

DR. ENID C. PINKNEY

HAMPTON HOUSE – Miami, Florida

Dr. Pinkney, thank you so much for agreeing to do this. We are at the Hampton House in Miami, Florida. It is December 27th and it's about 11am. I'm here with Dr. Enid Pinkney. Can you please state your name for the recorder and what you do at the Hampton House.

My name is Enid Curtis Pinkney. And what do I at the Hampton House...that's quite a question [laughing] because, well my title is the "Founding President and CEO of the Historic Hampton House Community Trust." So that's a long title. But what I have been doing, I started out just to get historic designation for the Hampton House. Someone came to me, Kathy Hirsh [assumed spelling] saying that she had heard that Dr. Martin Luther King first said his "I have a dream" speech at the Hampton House. And that the Hampton House had so many activities that were of historic significance that it deserved to be designated as a historic place.

About what year was this? Do you remember?

This was in 2001. So...she came to a group, the African American Committee of Dade Heritage Trust and so for historic designation, we thought that that would be a good idea. She was looking for a group that would sponsor it and we said that that sounded good. We could do that. And while we were getting the information together to prove that it was worthy that it was worthy of historic designation according the Department of Interior, we found out that the Miami-Dade County was going to tear it down.

Had it been sitting abandoned about thirty years?

Yes. And during those thirty years, the drug addicts had taken up possession, the homeless were in here. Everything was going on that shouldn't be going on—everything illegal was going on. And so the neighbors were complaining about the building and saying that it should be torn down because it was a nuisance in the community. So then we had to change our course of action to preservation of the building, because you can't have a torn down building designated historic.

So it was kind of the cart before the horse a little bit?

Yes.

So that was even more daunting, right?

Yes, it was because there were so many people who felt it should be torn down because they didn't see the historical importance. History wasn't that important. So that got to be a battle with the preservationists, [they] had to get together. They had to mobilize as to how we could save the building.

How many years did it take before there was real money to put forth for preservation?

Well, I think it was when we had the General Obligation Bond Program, a bond program was coming along. And it was really funny because they told me, you know, this was out of my league. They said some of the preservationists that had experience with this said that I needed to apply for, to be a part of the General Obligation Bond Program. And when I got the application - I did get the application - but when I got the application, I didn't know how to fill it out. Because it asked you what you needed the money for, what this money was going to do and I didn't know, so they told me I had to get an architect to fill the application out. What architect can you get that's going to do all this for free when you have no money? We had no money, but I called Richard Heisenbottle who was a member of Dade Heritage Trust, at one time was President of Dade Heritage Trust and he was a preservation architect. I told him the problem that I had and that I needed his help. He said he would be willing to help, and he would be willing to come here and make an assessment. So we set the time, and he showed up. When he showed up, I said, "My God," you know [he's] in his GQ suit and this place was so filthy. It was nasty. And I apologized to him, that I should have told him that he would be walking through broken glass, needles, it was just a mess. But he was comfortable and he walked through the building. And he filled out the application for me and signed it, which was good because the powers that be who saw his name on the application would have to give it respect. He said that we would need 4.7 million dollars to restore this building. And so it went to the County and it was accepted. So...

Where you working or doing other work at this time? Since you weren't getting paid to do this, where you working, were you retired?

I was retired. So after we got the approval, they wanted me to advocate for the General Obligation Bond Program because the *Miami Times*, which is the black local paper was telling black people not to vote for the General Obligation Bond Program because the last time they had the General Obligation Bond they promised black people some things and they never did it and they were going to do the same thing this time. That was an editorial [laughing] in the *Miami Times*.

You had that battle on top of...

So they had me on a telephone, where you call people's houses and tell them to vote for it and then I was going to all these meetings all over Miami-Dade County telling people to vote for the General Obligation Bond Program because this time it's going to be different. That the Hampton House was going to get some money. The black archives was going to get money. Virginia Key {in audible} Beach was going to get money if they voted for it, so I had to be a proponent for the General Obligation Bond Program especially to the black community. And the bond program passed, the voters passed it, and that's how we got the 4.7 million dollars. However, after we got it, they took so long to continue what needed to be done in order for us to use it, so that when we did get to the point of bidding out the project the first company that accepted the bid for 4.7 millions dollars, after they actually got into looking at it and seeing what needed to be done, turned it down. And they said it would take at least five million dollars or more to restore it, so then it went out for bid again for the five million and the company that got it after they looked into it and to see how much it cost to restore it, they turned it down. So that was the second [laughing] that got a bid to restore this building and turned it down.

[11:45]

Would you say about three years have passed, this was 2003, 2004?

Well that was about 2004 that we started, yeah. And then another company said that they could do it, the Link [inaudible] construction company said that they could do it for six million dollars and Commissioner Edmonson, the commissioner for this district was able to get that money, but that would not complete the restoration, that would partially do it. So we accepted that, rather than having nothing. So, it's still not completely restored, but...

So it's interesting this historian, preservationist was thinking something different apparently. Or they got in and saw how...because it is very mid-century, it's an architectural gem.

Yes, but I think it had to do with too, prices going up. Instead of, you know, acting right away, we had to wait. They didn't finish with what they did until 2015.

Wow. So talk about why the Hampton House is so special and why you went through all of this. [laughing]

It was like going through hell. [laughing]

Sometimes I think, "Is it worth it?"

Yes, you don't have any money and even...you have black people who don't see the value so because they're saying oh that's too much they could put that money in the welfare department or do something with people. Rather than "That old building, that old building, they need to tear it down." Because they are not into the value of history and that's a problem with a lot of us. We don't value our history, our heritage, our legacy, our culture. All of that value is missing. And so you have to fight all that from your own people, because the people in power sometimes don't know who to believe. They don't know whether to believe me or to believe them. You know, who's speaking for the people. And they're politicians. So they want to be on the side of whoever is going to put them back into office. So it's a matter of...we have to have some human relations skills. You have to relate to people and we try to sell your point. So all of that was mixed up and then you don't have any money. So you have to try to get the money from wherever the money is and then you have to convince those people that what you're saying is worthy, because there were people who felt that it would be a waste of money to invest, because this has gone up to ten million dollars, that it's a waste of money to invest that kind of money in this neighborhood, because we were not going to be able to sustain ourselves.

Can you talk about what the neighborhood is like today and what it was before, when the Hampton House was in it's glory?

Ok, see this was an urban suburb area. When black people were moving from over town, this was one of the choices that they made.

What is this neighborhood called?

Brownsville. [Her phone rings] Now what was I saying?

We were talking about the neighborhood.

Yes, the neighborhood has changed, because this is sort of like a border area up in here. And it's black, white, they're all mixed up, because a lot of them are into drugs. It's amazing how integrated they are, but that's the way. What happened when we first came here, they were taking over the place. They were sleeping on both sides. I had to call the police and then I talked to them (the drug addicts) also. I said, "You know, you can't do this. You're trespassing. You cannot sleep here. You can't lie down here, because it made people who wanted to come here, intimidated... seeing them hang around. And so I had to talk to them. And one fella told me [laughing] he said, "Momma, you know I feel good when I come here." It was something about the place, he said, that drew him here. And he said, "Can't you give me a job?" And you know, what I would really like to see is some form of rehabilitation for these people.

It's a health crisis. It really is.

Somebody who cares. And these young ladies... stop the prostitution. These men, white men, black men, they park in the parking lot and they talk to them and the next thing you see, they are getting in the car.

When I was here... I came and photographed the exterior a couple of years ago. And I saw a woman, she must have been a child. She couldn't have been more than 20 [years old], walking down the street towards me because I'm photographing and I see that she has no clothes on from the waist down. And when I saw her, I thought "is that really happening?" I thought maybe she needs help, maybe she's been assaulted, you know? As she got closer I could see that she was just playing with her hair and I could tell she was on drugs and it was heartbreaking, it was heartbreaking and I saw her get into a car, so I've seen what you're talking about and that's one thing I have found, because I've documented Green Book sites throughout the country. I've scouted about 4,000 of them, and 80% of all the Green Book sites... I've catalogued about 10,000, and 80% are in traditional black neighborhoods that were at that time, they were thriving, they were cultural spaces. There were so many different things and activities going on in the community and a lot of... Miami is not the only one, but a lot of them have fallen on these really hard times. It is interesting. I would like to take some of these Green Book sites and rehab them and hire the community members. Hire the people who have been displaced or put in jail, or are coming out of prison and can't get jobs or have had drug problems and are trying to get their lives back together to come in and rehab Green Book sites. Because a lot of them have fallen into disrepair.

Was George [inaudible] Roll in the *Green Book*?

I'd have to look at my Miami list. I could send you the list. It doesn't sound familiar, because it's no longer standing, but Lord Calvert was in there. But I can send you the list and see which ones you recognize. It's a sad part of our culture, to see it turn like that, but then societally, there's so many places where it's turned its back on providing rehabilitation and resources on a medical problem. And we see that changing with the opioids, we see the attitudes shifting but, no, I think it's heartbreaking. I'm glad you were able to connect with people and see how you can help the community.

Yes, they called me "Momma," I think they catch my spirit, that I'm not against them, I just don't want them hanging around here and sleeping around here.

What happened to the man who asked you for a job?

Well, I told him if I had some money, I would hire him but I don't have the money to hire him. That's another thing. We really can't hire people because we don't have the money.

So what is happening to the Hampton House now? How much did the renovation end up costing at this point?

About 10 million.

So what is this zoned for now? Is it a museum?

It's a cultural center. And what we've been doing, is we've collaborated with the University of Miami, we had a music program here, it's called BUMP the Brownsville Unity Music Program and we also collaborated with FIU for history program. And we did a DVD with the history program, I had that on the computer. And, you know, the space that wasn't finished, we're hoping to put a recording studio and a dance studio, so as soon as the money is cleared for that, we'll start with that to bring more culture into the community. The last Friday of the month we bring a jazz night and the second Friday, we do blues and we're thinking about doing some other music.

So there are local musicians or students that play?

They are local musicians. For Sunday, the invitations came back, we're using Lisa Richards. We have, on Sunday. My husband passed on July the 20th and two of my former students will sponsor a brunch. They are going to pay for the food and they are donating a set of dishes for a hundred people, glasses, silverware, cups, goblets, a dishwasher, food warmer and they want to upscale the kitchen, so when we rent the place out, we will have the utensils and the dinnerware that we could also rent to make our affairs more classy, instead of the paper plates, paper cups, things like that. So Henry, he was one of my students at Edison Senior High School, he and his brother Harry, he lives now in New Orleans and his brother lives in Atlanta and they're coming in this weekend for this event. And both of them are millionaires so they're just donating everything.

[26:52]

That sounds nice. So what kind of doctor are you? You have a doctorate?

I have two honorary doctorate degrees. One from St. Thomas University which is right here in Miami and the other one from my Alma Matter, Talladega College, which is in Talladega, Alabama.

Don't quote me, but that might have been listed in the Green Book, that college. I will have to check. So did you ever think this would ever be doing this as your second wave...

No.

Yes, this is a whole new life, but it probably keeps you busy and healthy.

Yes, very busy, very busy, very busy. There are a lot of problems with it, and I'm really at the end, I think. Because I need to just relax and get rid of some of the headaches.

How many hours are you working?

Well, like I was here last night until about nine o'clock. I'm just here until I finish a task. I don't even count the time.

So do they factor in a salary?

Yeah, it's just like a part time thing for me, you know.

Just for the recording, if we could talk about why Hampton House was so special, who was here, I'd love to hear about the lounge and if you have any stories about the Hampton House.

Well I think that the Hampton House is special *because* of that happened here. Because Dr. Martin Luther King used to stay here and we have a picture of him in the swimming pool in his trunks, relaxed, here at the Hampton House. This was one of his favorite spots. And Muhammad Ali stayed here, Malcolm X stayed here. In fact, Malcolm X proselytized him here at the Hampton House. And that was when he changed his name after the fight with Sonny, he had his victory party here when he beat Sonny Liston in the café downstairs. Nancy Wilson performed here, all of the celebrities that came to Miami stayed here and even those that performed on Miami Beach would stay here because they couldn't stay on Miami Beach. I know there were white people who told me that they would follow them because it looked like when they got over on this side of town after they performed on Miami Beach, the performance was better [laughing]. So they said that they were just waiting until they got off and come over here. And the Hampton House was like a respite for people who could feel comfortable in an elegant place. Where they could be at home away from home.

I heard the Maître'd wore a gold lame suit. Do you have any pictures of that, or is there any evidence of that? And that there was a dress code.

Yeah, you know, I think he has a granddaughter that is here in Miami. She's a musician and during the opening, she did sing for us and she's very expensive, so we were fortunate to get her. But she did it in honor of her grandfather.

I heard that you had to be dressed.

Oh, yes, yes, yes. This was a high class place.

Was it integrated from the beginning?

Yes, yes.

[DELETE] And did the Mankowitz's own it from the beginning?

Yes.

Did they build it was it already here?

No, they built it.

But this was a black neighborhood at that time?

Yes.

So they came in knowing...

...knowing that it was a black neighborhood.

And they built it for the community?

Yes, they built it for blacks so that blacks could have a very nice place to go.

Do you know much about them [the Mankowitz family]?

No, I didn't know very much about them. I met the son Jerry and supports he us. There's a *Give Miami*...in fact, he just gave us \$1,000 at *Give Miami* and he did that last year also. So he contributes to it and I think they still have some pictures of the Hampton House that we are going to try to negotiate with them, so we could have it for our museum.

So are you in control of the artifacts left at the Hampton House, or is it with the family?

Well, the family has some things of their own, but what happened with us is that we had more things, but at the beginning, we put them in storage and the leadership at that time, some of the people that were in charge didn't pay the storage and the people sold it and we haven't been able to get it back.

That's heartbreaking. Well the reason I ask is because I'm a curator with the Smithsonian to do an exhibit that will travel the US for three years and we would love to have on loan any objects or 3-dimensional artifacts or ephemera that you have for the Hampton House. It could go on the tour. Of course I've seen some of the those amazing photographs of Ali and Malcolm X at the party. Maybe the image of King and the pool. I don't know if we could possibly have those to blow up and take on tour with us. We have a year before that happens, but I will be in touch about that, if you have any artifacts. That's heartbreaking that you lost that storage unit.

Yes, that did happen. There were so many things to pull together and one person can't do everything. You've got to have dependable people all the way along the line and sometimes you don't.

Can you talk about why the Hampton House closed?

Well, I think that when black people could go anywhere and it was so exciting to go to all these different places, the Hampton House was the place they already knew, so they started patronizing other places and then I think too, with the death of the owners, and their children didn't seem interested in perpetuating it, so there were several causes that turned it into a derelict building.

And that was in the late '60s when it became abandoned?

Yes, uh huh.

And then we're up to know. Wow. It's amazing what you've been able to do. Walking into this place was very powerful. It's historic looking and it has that mid-century architecture. It's very Miami, it's very iconic. And had you not done it, we wouldn't have this.

Well, you know it was almost gone. It was almost gone.

So is it on the National Register?

No, that's another thing, we did get local historic designation but when we applied for National...they said that they would wait until we did more restoration, to make sure that it was restored as it should be. So they didn't want to give it to us before we got to a certain point in the restoration.

So that's in process. Is it true that Muhammad Ali stayed on the second floor?

[37:54]

Yeah, he stayed on...that is true but we wanted to make his room a part of the museum, so that's why it's on the first floor. No, what happened, Martin Luther King stayed on the second floor and Muhammad Ali stayed on the first floor under Martin Luther King. But we put the rooms together for the sake of the museum, for the consistency of the museum.

So, the story is that he tried out his "I Have a Dream" speech here?

Umm hmm.

And do you know in what context?

Well, see CORE (Congress on Racial Equality) met here, regularly. The CORE had its regular meetings here at the Hampton House. Eddie Moore who recently passed, was alive when he told us about this and he said that he was sitting right next to Dr. King when he gave the speech and he said it was just so magnificent.

Do we know roughly if it was a month or year before he gave "the" speech?

I'm not sure when he gave...I'm not sure about the time and how it related to Washington. But I know he did it here in Miami first.

That's amazing. I don't know if Jerry [Markowitz – previous owner] will know this, or if you know this, but how many people worked at the Hampton House? Was it just family run? Were there several employees.

Yeah, they had the waitresses, you know, and the bands, the people who, in fact Dr. Straun [assumed spelling] who was the second band leader, we just buried him a couple of Saturdays ago. Now Charlie Austin, who was the first band leader is still alive. But they had jobs here they worked here.

They were kind of the house band?

Yeah, they were the house band.

Can you talk about the Green Book? Did you know about the Green Book or had you just heard of it?

I just heard of it. Didn't know too much about it.

When did you know the Hampton House was listed in the Green Book?

We were talking about it, talking about the *Green Book*. We have a member of the board who's really interested in the *Green Book* and...what is...I can't remember the man's name but he came down here for something. And he is active with the *Green Book* and so is she, you know, they bring it up so we do talk about it. Her name is Dr. George. Deborah George [assumed spelling]She's a dentist.

You're welcome to give them my information. As I said, I'm working on a mobile app as well, so there will be many sites that are part of the mobile app so that people will be encouraged to come and see it. They can see the Hampton House and maybe there will be events here or maybe I can put your calendar or your schedule about what's going on at the Hampton House so people who are interested can come.

Oh...OK, good. Yeah, that's good.

Yeah so we can coordinate that. And with the exhibit traveling, I also have a book coming out next year, called "Overground Railroad" and it's all about the Green Book and the Green Book sites and the history of black mobility in America. And I write about the Hampton House. And I think I quote you too from the Miami newspaper article and so that's going to definitely be in the book. Like I said, it's such an incredible piece of history and so few of the places are left. About three percent are still operating so it's such a rare and beautiful thing for you to be here and I'm so grateful I got to hear your story because if you hadn't done what you did, it would have been demolished.

Right. And see, the other thing. The man who bought the Hampton House after it got so much bad publicity, he wanted to sell it, his name was Trotsky, or something like that. I think he said he was from Turkey. But he was interested in selling it and of course, this is prime property right here. You know it takes you ten minutes to get to the airport, or you could go downtown. It's a good location. And this area is on high ground, so as they're talking about people on Miami Beach are going to be underwater [chuckle] this is an area now where people are trying to buy all the property so there is going to be a lot of gentrification in this community. And the only people who are moving into this community now are the Hispanics. You know it's surprising how many are already here. We didn't want him to sell the property, because they would just put some apartments [up], in fact the apartments in the back, we were hoping we could get that so that we could have money to run this, but at one point they said they would give it to us and then it ended up giving it to a developer. So we struggled to pay the bills and keep the door open. But they knew that we were going to have this problem because we don't have a streaming source of income.

So is there a business model in place for how the building will support itself?

Well we've written grants for programs and plus the events that we have and we're renting the building out to people for parties and anniversaries and repasts, or whatever they want to have.

There's a place called Charlie's Place, that's a Green Book site, in Myrtle Beach and it needs a lot of restoration, probably on the likes of what you found once you got here and the city is coming up and there's money and not as much...as you know the struggle. But they're thinking of having small businesses come in and rent the space. You know barbershop and maybe a beauty salon and artists who want to sell their work, in order to figure out a way to generate income for the building but there's all these different ways. Yeah, I appreciate the struggle and I hope you guys figure out...

...how to make some money.

And also help the community with after school programs or whatever might...some of these music events or classes or maybe the city would step in and fund part of that. So who owns it now?

The county.

Oh, ok. Yeah, it's an incredible story. Like I said, you've done more than your share.

Yeah, that's what I said [laughing], see we have a house in Exuma, which is in the Bahamas, it's right on the ocean. So, that's where I need to be - just relaxing.

Do you mind if I ask your age? You don't have to..

No, I'm 87.

Wow. You don't look 87. That's incredible. And you've been doing this 2002?

Yeah, well 2001. That's when I started.

That's almost 18 years. Yeah, you deserve to be in the Bahamas...

Yeah, because it ain't nothing but a bunch of problems to be worked out.

Well if anything, at least your story will be archived and it will be noted that it was worth it.

Well you know, I've enjoyed it. I remember...I used to come here during the time that it was in its glory.

You remember that.

Hmm mmm. When other people see it as a derelict building, I see it as something else.

Is there anything else you want to say? I think we're about done and I'll let you get back to your life.

Have you seen the building, have you seen the exhibit?

No, I just walked in so I'd like to walk around and photograph...

[signs the consent forms]

She asks Xavier to take me on a tour. [END]

