

Cliff R. Montiero
Mashapaug Pond Oral History Interview

Date: March 18th, 2013

Place: Vartan Gregorian Quad, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912

Interviewee: Cliff R. Montiero

Interviewer: Cynthia Fong

Cynthia Fong: [00:30] So this is Cynthia Fong, um, and I am recording for Annie Valk's class on Mashapaug Pond. It is March 18th 2013 at about 2 o'clock and I am interviewing...

Cliffard R. Montiero: I am Cliffard R. Montiero. I am a native of Providence, Rhode Island and I've been in the civil rights, human rights struggle for 62 years. I'm 75 years of age. I'm the son of an immigrant; my father was born in Cape Verde. Um, my mother was born in Virginia, um, Native American and directed the Center of Slavery. My father would be Portuguese or Cape Verdean and, um, Native-uh, and Italian. Um, born and raised in Rhode Island, so I've known Rhode Island. I'm a former Providence policeman from 1959 to '62. Um, I've been involved in, um, the civil rights, human rights struggle, uh, since I was 13 years of age. Um, I dated a young lady in the Mashapaug Pond area and um, my religion, uh, used Mashapaug Pond for baptismal purposes and when I was 13, I was submerged in, um, Mashapaug Pond on a January date. Um, very, very cold, dressed in a black robe, etcetera. Now the most interesting thing about Mashapaug Pond was all of it was developed by the Providence Redevelopment Agency in a period where there was no fair housing bill. The fair housing bill in Rhode Island didn't come about until 1965 and I was very active in that struggle, uh, participating in sleep-ins, sit-ins at the Rhode Island State House. I started in, um, junior high school, uh, working on trying to get the fair housing bill a reality. So when they did urban renewal, uh, and tearing down Mashapaug Pond, it was a disgrace because there was a great deal of home ownership in that property. Um, many people owned their own homes and what redevelopment would do was come in two or three years before they were going to have the project, analyzing, talking to people, saying if you stay here, we'll buy your house and, um, we'll give you money to relocate but the money was never enough for them to purchase another house. So let's say they bought a house for \$5,000 and then the person would need \$15,000 to get a house in another neighborhood. But the other area that needs to be addressed is the fact that the banks redlined and wouldn't give mortgages to people of color. Um, many neighborhoods, they classified as white. People of color could not get mortgages in those areas. So when the urban renewal went in, it was really Negro removal without doing anything to improve their life. Um, many people use to be homeowners. After losing their home ownership in the Mashapaug Pond area, uh, became renters. So finding renting was difficult. Like I lived on Blackstone Street in South Providence, which is, um, between Eddy and, um, Point Street, uh, Eddy, and, uh, Prairie Avenue. Two streets over, Sumner Avenue, I couldn't rent as a Providence policeman in 1960. Two streets over. There were certain streets people of color could live on and other streets were in the same neighborhood, as there were certain bars, certain restaurants, and the same thing was in Mashapaug Pond area, there were restaurants. Now, Huntington Avenue, I was very familiar with. I use to go to, uh, a junkyard called Finks Junkyard, and Finks Junkyard, uh, I could buy used parts for my cars, etcetera. So, on Huntington Avenue, really, uh, a, uh, a kind of a junky place, prior to the railroad tracks, and then in order to get into Mashapaug Pond, you had to drive over the railroad track. [5:08] So

when you're talking about the other side, the other side of the tracks, Mashapaug Pond area was really the other side of the track. I think the Industrial Park was a nice idea, but I think that the city and the state should have had more responsibility to the people. We're talking about reparation; it should be in something like this because they really destroyed a community that was a nice homogenous community. Granted, there were people of color in this neighborhood. Uh, there were Negroes, there were Indians, there were some white people in the area. But primarily, it was home ownership, and when you talk about the difficulties in buying a house, you know, um, particularly in the 50s and 60s, it was very difficult, particularly when you look at the jobs that people of color had. We weren't, um, when I was on the Providence police department in '59, there were 17 policemen of color. '59. And, I think we maybe had 5 or 6, um, maybe a little more, maybe 10 firemen. So, most people had menial jobs, uh, all the women had jobs, um, cleaning houses. Now and then, they had a good job running an elevator operator in **Shepards** or the outlet company downtown Providence. So when you're talking people, uh, who had to have rubbish trucks or moving trucks to make a living, they were self-employed. Now I don't remember stores of people of color in the Mashapaug Pond area. There was basically a, um, residential neighborhood. And it had a huge park that people use to do picnics in, go out swimming. Every year, somebody drowned in Mashapaug Pond because it had like, it suppose to be, like, um, coldsprings or something that cause people to get cramps. Uh, but I thought it was a nice recreational area, a nice neighborhood. Um, and I think it's nice that they developed an Industrial Park, but at what expense and whose expense? It was the expense of the people of color. Now, just around the corner from Mashapaug Pond, they started the Huntington Expressway, and then it stopped. It didn't go all the way over to Mashapaug Pond. So apparently, you can see now where it now connects to 95. So somebody had massive plans on the highway system and apparently, had massive plans on relocating the people of color with no plan as to where they were going to go. Um, I guess the acquisition of the most inexpensive land is the way we grow in America. It doesn't matter what impact you do onto peoples' family units, on their ability, uh, to get around. In fact, even in the early 60's, we didn't have cabdrivers of color, bus drivers of color. So we're talking, uh, very liberal Rhode Island, yeah? Guess what? People of color had a hard time as I still think they have, unfortunately, a hard time now.

Fong: Thank you for sharing that. You mentioned that, uh, some of these neighborhoods had some, um, African-American populations and some white, um, families?

Montiero: Yes.

Fong: What were these race relations like back then?

Montiero: Well, I think everybody knew what was acceptable and what was not acceptable. Um, when you're talking the black community, don't forget, black didn't become a reality until '65. Prior to '65, we were called Negroes, colored, Native Americans, African American, but we were not called black because when you were called the N-word, black was the most terrible thing you could say to a person. And what, those of us, like I brought black power to Rhode Island, um, we were trying to develop black was beautiful because white was the standard of beauty, and we were saying, whatever you are is what makes you beautiful – not what somebody else says to define who you are. Um, I'm a little confused what my question, now what was your question, because I went off on, um, I thought that, I think that you said, how did the people get

along. I think, many of the people that I went to high school with didn't think there was any problem. I was class president at Hope High School, all the way through high school, but at my junior prom, as class president, you couldn't dance with a white girl. [9:56] At my senior prom, you couldn't either. And it was like, there's no race mixing and I dated a white girl in high school, and they suspended her from high school, had her parents come up to school, and say that we're trying to keep her away from him, and she was punished because of her relationship with me. So, um, I think that white people said we're not as bad as the people in the south. Uh, we're not lynching black people, and they compared the racism of Rhode Island with the racism in Mississippi, Alabama and it should have been, we compare the wealth of Rhode Island with the poverty of Rhode Island, and we should have compared Rhode Island's racism with Rhode Island's advancement in race relations and I don't think it was done. I think, uh, white people, in fact, it was, uh, it was very difficult to get people to stop calling me boy, no matter what age I was. Um, and, you people, um, was a terminology, and I think, um, the civil rights organizations of the 60's were core, um, the N-double-ACP and the Urban League, and I think another place that was very important was the John Hope Community Center, which use to be on Pratt Street in Providence, um, which is now on Burgess Street in, uh, off of Cranston, between Cranston and Westminster. I was very instrumental in developing our community. The other thing that was instrumental are the churches, uh, the black churches. The black churches gave a lot of support to the black community. Now, the successful people was, economics in Rhode Island when I grew up, were the black undertakers, uh, the black beauty parlors, the black, uh, barber shops. Um, on the east side of Providence, we had more success on Camp Street, over where University Heights is, we did. We had some stores on Cranston street of people of color, but basically, it was um, the people on the east side that had more than it was on the east, than it was on south side, than on, like Mashapaug Pond area. Now we had, um, a couple of social clubs on the south side that were, the Elks was one, that a big, big, big, big one. But um, most of the restaurants were owned by white people, and uh, we had no problems, but those restaurants were classified as for the colored people, although white people owned them. White people went in there, but, uh, I would say more than 50% of, uh, their clientele was, um, people of color.

Fong: So the stores even near the Mashapaug Pond area, you mentioned, were mostly owned by white people.

Montiero: I think the businesses were owned by white people. Um, I remember all of the stores, all the motor repair shops on Huntington Expressway and Huntington Avenue, um, and certain streets over there, we couldn't even buy houses on. You know, it was like, on the other side of the railroad tracks, in order to get to the Mashapaug Pond area, you went over railroad tracks. Um, and, um, and in the Cranston area, there weren't many people of color in Cranston at all in that era. Um, Cranston was, uh, really white. So the people that lived in Providence were at the end of Providence just before Cranston and they tore that down. And I don't know where all those people moved to.

Fong: Yes, that was going to be my next question: where, when the redevelopment agencies...?

Montiero: Well a lot of people moved to the east side, some moved to, uh, south side, uh, but it had been historically, the oldest black community had been around the state house on North Main Street, where Turnkey Post Office is. So it isn't just the Mashapaug Pond area that

destroyed the people of color in Providence. If you look at Fox Point: that was, um, the Cape Verdean, Portuguese community lived down there, and they got along well because they both spoke Portuguese. There was, uh, home ownership, it was, uh, socializing, everything. Um, and it's like, on Broad Street, the YMCA, um, when I was a kid, I had difficulty going there. There weren't many people of color, and some Boys Clubs, we couldn't even go to the Boys Club. We could go to the Fox Point Boys Club, but other communities, we couldn't go there. Um, so, when you look at Mashapaug Pond area, their Bucklin Park, um, was a recreational place, but everybody used that, and, but the place that people had softball and baseball games, Bucklin Park was one, it was on Dexter Street, near, um, Mashapaug Pond area, but the place that people played softball use to be Mashapaug Pond and then in that era, where we went swimming, if you didn't go to Mashapaug Pond, Lincoln Woods. [15:26] Black people didn't go far. When I'm saying black people, I'm saying people of color, Native Americans, Negros, um, and, uh, so we've made some progress but we've got a long way to go.

Fong: Are there churches in the Mashapaug Pond area that you, that you went to or you have experience with?

Montiero: I don't remember any churches in that area. Uh, there usually went, um, the churches were, um, Dodge Street, which is relatively new area. Yes, on Winter Street, there was a church on Winter Street that was torn down. Um, then they had churches on, um, Pond Street. Pond Street, uh, had churches, but all those areas are torn down by urban renewal. I'm saying, if you're talking about the big, huge, black churches, every one of them was torn down. Uh, Winter Street had a huge church, over near Broad. Winter and Broad, over near where Central High School is, a huge black church, Winter Street, uh, I think it was a Baptist church, and then, on, um, Ebenezer Baptist church, which is on Chester Avenue now, use to be on Pond Street, um, so where the black churches were, even if you look at Olney Street Baptist, huge church on Olney Street, um, just around Pratt Street on the Olney Street side, on the, on the north side of Olney, torn down where University Heights is. So, black churches were targeted, black communities were targeted and it's a shame.

Fong: Are there black communities today near Mashapaug Pond?

Montiero: I don't think so. I think there are people that live in that area, but, uh, there's not a black community I think. Um, I think it's moved down farther. Now, I think they were on Cranston Street, because in that area, don't forget, we have black doctors who use to go to homes because black doctors were not affiliated with hospitals. There's Dr. Gross, Dr. Robinson, um, were doctors in the area, and Dr. Robinson, my first wife's, um, grandfather, uh, who, um, started the N-double-ACP in Providence. So you had, um, organized crime in the black community, they use to do the numbers on Cranston Street. Um, I think his name was Daddy Black got killed because he paid more than people on Federal Hill paid on, um, the numbers, but there were successful black people on Cranston Street, but in the Mashapaug Pond area, I don't remember any black churches at all.

Fong: So before the, the redevelopment happened, the black community was really strong in that area, in the Mashapaug Pond area?

Montiero: It wasn't strong enough that it could get anyone elected. They were getting white politicians elected. They were organizing, registered to vote, and they had social functions, and they had parties, and you know, they had picnics, and, um, you know, sort of like, in that era, we use to go to, there use to be like Crescent Park, but all the black people use to go down there August 1st. That was celebrating Emancipation Proclamation day, down where they, um, there's a merry-go-round, know where the merry-go-round is? \ Crescent Park? Use to be a whole amusement park and white people owned everything, but on August 1st, they moved out and we moved in because they use to have a dance hall we couldn't go to, different things we couldn't go to during the regular season, and, uh, we were encouraged, August 1st to go there. Um, but... I think I need to, I need to take a break.

[long pause]

Fong: Um, so, you mentioned that there's some, some parties on August 1st, and those were times where the black communities really got together?

Montiero: [19:50] Well we celebrated, all of black community. Um, now when I was a kid, to go from east side to the west side, um, to see girls over there could get you beat up, or, you know, was warring and uh, and the only time that we were like a unified community was when we went August 1st, which was the celebration of the emancipation. Now I know that it's suppose to be celebrated in January but the thing that we celebrated was August 1st in Rhode Island and black people from all over, we had parades. Oh it was a real wonderful time, and the Elks had a marching band. There were several marching bands from the black community and we had floats and everything else, doing our thing on August 1st and we went to Crescent Park, we all got dressed up and moved out, and, um, it was a wonderful experience, and you had a lot of pride in your, um, blackness on that day. But, it's sort of like, as a little kid, when I grew up, there was a black policeman in, **Maolima** is the first black policeman, I think he came here in 1947. I use to go by his house, "There, he lives there! He lives there!" You know, he was like, king! Because we didn't have, um, the obvious success stories within our black community, so black ministers were very important, black undertakers, and black beauty parlors were very important. They were, like, the knowledgeable people in our community. Um, I never saw a black teacher until I was in the 8th grade, or a teacher of color, and she was very light complexion, and then she even put white powder on her face to get lighter, and she was a substitute teacher when I went to 8th in Bishop Union High.

Fong: So, on, when it wasn't August 1st, where, where was the black community organizing? Where did they hang out?

Montiero: They hung out in bars, many of the bars were owned by white people, and there were just a few private clubs on the east side of Providence. They had the IBA, and then you had the Masonic Temple, uh, which was very active, um, and a lot of, um, the black community joined together through these Masonic groups, um, and then, um, on the west side you had the Elks club which was a social place. Um, so they had sort-of private clubs and they use to have what was called Sips, a late at night, when all the bars and everything closed, and then people use to charge money to give you food and drinks in private houses, and, um, you can go there and drink after-hours. But, uh, most of the bars were owned, were black bars owned by white people. In my era,

growing up, um, it use to be on Westminster Street, was called the Downbeat, and on the east side was called the Celebrity Club. So black people went there but the Celebrity Club was racially integrated. Um, although, the black entertainers had to sleep upstairs because the hotels wouldn't rent to black people, and they forced them to because the public accommodation act didn't take place, um, until 1964, and fair housing didn't take place until 1965. There were no McDonalds, no Burger Kings, none of those national chains were in Rhode Island. They were all privately owned places and you had to hear from the black community what restaurants to go to. There were restaurants downtown, Chinese restaurants that would only let you take the food out. You couldn't eat in. And, uh, it was amazing that they had, not just Chinese, but Chinese-Americans plus white people had restaurants that you could take out, couldn't eat in. But the ones that bothered me were the Chinese ones.

Fong: The black communities, did they, did they hang out at the pond often? You mentioned that you...

Montiero: Oh, there was a lot of, softball games, um, and religious, I was trying to tell you, it was a heck of a religious experience. Go out there, and they were singing and walking on, wading in the water, and drop you in the water. You now, it was ice cold, etcetera, it was, uh, a new experience, but mostly, our entertainment, don't forget, uh, to be entertained at home was the radio. There was no TV in my era, see. You think that people stayed at home, no! They were out in the street. So I was, uh, a big experience for me would be to take a bus, because there were no cars, go over, pick up the girl from Mashapaug Pond area, go down to the movies. And people of color stayed on the balcony. Even in the theaters, there was racism. [24:57] In the theaters, we didn't stay downstairs; we stayed upstairs. And there was certain theaters that, uh, didn't even want you coming there, uh, people of color. But our excitement was we had to go to movies. Like, when I was a kid, we went to our recreational theaters and saw movies, on playgrounds to see movies. There was no TV. Your era thinks everyone had TV for always, no! There was no TV in my era. You know, in the 60's, you know, uh, you had a little black and white TV that was maybe 17 inches in diameter and you had 40 or 50 people trying to watch this one TV, and you had two TV stations: 10 and 12. And you had the Providence journal, was the morning and at night, very thick, very powerful newspaper. Uh, we had, in the black community on Cranston Street, uh, Judge Al Wiley's father, William Wiley, and his wife, ran the Chronicle, which was the black newspaper that gave the news of the, of the black community. Um, very knowledgeable man, he worked for the post office and did this on his side to keep us informed of what was up and what was down. And so, uh, the Chronicle was a very critical paper, and, uh, we use to get our news nationally. Um, there was one out in Philadelphia, there were other black newspapers that we would buy locally, uh, but the restaurants we went to were white-owned.

Fong: Tell me more about the baseball games near Mashapaug Pond.

Montiero: Well, we were able to, um, if you remember in the era I grew up in as a kid, um, black people were not playing in major league baseball. So, they use to have some of the black, uh, all-black teams travelling. Black teams would come in, they use to come into Hope High School, so people from all over the community would go to Hope High School. If they didn't go to Hope High School, they went to Mashapaug Pond, and they played softball there. And boy, we, they would play the local people, and some of the big names were there. I wish I could

remember them and really, uh, been knowledgeable about it but I remember there were some big players that came through, uh, from out of town such as Satchel Paige. Um, it was wonderful. Um, it was like, uh, a picnic day. People would go there and watch softball and bring food and I guess many people would drink and I was too young to be drinking.

Fong: So, the, the baseball games near the pond, were they, what kind of people came in to watch?

Montiero: You play baseball or softball was played there. The whole community. When you didn't have home entertainment, there were no computers, there were no telephones, and if telephones, in fact, the first telephone that we had, I think was a three-party line. So when you were on the phone, two of your neighbors could listen to everything that you were saying. You know, people were lucky to have a one-party line. You know, you're talking, you had to wait until someone got off the phone when you have a party line in order for you to make your phone call. And you pick up the phone, and they would still be on, hang it up, make noise, click. So when you sit down and figure, the era you're talking about, you didn't spend in your house. And then in the houses, don't forget, in many of these houses didn't have central heat. Some of them didn't have hot water. I grew up, we had to heat the hot water on the kitchen stove in order to take a bath on the floor of the kitchen. I'm talking about when I was a little kid. You know, and we had tubs in them, but we didn't have showers. You took baths! And then you had the kerosene stoves, you use have to go get a five gallon jug, put it in the kerosene stove, and if you had a furnace, it was powered by coal. And then you had to take the ashes of the coal to go out. So when we're talking a community, you had so much work to do, and then if you had a wood stove or a coal stove, so you're talking a community that had to fight and guess what? When you washed clothes, you didn't have a washing machine that washed the clothes and wrung them out. You had to wring them out by hand. Or you had to use a scrub board. Depends upon what your economics were.

Fong: [29:55] What were the economics of the communities near Mashapaug Pond?

Montiero: I think they were poor because there weren't the opportunities for jobs. There were no jobs for people of color. You know, the gas company and the electric company weren't hiring people. The police department was like, when I got hired, there was 17 of us hired: one person of color. Fire department, one! You know, everything was token. The vast majority, during World War 2, a lot of people of color worked in the defense industry, but when the war was over, they fired them all and sent them on their way. So there weren't jobs, you know, you had to work hard, and when you had a job, you know, like, um, I was very lucky that I was a stevedore for a while as a young person. I was a policeman; I worked in the laundry; I was a landscaper. So these jobs were menial jobs which people of color, now one of the jobs that my father had, which was a very important job was a red cap. The red cap use to go down to the train station, take peoples' luggage off the train. It was, uh, organized union of black people, but that was a powerful job! You made tips, you made, you had a job, you could dress up, you had a red hat and this outfit. It was a powerful job! You know, when you sit down, everything is relative to what's available to you, and what's available to black people? And when you talk about black people going to college, I went to URI, it was either 17 black men and 14 women of color when I went there in 1959. '58 rather. So when you're talking, well, going to college, there's no people

of color, and there's, there's no black colleges. Like after the civil war, they made black colleges in the south. The closest to the north was Pennsylvania. So, there were no black colleges, white people went, even like Providence college. I grew up in an era where they would only play one or two black players. So now, you take that attitude and it's applied to urban renewal. How many people of color do you think were working for the city of Providence urban renewal office? We didn't get our first black elected official until 1964: a city councilman named Phil Addison from the east side. So when black people registered to vote and participated, they were voting for white politicians.

Fong: Why do you think that is?

Montiero: The door wasn't going to be open for them. In fact, we went into the school committee, we couldn't get anybody onto the school committee. So we got the mayor, Doorley, to make a, um, appointed school committee so we could get people of color. Today, I think we need to go back to an elected school committee. But, um, so black people had to survive. You know, what was acceptable for you or not. My grandmother use to work somewhere on Cranston Street and had to walk home, doing home, she did domestic work. And you know what her weapon of choice was? She had 15 hatpins stuck in her coat, different size, different shapes. So when she was walking, she was going to stick a hatpin, you know what I'm doing about, a hatpin? A long thin thing, and some of them were very thick. Um, they stuck them in their hats because everybody use to wear hats and white gloves when they went to church in my era and women wore long skirts. In my era, you didn't say someone was pregnant, you say, uh, "When's the stork due?" Everything was very prim and proper in my era, you didn't talk as freely as people talk today and, you know, um, there were people that were strange, that may be classified today as gay. We didn't say they were gay or weird, we would call them strange. When you said strange, you knew that they may have been a homosexual person. Um, it was openly, uh, drugs, open, uh, prostitution too, everything. Because you had within the black community, successful black people and bums. So you had, there was no economic separation because your binding characteristic was your skin color.

Fong: The communities of color before urban renewal near Mashapaug Pond, where did they go to school?

Montiero: We went to the regular schools, you went to your neighborhood schools. But they would do, now I'll give you an illustration. Like, um, many of your kids went to, there more parochial and more Episcopal schools, there were more church schools in a lot of communities. [35:01] So that's why when they kept a neighborhood, they kept it black. The black kids, like I lived on Benefit Street and it was an integrated neighborhood, and I went to, uh, Benefit Street School until the third grade, and after the third grade, I went to Doyle Avenue, uh, which is now torn down where University Heights is. Two streets over was Sumner Avenue Street School, which was all white kids. Doyle Avenue was racially mixed. Poor whites and blacks went to that school. Um, so, they used neighborhood schools but they could define who went to what schools based on where you lived.

Fong: Where were the schools located before the renewal near the pond?

Montiero: Uh, I lived on the east side so I don't know that. My exposure to Mashapaug Pond was going over there socially when I was a teenager. Um, that was far away because I didn't travel on mass transportation that much. I remember trolley cars and buses going over there, but, um, my mother was a very strict mother and, uh, my father may have taken me, like my father had a rubbish truck so I use to ride everywhere. I don't remember a dump near there. I, uh, remember going to a lot of communities where there were dumps, but I don't remember a dump in the Mashapaug Pond area. I don't remember one there. But I can tell you where a lot of them are around the city of Providence. I remember going to places where there are now supermarkets that use to be dumps when I was a kid. Um, and I filled it in, and there were schools built on dumps. So, um, I remember that, but I don't remember, uh, the churches I remember, because the churches were in neighborhoods, not in the community.

Fong: What else did kids do around the pond?

Montiero: Bicycle was big! Everybody rode bicycles. And it was critical that you ride bicycles because there were jobs that you could get. Like, um, when I was a teenager, we use to work in the, I think it was Fox Soda Company, helping fill soda bottles, washing soda bottles, um, so you had to have bicycles before the era of cars. Bicycles were very important, uh, in the minority community because a lot of people didn't have cars, and when you did have cars, it was just one in the family. It was not multi-cars like we have today. One car! And many families had a truck and not a car, because the father was a rubbish man. The father was a moving man. So, you had a truck and the family went out, like, we use to go many times to Lincoln Woods or Goddard Park in a, in a big dump truck. We would load it up with hay. Everybody would jump in the back of the truck, and go. You know, but Goddard, uh, but, uh Mashapaug Pond, you could ride over there with the bicycle. We went to Lincoln Woods because you didn't want to ride up Charles Street walking. You wanted to ride through that neighborhood because you went through the Italian community that was not pro-black at that point. It was kind of tough on black people going through a lot of communities. We use to have to take chains and bats, um, you couldn't walk through communities, not a group of black kids. We were troublemakers, going some places, didn't matter.

Fong: So you rode around with your friends, around the, the pond area?

Montiero: We rode on, with the pond, but we mostly went where there were movies. Now, there use to be movies in Dexter Pond. They had movies there. I don't remember movies outside at Mashapaug Pond, I don't remember movies there. Um, because, like I said, I lived on the east side so when I went to Mashapaug Pond, I was chasing girls, uh, to take them out of there to downtown, to the movie theater.

Fong: What did the girls do around the pond?

Montiero: I don't know. I don't know, uh, I would say bicycle riding, skating, uh, we use to play kick-the-can, we use to play, um, field hockey with cans. Uh, we played basketball. When you sit down and figure, you had to use your mind not to be bored and when I think of, and then you, if you were, uh, a teenager, some parents had it like, like in my house, my mother use to have it, when the streetlights come on, you get home. So, you know, when the streetlights come on early,

you better be home. [40:00] Um, you weren't out on the street. Um, unless your parents knew where you were, and sometimes I would leave my mother's house to go to visit my grandmother on Cranston Street and Dodge Street so that I could sneak out and do a little more. But basically, parents were very strict with their children. Parents were worried that their children, um, were in the house. They didn't trust the police. There was, there was, there was less trust of the police department then than there was now. And many people don't trust the police department even today. But there was less then because who enforced the racism? And the racism, let's say there was a restaurant that didn't want anybody of color in there, who kicked them out? Who locked them up? The policemen! So, you didn't have anybody that you trusted but your own community, your own family.

Fong: Um, when you, you mentioned a little bit about how people played field hockey and skated around the pond...

Montiero: Not field hockey.

Fong: Okay.

Montiero: Can hockey, uh, you know, we didn't, we did roller-skating, um, but we didn't do ice-skating. If the pond froze over, you didn't see people of color out there ice-skating. Might have been out there, crazy enough to try to do ice fishing. Like we use to do fishing in Mashapaug Pond and we use to do fishing, and we would also go, um, the Mashapaug people use to go to Roger, uh, Rhode Island, uh, Roger Williams Park. That was a big day out. Roger Williams Park, to go over there and row a boat and be in a boat out there because Mashapaug Pond had boats but they were owned by private people. I don't remember people renting them.

Fong: Why didn't the black community skate?

Montiero: I think it's conditioning and programmed. It's sort of like swimming. I was almost a teenager before I learned to swim. You know, if you grow up around water, you know, people say, "Oh black people can't swim because body fat," but look at the black people that swim in the Caribbean, if you grew up around water. Or Cape Verde. I was in Cape Verde two years ago, everybody and his brother was jumping in, diving and swimming like fish. It's programmed. What you're programmed to do, if you grow up and there's no swimming pool near you, like, I grew up, there was a swimming pool that was 18 inches thick, deep. How are you going to learn how to swim in that? And water was shooting, so you got wet. You couldn't learn to swim in a playground that didn't have a swimming pool. But if you had a swimming pool, then you have to have a lifeguard. That's more money. So the playgrounds that I went to as a kid had, it was like a wading pool, so how are black people going to learn how to swim if they don't have a swimming pool? And schools didn't have swimming pools. So you learned to swim and many people drowned. I grew up, a lot of people who drowned, they couldn't swim. The kids around Mashapaug Pond area learned to swim or drown. Noone was teaching them how to swim. Self-taught swimmers.

Fong: Did you swim in the pond?

Montiero: Nope, I swam in the swimming pool. Or I went to Goddard Park, or I went to, uh, Lincoln Woods. I don't remember swimming in Mashapaug Pond. That was not my stable community. I went in there, saw Mary Jane, took her out of there and left.

Fong: Do you have many friends in the area?

Montiero: Well, you had friends because, uh, you went to high school and junior high school, high school mostly. Some people went to Central High School but some of the people in Mashapaug Pond area went to Hope High School and I was class president, uh, captain of track and football, so I knew a lot of people. So I was able to go many places and my mother's church was the church I grew up in was on, on the Cranston Street, Dodge Street, uh, and on, uh, Pond Street area. So I knew people on the other side of the state, on the other side of the city, rather, because of my mother's religion, and I had family members that lived over there. So I had more safety than other people did, so I could go anywhere I wanted to be, generally.

Fong: What do you mean by safety?

Montiero: Well, if you weren't a part of a community, be it black or white, you were, uh, coming in to steal their girls, you were coming in, start trouble, or someone would start trouble with you. In my era, uh, street fights were very common. You know, the guys from the east side hated the guys from the west side. You know, the guys from the west side would go over to the, uh, east side looking for a dance, what were they doing? They were stealing my girlfriend. [45:05] You know, you're going to get into trouble, coming over here. They were only over here looking for trouble. When the guys came over as a group, they didn't bring girls with them. They came over to take what was there. So that was not a, an area that would cause stability.

Fong: Were you ever involved in any of those fights?

Montiero: Of course! I had broke my nose about five times because, lip, my eyebrows, and look at my right hand compared to my left hand. My right had is much larger than my left, you see the broken knuckle there. So when I was a kid, fighting, you had, I was 6 foot at age 13, everybody wanted, I was 120 pounds maybe, everybody wanted to beat up the biggest kid in the school, right? Me! I was the tallest kid in junior high school. In my era, 6 foot was tall. My father was 5' 6", my mother's 4 foot 11". People were shorter in my era, and so I was tall, and I guess my height on both sides of my family that I knew of, I was the tallest, but now I'm finding out that my grandfather was a 6 footer, and I had an uncle that was a 6 footer, although I also have an uncle that was 5 foot 2". So, uh, I guess we got, uh, diversity in height.

Fong: Um, what were the fights like Mashapaug Pond?

Montiero: Well, we had all kinds of fights. Some fights were without weapons, and some were with weapons. Um, and usually, it was over girls. I went to see Mary Jane and Mary Jane's ex-boyfriend didn't think I belonged there. She may have still been dating him and was cheating on him. But in that era, you know, you couldn't date white girls so you had to date black girls. You only could date people of your own color. If a policeman saw you, you might get a beating, dating a white girl. Walking around the street with a white girl could be dangerous. But, uh, the

most important aspect of, um, that area is the home ownership. And once you take people who owned property, when you sit down and figure the difficulty they had with the bank getting the mortgage, and many times they had to get a second mortgage with a private lender in order to get the loan from the bank, and then the bank only would approve it if it was in a neighborhood that they thought was acceptable for people of color. So the bank was deciding where you were going to live, the real estate agent was going to show you only where they thought you could get a mortgage, which was where the people of color was, and what happens now that you've destroyed a neighborhood of people of color? You're not establishing a new one. And when they move into a white neighborhood, they move in as a renter, not as a homeowner. And they start moving in, and then white people move out. And then it becomes a neighborhood of color because if white people stayed still, black people couldn't take over the neighborhood. But panic comes in when people of color move in and sometimes there were landlords that would destroy a neighborhood by going in, buying a house, uh, in a white neighborhood, loading it up with a black woman with 12 children. So it caused panic, so then the landlord paid what was the normal rate, [cough] excuse me, and then became a slum landlord and bought up property. There were slum landlords that bought up a lot of property by taking and bringing black people in, scaring white people out, buying up their property.

Fong: Was that true near the pond as well?

Montiero: That was true all over the city of Providence, true all over the city of Providence. And I bet it's going on now.

Fong: Um, after the redevelopment, who owned the homes after that near the pond?

Montiero: There were no homes there. After the redevelopment, it was made into an Industrial Park. There were no rental homes in Mashapaug Pond. They tore down Mashapaug Pond and made the Industrial Park so that, um, banks moved in there and all these different companies moved in there. And then they tore down the, um, Huntington Avenue, uh, which was, uh, junkyards, etcetera. They paid them to relocate and many of them moved from, like Fink's Junkyards I know, I remember that because I went to school with Howie Fink and his sister, and they bought a place in East Providence near the red bridge. So the Fink junkyard moved from Huntington Expressway over there, but he couldn't make the money that he made on Huntington Avenue because everybody knew him, his family, his father had been there. I don't know if his grandfather started it. So his family had been there. Um, so the businesses relocated but the people who had, who had been homeowners, who moved from there were replaced by Industrial Park that's there now. That's not very successful either.

Fong: [50:40] What about the other side of the pond?

Montiero: On, you mean on Cranston Street side? Or what do you mean?

Fong: On...

Montiero: See, the pond goes into Cranston.

Fong: On the, near, um, the Elmwood Street and Reservoir Avenue side.

Montiero: Oh, that was all a white neighborhood. That was in Cranston; you're going over. When you get over to Reservoir Avenue, uh, you're getting into Cranston, and there weren't that many people of color in Cranston. Now you get like, Twin Oaks is over there. That's, that's a primarily a white neighborhood still.

Fong: So none of that changed? The redevelopment didn't touch them?

Montiero: Well, I think it improved, um, the roads. It moved the park, uh, up higher. Uh, there's a ball field there now, but the ball field doesn't have a whole lot of people that live there. People have to live around the ballpark, you know, there were people in Cranston and Providence that lived and play in the park now. But not like the community that I grew up with, people of color. So, urban renewal has made a lot of buildings over there, it's like public television is located over there, and it made it convenient for businesses to be there. But unfortunately, uh, it is not the success story that I think somebody envisioned. Because there are a lot of vacant buildings over there.

Fong: Okay, um, is there anything else that you want to say?

Montiero: Yeah, I think that, I think that the Huntington Expressway is a nice location, but I think that because of 95, I think there are more people are apt to build their businesses off of 95 and off of 295 than off of the Huntington Expressway. I don't think it's generated the kind of businesses it thought it would do. And I'm sorry that the people who made the plans were not more sensitive to the needs of the people who lived in the community that they were destroying and relocating.

Fong: Yeah.

Montiero: Maybe somebody ought to pay them. Maybe there, maybe there should be reparation to the people that use to live in Mashapaug Pond, if they're alive and well. Take care, thank you very much.

Fong: Thank you. That was great. Um, yeah, so onto this consent and things... [53:36]

[End of interview]