you're not allowed—they don't get this opportunity in an integrated situation. Why, I don't know. But they're, they're not getting it. And when they see people who come to business dressed—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Dorothy Graham:

—like they're going to play, that's very bad also. They don't learn what they're supposed to wear and how they're supposed to act. Young people need role models.

00:20:29:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop right there. We've run out of film on this—

[cut]

[camera roll #1136]

00:20:37:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

Twenty.

00:20:40:00

Interviewer:

You were just saying something about ownership and Black women. Start that again and tell me.

00:20:44:00

Dorothy Graham:

OK. Ownership is a very important thing to Black women. It doesn't seem to matter too much to others, to other ethnic groups, but Black women have always been independent. Black women have always worked for what they want. So when you get this women's movement and all of that, we've always had it, you know. And I can remember making my own money from about seven years old. The people who lived upstairs in our house, all men. We never rented rooms to women, only men, because men were clean and you didn't have to worry about them, cleaner than women. My mother—my grandmother thought, anyway. And I made money by heating water for them to take baths when they came in at night, five cents a pail. Because we didn't have hot running water, we had running water, but not hot running water. And six men upstairs, five cents a night, you see, that added up. And that was my money that I had to buy Christmas presents, and Mother's Day presents, and things of this sort. We've always worked, we've always saved, we've always worked toward what we needed. And to have all that you had worked for all of these years just pushed away from you, pulled out from under you, you, you can't imagine what that is like. And then looking

for somewhere to live where you had to be careful because there were places you could afford the money but you couldn't afford to live around those kinds of people. And so this is why it took you so long to find somewhere to live.

00:22:44:00

Interviewer:

Well, now, take me back to a particular holiday. You said in the pre-interview that you, around Thanksgiving, you'd gone downtown to talk with city officials. Something like that about their—

Dorothy Graham:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Tell me that story.

00:22:56:00

Dorothy Graham:

You didn't know when you had to get out, you see, you just were told. And then some people, they stopped taking your taxes so that they could—not garnishing, what do you say? They could say that your property wasn't worth anything. And this is how they, they kept you from getting any money for your property. We always put our rugs down for Thanksgiving dinner and put up the draperies. And for, the other holiday would be Memorial Day. That's when you put up crisscross curtains and things of that sort and took up rugs. Well, this was a general routine for us and my mother was afraid that we would not be able to spend Thanksgiving in our house because we didn't know when you were going to leave. Nobody gave you any definite time—

Interviewer:

Stop down a second.

Dorothy Graham:

—that you would leave.

00:24:06:00

Interviewer:

I need this answer.

[cut]

00:24:10:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

Twenty-one.

00:24:13:00

Dorothy Graham:

My mother was afraid that that we would not be able to have Thanksgiving dinner in our own home. So I took time off from school and I went downtown to find out about it, just when would we have to move. And I was told then that, Oh, he didn't know, but I could ask Sofgay [phonetic], that was the housing man, a national housing man. And I went where they told me I could find Mr. Sofgay and he told me, We are coming through. Just get ready for it and you are in that line. But go back home and tell your mother that she can have dinner in her home this Thanksgiving but I don't think she would be there for next Thanksgiving. So that meant that the rug company could bring the rugs, you know, that you had had in storage all summer, and put them down, and you could plan your Thanksgiving dinner. You, you don't know just what it feels like to be that uncertain. To have everything you've always had and cherished, and now you're not gonna have it anymore, and you don't know where you're going, you see. And this right of eminent domain, we need to go back to the drawing board, I think, and get some new rules, and laws, and regulations for that. If they would only give you enough money to move into a like circumstances, it would be all right. But to think that you got around eight or ten thousand and one lot would cost that much at the time that you're going to move, you see. And, and this is the way it works out.

00:26:23:00

Interviewer:

Well now, take me back to something we were talking about before. Role models. You had begun a statement about Black children needing [background noise] role models. Tell me. Tell me what you meant. Just a second.

00:26:35:00

Dorothy Graham:

All children need role models but Black children particularly need role models, I think. When I went to Allapattah Junior High School, there were White teachers there who came to work looking like anything at all. Just looking bad, frowsy, OK? Some of them didn't even smell clean, it sem-seemed as though they didn't take a bath every morning before coming to work. And this would be one of the things that you tried to impress upon children. Even though they didn't have hot running water, you could put enough soap on your body to warm it up to take a cold bath, but you take a bath before you leave home, you see. And this is what colored children are taught but they didn't get this. They didn't get the importance of knowing how to read. That you have to read, you see. You make this important to them and they read. This business about Johnny doesn't read, that's a lot of hogwash. He doesn't read because nobody has made him think he needed to read.

00:28:00:00

Interviewer:

Stop down, please.

[cut]

00:28:03:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

Twenty-two.

00:28:07:00

Interviewer:

I need you to put McDuffie, his name, in the answer you give me. But tell me, Yeah, I remember the McDuffie situation, and you feel that any, as a Black woman. Go ahead.

00:28:18:00

Dorothy Graham:

I remember the McDuffie verdict. And I feel that Black women who have Black sons, they must be fools because there seemingly is no justice for a Black man. Really, as soon as our Black men in this area get to any point at all, they're cut down one way or another. McDuffie, that decision made you feel as though there's no point in having Black male children because there's no justice for them. The young man, the—we had nothing to prove anything in the McDuffie case because the people who beat McDuffie up turned state's evidence. And then when it's time to have proof, there's nobody to give the proof, see. So this happens over and over again in, in so many, so many ways. And it just means that you have to learn to fight, you have to learn to get what you are supposed to have without waiting. But you have to learn the justice system, you have to learn your civics, you have to understand these things, and the way they work. And so much is subtle, you know. So much is decided over a cup of coffee. And this is when the average back person is working. This is when the decisions are made and this is what makes it so very difficult. Because Black people are simple loving people, generally speaking, who are not violent, generally. And they're not sophisticated enough to recognize when they're being taken advantage of. I don't mean that we're stupid but there're just little things that we do not detect, we don't expect, and therefore we're not ready for them. And this is why I feel that if you can get more of your Black children together, and teach, and push, and have them understand, I think that they would not—this is why I worry about integration, you see. We're not getting what we need. We're being passed over—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Dorothy Graham:

—This is, this, this is what worries me.

00:31:31:00

Interviewer:

Thank you.

Dorothy Graham:

OK.

Interviewer:

And I think you got it.

00:31:32:00

Dorothy Graham:

OK.

00:31:34:00

Interviewer:

I appreciate that very much.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:31:37:00