

JERRY MARKOWITZ – HAMPTON HOUSE  
MIAMI, FLORIDA  
DEC. 27, 2018 2:00pm

*Hello Jerry, I wanted to thank you for taking the time to do this. It's an honor. For the tape, please state your name and what it is that you do.*

I'm Jerry Markowitz and I live in Miami, Florida and I'm a lawyer.

*Tell me about your parents and about the Hampton House.*

My mother came to Miami when she was two years old in 1914. My father moved here from the Midwest, I think in 1925. They were married, I guess in the late 1930s and lived in South Florida until each of them passed away many years ago.

*How did they find the Hampton House. Or did they build it?*

No. My mother's father owned the property and this is all sort of family folklore because I've never seen any of the papers but as I understand it, he leased the property to some people who built the Booker Terrace and when I say lease, it was a 99-year lease which is a common way of dealing with hotel properties in South Florida. The lease of course provides for payments every year and at some point in time, I'm not sure when, probably the late '50s, the people that owned the Booker Terrace were unable to make the payments and my mother at that point had inherited the property from her father and had the choice of either losing the property or foreclosing on the lease taking over the property and trying to salvage the interests she had in it. And she chose to do that and she and my father rehabilitated the property which I think was in relatively sad shape. They restored it and developed it. Their objective was to make it a convention kind of hotel in addition to catering to local residents. They traveled all over the country developing convention businesses and worked hard in South Florida developing the local clientele.

*So it was the Booker Terrace hotel. Did that start around the '30s? Do you know?*

I don't know.

*I'll look that up. But so your parents, she inherited it in the '50s?*

No, her father died when she was very young, in the 1930s, so she inherited whatever he owned and this was one of the things that he owned.

*But when did your parents take it over?*

I'm going to say in the late 1950s. That's an educated guess. I really don't know. At that time I was 11 or 12 years old. So I wouldn't have been attuned to those kinds of things.

*So they did a pretty extensive rehab project, you'd say?*

Hmm mmm.

*Assuming it closed down, was there a built-in clientele from the Booker Terrace?*

I don't know. I don't know.

*So when they started it as this idea for a convention hotel, do you know roughly when it became something when the celebrities and people from South Beach....*

The early 1960s.

*So it was pretty soon after. And then there was this local interest and from what I understand was integrated from the beginning, correct?*

Hmm mmm.

*Did they own other businesses?*

Yes, my father built homes. He was also in the plumbing supply business. My father came from a family of plumbers. He had nine brothers and sisters and the men were all plumbers and owned plumbing businesses throughout South Florida, actually.

*Did your mom, was she involved.*

My mother was actively involved in the business.

*And in the Hampton House?*

Yes.

*And do you know where the name came from?*

I'm gonna guess. I have this vague recollection that there was a contest of some sort. Some of your research might find that out. But I think that's what happened.

*Any stories about...I can't imagine having Martin Luther King walk into the place and how your mother [reacted]. This was just a regular thing? CORE was having their meetings there fairly regularly. Do you remember any stories about the people coming in there?*

There were a lot of functions that were developed. I know we regularly had conventions of the National Shriners, which was an organization of probably 50,000 black Shriners around the country. And there were golf tournaments that were developed. This thing called the North-South Golf Tournament. I don't remember the details of it. I remember seeing pictures of celebrities there. They also developed a clientele in the lounge, and there were some local people that were involved in it. I remember there was an entertainer, his name was Napoleon Reed and his wife was Blanche Reed, I think. They were involved and did some performances. Cab Calloway would come and Blanche

Calloway and through them, lots and lots of entertainers would just stop by. But they also developed through talent agents bringing in performances maybe a week or two at a time, a variety of jazz musicians, well known and still famous jazz musicians. I remember Cannonball Adderley was one of them, a lot of the other names escape me, because I was young and at the time, it necessarily didn't mean a lot to me.

A couple of interesting things happened in the shows. Flip Wilson worked there. I don't know if he was from Miami or ended up here, but he worked in the hotel as a desk clerk. And ended up being an MC in the show. It was a revue and they would have dancing people and then they'd have a comedian and a singer. It was like an old-fashioned kind of revue. And one of the people in the revue was a guy, his name was Chickie Horne and he was a female impersonator, and he was really, really good, and Flip Wilson, literally stole his routine. I don't know if you're familiar with the Geraldine Routine that he did when he was on television. It was this guy's routine. He took it and just changed a few of the names and because very famous back in the day from doing that character.

[I check the spelling of Chickie Horne]

There were a fair amount of political people that came. One of the...I think the reason for some of the business that they got, other than that they just developed this place that was a warm and comfortable place for black people to be, at a time when...well I didn't realize it at the time because I was too young. I was kind of in this transition period of things were changing. And I didn't really...until I heard stories about the way things used to be, and just took for granted that things were more the way they are now than the way they were then. But I'm not sure what now mean either with the way things are going [laughing]. But for example, there was one instance I remember, there was General Hershey who was the head of the Selective Service System which is in charge of drafting young people. His chauffeur used to stay at the Hampton House because he couldn't stay in Miami Beach with his boss and that was a very prevalent thing.

[10:00]

In those days if you were black and you worked on Miami Beach you had to have an identity card basically if you were going to stay on the beach after six o'clock. To leave or go, you had to have an identity card. Still even then there was a lot of, in South Florida, "separate but equal" stuff. There was none of that at the Hampton House. I don't recall seeing anything like that but in public bathrooms and beaches and things of that sort in South Florida, yeah, there was a black beach called Virginia Beach, I remember hearing about and you know there were just separate areas. So the Hampton House became a place where people knew that they could go there and be comfortable and not have to worry about those kinds of things.

I think, it began, the decline...later...I can't identify what year it would be because in 1966 I graduated from high school and went up to college and I wasn't really around here. I went to college out of Miami. So I wasn't that attuned with what was happening here. But as times changed and black people were able to, you know, without controversy, visit other areas of Miami Beach and stay in hotels in Miami Beach. There really wasn't the need that there was before. The convention business and the other business began to decline somewhat to the point, at some point in time, I don't recall when, but we sold the property and the people that bought it let it turn to the way it was before it was restored by Mrs. Pinkney's efforts. But that was from the time we sold it to what she did which was probably 20 years. And through all that time it was stagnant.

*Would you say that your parents were political in any way? Or had any...I mean clearly they were open to integration.*

Something came up this weekend. They were long-time residents of South Florida and they were part of the Jewish community which suffered from a lot of the same issues that black folks had. In fact, my former law partner, who just retired as a judge was going through his stuff, he's kind of a hoarder, and he found a letter his cousin had sent him from Mobile, Alabama, from 1942, where the owner of the hotel wrote to one of his former customers saying, you know "we had previously allocated eight hotels rooms to Jewish people and we had to make a decision whether we were going to cater to Jewish people or Gentile people. We made the decision we were going to cater to Gentile people, so thank you for your business but you're not welcome here anymore."

There were a series of very polite letters going back and forth that culminated in the owner of this hotel saying that, "we really did the wrong thing, you can stay here again." But I have to think that partly because of that, you know the Jewish community in South Florida was not...didn't view black people the same way maybe the other people did. You know, not to mischaracterize southern people because Miami was kind of a southern town, very southern, but there is a certain segment of society, and there probably still is that are not comfortable.

*Yes, and it's not just about the South either, this happens all over the country. Yes, but I just wanted to get a sense of the character of your parents. You know it (the Hampton House) is such a significant place where there was just full integration from the beginning, so clearly they had no issue.*

*How old were you when you were around the Hampton House and did you work as a busboy?*

I worked there in the summertime and some holidays and maybe on days off from school, you know when I was a teenager before I went to college. So that would have been the early '60s, the first half of the '60s. I went to college in 1966. So I was, you know they had a phone system which was an old-fashioned system where the phone would ring and you'd plug one of those things in and it would say "Room 50" and you'd plug the thing in there. I did some of that and I was bellboy and a busboy and if they'd need some help from someone who didn't need to know a heck of a lot, I'd do it.

*What do you remember about the place? Do you have any memories?*

Oh yeah, it is amazingly similar to the way it...in fact, if you go in the courtyard where the pool was, there's kind of monument now where the swimming pool used to be but if you look at the outside where the hotel rooms are, it looked exactly the way it did before. You go up to the front of the hotel in the lobby, it looks identical to the way that it was. I have some pictures that I'll show you that we have around the office and you can see the way that it was.

*When I got the tour, I was told it was pretty exact. I took photos. Do you remember the Napoleon Room? Was that what it was called?*

I don't remember it being called that.

*It was a restaurant. Do you remember the maître-d?*

Yeah, Harold Kemp.

*From what I read, you had to be dressed to come to this very...did he have a strict dress code? Do you remember anything about this?*

I remember people being dressed nicely. You know, nicely might have been the way I'm dressed now, but people didn't come in, you know in a sloppy fashion. If you, I think went into the lounge at night, people were often dressed in coats and ties.

*It sounds like it was such the place. Do you remember seeing any celebrities?*

One of the most indelible things in my mind, and I wasn't even really sure who it was at the time, but I working in the coffee shop as a bus boy and I was pouring coffee. I poured coffee for Malcolm X. That was pretty cool.

*That's amazing. Do you remember...did he say anything, or you just knew who he was?*

I knew afterwards, shortly after I found out who he was, but this was at a time, I know the story now, I didn't really know it then, in fact it was just a play that was kind of about it. That was on Miami Beach and 17 of us from our family went to see it all on one day. It was really, really interesting. Malcolm X was there to, and I don't know what the right word would be, but to groom Cassius Clay into the Muslim faith and I think that was his mission to be there and he just hung around trying to, and was successful in getting him into the Muslim faith. So he was there.

I don't know at all, how it came to be, that Martin Luther King came. I don't recall, myself, seeing him, but I know he had been there a number of times and I have to think it was because the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) having their meetings here. In fact, I have a picture in the office of him with several of the people including the guy with the gold jacket on, he wasn't wearing the gold jacket but he was in the picture.

*So had you ever heard about the Green Book before I talked to you?*

I had no idea what it was, in fact I went on Amazon after you told me and I bought it and looked through it. There was a very prominent advertisement in it for the Hampton House.

*Yes, so again your parents paid extra for that, so of course you don't have any knowledge about how they knew, because you didn't even know what the Green Book was but I'm always trying to get a paper trail or something linking these places to the Green Book.*

*So since then, what I think it's 2015 since the Hampton House has become...?*

I think it was around then. There was a dedication.

*What is your understanding about what will happen to it, or what it is going to be?*

I think it's supposed to be a community meeting place for the people to know something about the history of the community at the time that it was in its heyday. And also for a place for people to have meetings and parties and you know just a community gathering place.

*Yeab, I think it's 10 million dollars that was spent on the renovation? It's amazing what they've done. [look at notes]*

There's a couple of interesting people that you may speak to, when I went to the program that they had when it was dedicated...there were some people that I had no idea, who had any relationship with it. One of them is gentleman named Harvey Ruvin (R-U-V-I-N) who's the clerk of the Circuit Court in Miami. And apparently back in the day he frequented the place to go and hear jazz and you know, he's a little short white Jewish guy and also, I didn't really remember, but she knew me, you know hugs and kisses, is Muhammad Ali's first wife who's name escapes me, she's a very, very charming lady. In fact, she gave his first championship ring to them to have there.

*I saw a picture of her and I hear that she's still with us.*

Hmm mmm.

*And that was when he came in Cassius Clay and left Muhammad Ali. I wonder how long that grooming took? I believe he was there to celebrate his win.*

[22:00]

Yes.

*I don't know what year that was but apparently....*

That was probably '60 or '61 because I went to the fight with my father and my brother and I was too young to go back there because I was 12 years old and so I went home and I think my father went over there and they had a gigantic party.

*You said your brother was also working at the business?*

Yes, he's older. In fact, I tried to get him to come today but his wife is very sick, and he's been going back and forth to the doctors, so he couldn't come. But he was in his early twenties at the time and I think he spent some time working there.

*Was your mom part of the daily operations?*

She was pretty much there every day. She was there cracking the whip making sure that everything was the way it was supposed to be.

*If you had to guess how many people actually worked there?*

I don't have any sense of that.

*Do you know if was, for the most part, profitable or breaking even?*

I don't really know.

*Do you what may have happened to the business records?*

They are all gone. Almost, I won't say almost, I know they're all gone. After my father died in 1985, my brother and I spent days going through stuff as far back as the 1930s, throwing it out. In fact, we even threw out proof of our Miami Dolphins season tickets [laughing].

*Families throw out stuff all the time. Yeah, who knows, you may have thrown out Green Books and not have known it. Because a lot of businesses who were in the Green Book had Green Books for their customers and now I think the last one sold to the Smithsonian for almost \$23,000.*

Really? So when you buy it on Amazon, it's just a recreation of it?

*Yeah. To find a real one...you used to be able to find them on eBay once in a while...*

Because online you can buy them for eight or nine dollars.

*That's for a recreation, but the originals... and that was four years ago (Smithsonian purchase) that sold for \$22,500 at auction and that was before the (Green Book) film, so they're, I'm sure, going for even more now. But like anything, who has their 1985 AAA guide? People just throw them away. Enid did mention that there was a storage unit that was...I guess it was right when they were doing the renovations, but somehow the storage payment wasn't paid off and things were destroyed or given away, so there was that. Whatever materials were there, they are gone.*

We had some memorabilia and stuff and we gave it all to them.

*That's good. It was a family decision to do that?*

I mean it wasn't a lot. It was basically going through family photo albums and just culling out pictures.

*Do you know the origin of the images of Ali and Malcolm X? Do you know who took those photos or who has the rights to those photos? Negatives?*

Not a clue. Not a clue.

*Because we'd love to have them for the Smithsonian exhibit that we're working on. And I talked to Enid about it and I think Xavier was his name, he showed me around and we have about a year before we need to collect any of those things.*

The Miami Herald may have taken some of them. I also think Life Magazine took some pictures there. They're gone too, but, oh that was Look Magazine that's gone. I know there's a picture of him and Malcolm X and literally hundreds of people and I think it was in the restaurant.

*And is the one where Malcolm is behind the counter, photographing...*

Hmmm mmm.

*Yeah, that's the image. My book is coming out next year too, and I'd love to include it in my book. I just don't know what the rights are. They're at the Hampton House, but they're blown up, but I think he said a student or something just found them online and did that, so.*

There's also a movie that you can find online and if it's not online it's in the Archives of the State of Florida, it's called the *Search for Tomorrow*, I think. And it's about a 20 or 30-minute, sixteen millimeter movie that was a promotional thing that we would show at conventions.

*Do you know if that's free to use? We might be able to screen it?*

I've seen part of it online. There's pieces of it. I don't know if the whole thing is online but if it's in the archives of the state it ought to be available, I would think.

*I should see if it's public domain. Okay, we'll see. Like I said, we have a little bit of time, but there is that big, wall-size logo. I guess it was used in that film...*

You mean in the play?

*Oh, yes, in the play, that's what I mean. I'll talk to Calvin Ramsey and see if I can take that on tour. I would just like to have something of interest to tour with the exhibit because it was such an iconic...also the image of the women standing in front of the sign.*

Yeah, I have that in our hallway, of the office. I'll show you. You mean with their suitcases?

*Yes, I'd love to know the origin of that, or if we could get permission to use some of those images.*

That's a good question because they've probably been copied so many times, with or without permission.

*Yeah, a lot of people copy stuff, they take stuff from me all the time without permission, but I don't want to have any problems. And also the publisher won't publish it unless they know. So do you remember anything about the staff members or the clientele? Any stories?*

We had, for many years, the chef was a person who we got from one of the hotels in Miami Beach. He was maybe an executive chef at one of the big hotels.

*And he was white?*

Yes, his name was Sy Siflinger, and he was there for many years and he was a master at making all the soul food. I remember he would make chitterlings and I never acquired a taste for them [laughing], but he would make them on whatever day of the week it was and the place would be packed. And there was Harold Kemp. He was the manager of the hotel, I think. If it's the person that I'm thinking of in the gold jacket that you were talking about. I don't know if any of these people are still alive but I remember one of the desk clerks was Ellasteen Crue [unverified spelling] and her husband Martin was one of the chefs. And then there was Barbara Wade who was one of the desk clerks and I think she's still around in Miami. The people you're talking to may well know the whereabouts of some of these people. Who else do I remember?...that's all that comes to mind right now.

*That's amazing, I've never heard of a white chef making chitterlings. Never heard of that. And the fact that you served chitterlings that's also impressive. I've been to a couple of other Green Book site restaurants, and it was always the other way around. It's that white people would go to the black place because it reminded them of the Mammy's that cooked for them and they wanted to get that kind of food so they had to go to a black...and that forced integration. So the fact that he was making soul food good enough for black people to come is significant.*

*Do you remember if there was ever any drama or any times when people didn't get along, due to race?*

No. I don't recall anything like that. I do recall, as an observation, it was near the airport. A lot of people that worked at the airport would come there for lunch, or come after work and a lot of the local clientele came from people that worked at the airport.

*But it was primarily a black neighborhood, correct?*

Hmm mmm.

*It still is? Enid said there may be some gentrification happening, but for the most part it looks like the neighborhood has fallen on hard times. But of course when your parents owned it was it just a normal black neighborhood?*

Yeah, well, I don't know how long before, but what happened I think, in South Florida is the area, I guess from downtown north to about 71<sup>st</sup> Street was predominately white, even west. And when I-95 sort of divided the city, it literally divided it and became like a redline and gradually over a period of years the neighborhoods became more black as they went west so I think that it may have even been a little east of there, it was more of a mixed neighborhood, but my recollection is that that area was predominately black at the time.

*Yeah, it looks like it's struggling right now. Enid said there's a large Latino population moving in, and because it is so close, things are changing but yeah, when they took it over, she said it was full of squatters.*

Oh, they had trees growing through the building. It was...I don't know she must have pictures of what it looked like. But for them doing what they're doing, the building should have and probably was at some point technically condemned.

*How long did it take her to find you? How did the two you meet?*

You know, I don't know. I suspect sometime before 2015 when they started to do the dedication, she reached out and asked if I was interested in coming and participating and saying something and we did.

*Did you ever think about it, as an adult, when you came back to Miami that this place existed, did you ever wonder what happened to it?*

Well I kind of followed what happened to it because I know the person that bought it got into financial difficulties, he was in the taxicab business and his whole empire kind of went into the wrong direction. So I had followed it and saw that it was in disrepair and then there were some articles from time to time that the people were trying to restore and trying to raise money and things of that sort.

*That's amazing. I think we're done. Is there anything that you wanted to share that I didn't ask you about?*

No, I think that's about it.

[We go and look at some of the Hampton House photographs hanging in his law office]