Interview with Brenda Bozant Davillier

July 15, 1994
Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South
New Orleans (La.)

**Interviewer:** Michele Mitchell  
**ID:** btvct07065  
**Interview Number:** 827

PREFERRED CITATION

**Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South**
An oral history project to record and preserve the living memory of African American life during the age of legal segregation in the American South, from the 1890s to the 1950s.

**ORIGINAL PROJECT**

**COLLECTION LOCATION & RESEARCH ASSISTANCE**
John Hope Franklin Research Center for African and African American History and Culture  
at the Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library

http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/behindtheveil
BEHIND THE VEIL:
DOCUMENTING AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE
IN THE JIM CROW SOUTH
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:
BRENDA ANN DAVILLIER

JULY 15, 1994
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

INTERVIEWED BY:
MICHELE MITCHELL
BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW:

MICHELE MITCHELL:  This is July 15, 1994.  I'd like to start off by asking you to state your name and to spell it for the historical record (   ).

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER:  The name is Brenda Bozant Davillier. The maiden name is Bozant, B-o-z-a-n-t, and my married name is Davillier as in David. A-V as in sister. I-l-l-i-e-r.

MICHELE MITCHELL:  And were you born here in New Orleans?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER:  I was born in New Orleans and I've lived here most of my life. I lived in Slidell for a couple of years and I lived in Los Angeles when I was a child for about nine months.

MICHELE MITCHELL:  Really?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER:  Uh huh. But New Orleans has been my home. I'm one of those people who likes to visit other places, but I like to live here. Really have no desire to move. I like Slidell across the lake where my mother's from, but not to live there.
MICHELE MITCHELL: Why not?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Oh, not the place itself, but you know, the small town habits, the gossip. And it's, I prefer New Orleans. You have so many things you could do, you know. It's just not like that. For instance over here, if you want to just go somewhere and be by yourself, go to Waldenburg Park, you know. A lot of places where you feel safe. People are there, but it's nice, you know, to have that in Slidell. It's a different kind. And you would think, well, and parts of it still pretty rural, but it's just not the same.

MICHELE MITCHELL: When were you born and could you tell me a little bit about growing up here in New Orleans.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Alright. I was born November 17, 1941 and the way I understand it, let's see, was I born at home? I think I was born at home on Tonti Street.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Tonti?

MICHELE MITCHELL: Tonti. North Tonti. T-o-n-t-i. We didn't own that house. My father was a carpenter, contractor. Very good. Very skilled. And my mother didn't work away from home. She stayed at home. I was second. I have an older sister
and my mother lost the child that was right after me. Anell. She was born prematurely and I have another sister and a brother. We lived in that house. Still I don't remember much about that, because we moved from there to St. Anthony Street a few blocks away. I remember that house. I remember my sister's dog in the yard that used to pull the sheets off the clothesline and she was angry. My mother got rid of this dog, because the dog always pulled those sheets off the clothesline. Then we moved into the house where my grandmother lived, my father's mother, on Miro Street and that was only a few blocks away. And I remember that house very well, with the shutters on the front, it was a double shot gun house not far from Elisha Peele's. And I remember my grandmother's rocker with the cane seat and cane back. She died, I think they said she died in that rocking chair when I was still small. That's a funny story that goes with that. I was laying down on the, we had a sofa in one of the bedrooms because when my mother and my father moved there with my grandmother they brought their living room set. So there were two sofas. One was in the room where our bed was next to the kitchen. My mother and my aunt, it was my daddy's sister-in-law, was sitting in the kitchen talking and we were suppose to be taking a nap. I guess I was about four years old or three years old and I used to suck my thumb and I didn't want to suck my thumb. So I'd lie on my belly and put my hands under my belly. So to keep from sucking my thumb I just stuck my foot out and started rocking the rocking chair.
And the next thing I knew I heard my mom and my Aunt Bernice, say, well, what's that. You know, and they came and peeked in room. I put my foot back and acted like I was asleep. They said, oh, that must be Miss Bozant sitting in that chair. They were so frightened they didn't know what to do and I was scared to say anything. So for years they thought that was my grandmother rocking the chair. It was only after I was grown and knew that my mother wasn't going to do anything that I finally told them. In New Orleans, you know, down here you have all of these ghost stories. Everyone has a ghost story in the family. So I'm sure that as the family ghost story for years. And when I started school, well, one of the things that happened with my father, he's light complected like I am. We have French in my family on my mother's side and my father's side. But he couldn't get any work. The only way he could get work is if he didn't tell the people that he was, a lots of the time they said Negro or colored and then the men who worked with him, they would all call him Mr. Bozant so the people wouldn't know. But he and a lot of other of his friends, they just didn't like the system and he was one of them that signed up to go to Guam for a year. And at the end of the year the plans were they'd have all of this money from the contractor and all of them were moving to Los Angeles and get away from here. So, his friends, it worked out for them and that's what they did. But after he was there about a month or so he got a bad infection on his hand and he couldn't work and they couldn't
cure it or treat it. And he ended up, they sent him back. Well, he didn't have all of his money. On the way from Guam, he stopped in Los Angeles, on the way back, and just never made it back to New Orleans. So I don't know. That's one of the sad things. He didn't let my mother know. I don't know if he was just so discouraged that he started drinking. My mother didn't know if he was dead or alive. Didn't hear from him, but finally, he had a sister out there and they saw him and called my mother. They were separated. I guess, a couple of years later we went out to Los Angeles, stayed there about nine months, but he had really become an alcoholic. So we came back here to, we actually went to Slidell. That's when I lived at Slidell. Mom went to, my mom went to stay with her mother in Slidell and I really didn't hear from my father hardly at all after that. I guess that happens in a lot of families. Eventually, he remarried in Los Angeles and my mother remarried. But living in Slidell was different. Los Angeles, I liked Los Angeles in some ways, because, you know, you go to class and you'd have trips to the airport and trips to different places. We didn't have that over here in school, you know. The zoo was, everything here was segregated. So when we came back here and they'd teach us about airplanes, all kinds of things, it's second grade in Los Angeles. But you came over here and it was just very different. Slidell was different. I had only gone through first grade in New Orleans before I went to Los Angeles. It was a segregated school, but I don't remember a lot
about it, you know. I remember more in Slidell. That was also a segregated school. That's how it was, but the teachers were all dedicated, you know. The teachers wanted to make sure you learned and your parents, it wasn't like today where the parents jump on the teachers for this and that, you know. So we didn't have the same kind of problems in school that you have now. And on the surface Slidell was a small town. My grandfather on my mother's side only spoke French. Well, he did learn some English but he couldn't write in English. He wasn't literate in English at all. His father, my great-grandfather was from France on my mother's side and he used to travel back and forth between France and Slidell and New Orleans a lot. He did a lot of hunting, trapping, you know, fishing, and then had, my great-grandfather had a land grant from the King of Spain. So they owned about one third of Slidell.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Really?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Uh huh. The Laurent family, L-a-u-r-e-n-t.

MICHELE MITCHELL: L-u-r-e-n-t?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: L-a-u-r-e-n-t. And, his first wife who also spoke French died and they, he went to Mississippi and
married a woman whose mother had been a slave. He brought her and her sisters and brothers, some of her nieces and nephews all to Slidell, right in the middle of it. Slidell, have you been to Slidell?

MICHELE MITCHELL: Yes I have.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Okay. Right in the town? Well, in that part of town it was mostly everybody who was Anglo-Saxon. Across the bayou were French speaking people. In the village were people with darker complexions who spoke English and the French speaking people called them Americans. They didn't call them Negroes. They just said Americans because they were talking about the language and if the complexion was very dark. And if the complexion was very dark, it didn't matter if they spoke French they were called Creoles. See, a lot of people wanted to say Creole was based on your complexion, but the way I understood it it was the cultural.

MICHELE MITCHELL: A cultural thing?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: It was the cultural. No matter what color your complexion was if you spoke Creole you were considered Creole, but if you didn't speak Creole they called them Americans. The people who spoke Creole called people, other people called
them colored or Negro, they just called them Americans. And, in the middle part of Slidell it was mostly Anglo Saxons and here comes my great-grandfather and he brings his second wife, Emma, and all of her family. We had a lot of land there in that whole section and it's still pretty much like it was then, because the family owns all of that so you have different members of the family. You don't have streets running through but you have suburbs and shopping centers around. And an interesting thing happened. They never had any property, they never had any children together, him and Emma, but after I got my graduate degree in Urban Studies and I was in Covington doing some research for someone else. I didn't even realize that our family had owned all of this land. I started to do some property research and there was never a secession done on all of the property owned by my great-grandfather, Joseph Laurent. It seems that, you know, I always tried to figure out what happened, you know, and if you kind of think back on it it could be that the people in the town who were Anglo Saxon considered him since he was French, spoke, and my grandmother spoke French, or my great-grandmother, they just considered them, they were in town. They considered them like the stumps. Most of the were of German descent or English descent, not French. And I always imagined that when he went to Mississippi looking for a wife they were telling him go get a woman, you know, to take care of your children. But one of the traditions here in this area is that French and Spanish people
didn't usually just go take a woman. They married and they gave their children and all property rights. That was important to them. And that's how you get all colors and complexions of people down here with these French and Spanish sounding names. They were not slave names given and I think that what happened then is the whole town sort of turned against him at that point. Some strange things were done, you know, what happened to all of the property. And my grandfather, my mother's father, wasn't literate. She used to go with him a lot of times to read things for him in English and tell him what it was. And he had to sign "x's". So it's a strange thing. We know of some property that went, that was his and all of a sudden it belonged to the attorney that handled everything. So I've really never gone into all of that, but it's not a typical for New Orleans where we grew up. Because my grandfather went to Mississippi and married a second wife and brought her whole family there, we have people of all complexions in our family. We grew up together from a baby actually. I thought all families were like that.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Did you?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: I did. I thought all families were like that. I guess in a way I didn't grow up with any prejudice. I thought this was how all families are. You know, you marry who you want to marry. This is how all families are. And in New
Orleans, when I lived here I lived in the part that's called the Seventh Floor. I didn't know when I was growing up that it was called the, the same street where I live now on Miro Street is, I've always lived except for one period when we lived downtown, I've always lived within one mile of where I live now in New Orleans.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Really? Are you now along Miro Street?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: I live now on Miro Street about eight blocks from where I lived as a child. And before we bought this house and we were renting, we rented on Miro Street two blocks from where I live now. Not by design, you know. But people after I was grown, working for the city and somebody started talking about the Seventh Ward Creoles. And I'm, number one, I have never called myself a Creole, you know. The only way we used Creole was in terms of the language. Do you speak Creole? You know, now there was people like my husband's family, they lived down the bayou where everybody spoke Creole. In Slidell, my grandparents were Creole, but my mother, they didn't let them learn it because they'd go to school and they couldn't speak English and they had a difficult time in school. So they didn't let them learn Creole. But to me, where we grew up Creole was just a language to us. We didn't call ourselves Creoles. My husband, they called themselves Creoles. They spoke Creole, their families, the whole thing down
there. They called themselves Creole. We didn't. We called ourselves what other people called us. Colored. And you know, as a little child, I'd say well, all of these colors in the family I guess that's why they call us colored, because we have all colors.

In Slidell, race relations were not bad, because for one reason everybody was kin, white and black, Creole colored or whatever. Everybody was all mixed up. You could trace your ancestors back because so many people did have a lot of French and Spanish ancestry and some married into folks with German or English heritage. Some with Indian heritage. Some with African heritage.

You know, whoever they wanted to marry that's who they married. Part of it I think goes back to like the French Revolution where the people don't tell us what to do kind of thing and I think that attitude is still, you can see if people call "Dutch arrogant", that's Dutch arrogant. It's just part of the thing, you know. I have as much right to be who I am as you have to be who you are.

And so in some ways, in some ways that protected us from some feelings people who go through segregation have to go through with. The feeling of inferiority, because it's like everybody was just as good as everybody else. Nobody was better. Nobody was better than me, but I wasn't better than anybody else either, you know. And I think that was a blessing to grow up like that in the south. It was a real blessing and it helped me to get through a lot of other things.
MICHELE MITCHELL: Did you ever have any early negative experiences in your whole life being around segregation.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: When I was, I'm Catholic, still Catholic, and I remember because it was segregated in New Orleans we went to Corpus Christi Church which was a black, colored church, you know. We didn't have any integration in the church because nobody white came to the church. When I went to Slidell, most of the African-Americans, colored, whatever you want to call it, there was a church down the bayou where they spoke French and had the Masses, well, all of the Masses then were Latin, but they had their church because they all spoke that language and they went to that church. But most of the African-Americans were Baptist or another denomination. The Catholics in Slidell who were not Anglo Saxons were few and far between. So we had the last two pews in the church on the right hand side and I remember when I was in 10th grade that I went to Corpus Christi Church and the priest read a letter from the Arch Bishop stating that there would be no more segregation in Catholic churches. That whenever you went into the Catholic church you sat anywhere you wanted to sit. So that summer when I went to Slidell to visit my grandmother, it was the summer after the 10th grade, I told my cousins, I said, you know, we could sit wherever we want to sit in church now. We don't have to sit in the last two pews. So the way things were then in the country, we'd walk that mile to church
and then if you wanted to go to confession, you'd go before Mass and go knock on the rectory door and ask to speak to someone to hear your confession and he would do it. So the church was always open like an hour before Mass. So I got my two cousins younger than me, see, I didn't want my older sister or anybody else to know what I was doing. So I got my cousins and some of my other cousins, all of them younger than me and I said now we're going to go to church early. We're going to go all the way up to the front and sit in the first pew and if anybody tells you to move, don't move. I told my cousin, my good friend, I said, now you sit on that end and I'm going to sit on this end and don't let anybody out. I said if anybody tells you anything, just sit there and say your prayers and don't even look around. But sure enough we were in church. Nobody was in there. We sat in the front row and then when the ushers came, two ushers came early. You could hear them talking in the back. They came up and talked to us and said, you have to move. We didn't answer. We just sat in church and didn't move. So they couldn't make us move. Well, it was summer time. There was no air conditioning and people came to church and as I told you we had all colors in our family. So we had all colors across the front of the church. Nobody would sit behind us. So there was one whole side of the church empty and people were standing up all in church. A couple of people fainted because they wouldn't sit behind us. I was in 10th grade. My cousin was in about the 8th grade and some of the other ones were younger
than that. Well, needless to say, and the thing that the adults, colored, Negro, African-American, whatever, none of them came and sat up there with us. They sat in the last two pews. Needless to say, our parents found out. The only one who could go to church after that with me was my cousin, the one who sat on the other end. But every Sunday we'd go up to the front of the church, either or the first or the second, as close as we could get to the front of the church for the whole summer. And gradually people began to, they wouldn't sit with us. They might leave the pew behind us empty, but they had to eventually start sitting behind us. When Father came in for Mass, why he couldn't say anything because the Bishop had given his letter. But he was a big man. He was fat and he was big, Father Tim. He was out there. He was blaring at us. It looked like he was about to explode, but he couldn't do anything. One of the Sundays I went before, because we'd always go to confession about once a month. Knock on the rectory door. Father, could you come hear my confession? He slammed the door in my face. He did. But that's alright. Now you need to go to confession.

MICHELE MITCHELL: He slammed the door in your face because you were going to confession?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: I asked him to come to hear my confession and he didn't. He refused. He refused to do it. He
slammed the door in my face. And that was strange, you know. But you know what, God is good, because I just didn't even worry about it. I think this is where it's been a blessing that we grew up believing that we were just as good as everybody else, because I guess when I look back at it, I guess I figure that's his problem. That's not mine. I didn't say that, but as I look back at it it really didn't keep me from going to church. In fact, I was even more determined to go early every Sunday. That same priest, when my cousin got married, they built a new church, and almost all of the parishioners were white. Well, my cousin wasn't and it just so happened that when she was going to get married her church was going to be, her wedding was going to be the first one in the new church. And he told her, I'm not marrying you in my new church. Go down to the bayou, to ya'll's church and get married. And she went to the Arch-Bishop and the Arch-Bishop told him that's her parish. That's where she's been going to church in Slidell, not down in the bayou, and you are going to marry her in that church.

So you know the church is not exempt from it. Years later, in the church, I was working for Catholic Charities. I got to thinking about, oh, when, it was about '76, about '76, I was working. I had finished my undergraduate degree and I was working as a -- no that was around '78, '78 or '79, later than that. I had finished undergraduate work. I had some experience with the housing authority, some training. Very good background and experience and I was working for Catholic Charity in their refugee
program. You know, you had all of these refugees coming from Viet Nam at that time, settling here, and at first I was doing employment counseling. And my sister who had had years of experience in housing was the Housing Supervisor. Well, she left and went to Christopher Homes and the position of Housing Supervisor was open. I was asked to take it because I did have experience in housing. And I did, but I was told, you know, you have a few months. I got six months probation and we'll see if it works out, then we'll decide if you're going to be the supervisor. There was a white nun who worked with me as the housing counselor. So after the end of the six months, and I did an excellent job, I was told, well, we want you to continue to do this work but we're going to give her the title of Supervisor and the pay. I said, I don't think so. So I went through the channels, you know, wrote to the personnel department. Gave them a copy of the job description, copies of the work I had done, and I told them if you want me to be the housing counselor, I'll be the housing counselor for the housing counselor's salary and title. But I'm not going to do the supervisor's work and get the title and pay of the counselor. And I thought they would reverse her decision, but they upheld her decision and I was fired because I refused to do it. Now that was a very traumatic, that was very traumatic for me. It was more traumatic than trying to deal with the father who slammed the door in my face, you know. I ended up filing an EEOC complaint and because they were getting federal
funds for their program and other ones, they did do, examine that a lot and they had to hire a lot more minorities, federal. It was very difficult for me though, because here I was suing my church and I ended up dropping the suit. Things did change over there, but it was a very, very difficult time. I didn't handle that very well. I didn't handle that very well. I got extremely depressed at that time, but it wasn't my first problem with discrimination, you know, in the marketplace. I told you I went to college a year and then I got married and I had problem pregnancies. Well, once I went and took the Federal Civil Service test and started to work for the Department of Agriculture after I passed the test. Well, it was on Canal and Claybourne then. The building was called the Delta Tower. And when I went in I noticed it was one huge room where everybody sat. They processed payroll there for the whole Department of Agriculture. They had those little keypunch cards they used to use then, you know, those little cards. Well, I looked around the room and, you know, we had these tables all around. They had desks all around and in the middle there were tables, just rows of tables. Everybody black sat around the table. Everybody white sat at the desks, except for one lady, Addie, who had transferred here from Chicago. And they used to put dead roaches in her desk and do all kinds of things to her. Oh this was in sixty, around '64, '65. Lyndon Johnson was president with the, what was it, Great Society. What was it called?
MICHELE MITCHELL: Great Society.

BRENDA B. Davillier: And, I noticed also that everybody who was not white was called intermittent employees. That meant you didn't get sick leave. You didn't get annual leave. You didn't get overtime pay and we would work on the average of 45 to 50 hours a week. We'd work an average of 45 to 50 hours a week. So after awhile, you know, I'd been there about a month or two. Do you have a Civil Service handbook. So I looked at the book and it said that if you had, if you were intermittent and you had worked two consecutive pay periods at 40 hours a weeks for each week in those pay periods they were suppose to automatically put you on as a regular employee and give you your benefits. So I asked about it and they said, no. So I wrote to the Civil Service office here in New Orleans, Federal Civil Service. Well, they took my letter and they sent it back to my supervisor. They never did respond to me. So what they did is they would work us 39 hours one week and then they might work us 49 the next. So we were still getting in all of these hours every pay period but we weren't getting the 40 consecutive. Well, I said, well, that's how it goes and then I got pregnant and I was having problems with my pregnancy. I had to stop working. So I didn't resign. I just told them the doctor told me I can't work. They said, okay. So I didn't get sick leave. So I just wasn't working. I was like on a leave of
absence. After I lost my baby and I was able to go back to work, I went and told them, well, I'm ready to come back to work. Said, oh, you quit. No. No. No, they said we don't need you. We don't need you. I said okay. I went down and I filed for unemployment and they told the people at unemployment I didn't qualify for unemployment because I quit. I said, well, I processed those forms. Show me the form I filled out resigning. You know, I didn't resign. So they had choice. They could either pay me unemployment or take me back on the job. So they took me back on the job. Now, we used to work a lot of times on Sunday and there was one section again, like I told you, everything was open. Okay. The whole thing. Just like we could see everybody up here. You could see everybody working up there. There was this elderly lady called Verna. I don't remember her last name. They had a unit and it was all elderly, middle-aged and elderly white women, about eight of them on that side of the room and they would have to read and verify stuff on the card. The keypunch card. Hard on the eye. So sometimes when I was there on Sunday she would get me. She'd ask me to help her. So after I did that a few Sundays, she said, oh, I really do like the way you work. I'm going to promote you and put you on full-time in my section. I said, oh, fine. So one Monday I walked in and she had the desk next to her -- see, there would be two desk along the wall. Rows of two desks each. So I sat next to her and I'm doing my work and at the break -- you get a 15 minute break in the morning, a half
an hour lunch, a 15 minute break in the evening. Well, break time came and who usually talks to you on your break? Your friends. Right. Now these people worked right there. I had been there almost a year. They had never noticed who I talked to. Who I ate lunch with. That was because they didn't look at us. We weren't there, you know. So here I am. They all got up to go to the rest room. My friends came to ask me 'how do you like your job'. They sat down in the chairs these ladies used. They came back from break, the ladies, the white ladies, and they, oh Lord. Get something to wash my chair. I'm serious. It was so much commotion because they had sat in their chairs.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Get something to wash my chair.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yes. Wash my chair. Well, needless to say, they moved me back to the tables. They got me out of the desk. They moved me back to the tables. They didn't give me my promotion. I didn't get any benefits, but they had me doing the same work as the other people in there. So I was getting frustrated, you know, and I'd have things on my desk I'm working with. You know, your stapler and stuff like this and they'd come pick it up. I'd say where's my stapler. They'd say that's government property. So I'd go snatch it off their desk and say, give me this government property, I need it. Verna was so frustrated. She wanted to tell me I was working too slow. I
said, well, how much are they doing and how much am I doing? Is it less than what they're doing? I said I'm not busting my butt and they treat me like this. She even went so far as to tell me the chair that had a cushion was causing me to work too slow. So she got a hard chair for me to sit in. She, once when the supervisor, Smitty, was on vacation and she was over the office, she'd go sit down and write me up and I'd go to the typewriter and write her back. So this went on until finally she asked me to work overtime one Sunday and I told her, I'm not working overtime. You don't pay me overtime pay and I'm not working overtime. So they fired me. So by this time I was, I was just tired of it. So I didn't write to the local Civil Service. I wrote to the Secretary of Agriculture in Washington and Lyndon Johnson. That's how I remember Lyndon Johnson was president, because I said ya'll call yourself your "Great Society". This is a federal agency. This is what's been going on. And I told them everything that was going on there. So what happened is, my friend Cecilia worked there the feds went all over the place. All of a sudden everybody got their full-time status and got their benefits. Well, some of them were sitting at desks next to these white folks. Do you know a lot of them quit rather than have a black person sit next to them? They quit. They quit. Well, that just made room for more folks to move up. So that was a benefit. Well, they called me in. All of them had to apologize to me for what they had done to me and they said, well, we're going to give you a job back, you
know, with a promotion, but not in that office. They were going to put me in another building somewhere else. So I said, well, you know, I really don't want it. They said, well, what do you want. I said well, you fired me. They said we can't fire you. What do you want to do? I said, well, you know with everything you put me through I need a paid vacation. So I'm just going to stay home and get my unemployment, because you have put me through so much, I told them. And that's what I did until I was ready to go work somewhere else. But it was an interesting thing, you know. On the surface, you walk in that office and you wouldn't know how deep the feelings of resentment and racism were. You just see everybody working in the same room, minding. And one of the other things Verna did, see when I was pregnant, before I lost my baby, she had me climbing. She put me on different duties to try to make me lose. Climbing ladders. Doing other kinds of things and some of the other men who were black men, they said, oh, wish you wouldn't be in there. Let me get up there and get that for you or do that for you. It was a lot of different, just mean things. A lot of mean things.

MICHELE MITCHELL: This is about racism.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: It is and see, my little story, I'm sure it's not different from a lot of others. Now a lot of people who I, even with the church, we saw some good out of that, because
people gradually did begin to sit anywhere. The Department of Agriculture was fully integrated. The Catholic church was integrated because of it. And it's a lot of different stories like that that people had. But you go through that, people would look at me a lot of times and say, why you call yourself black. I went to a doctor's office once and they were asking race, and they said why do you call yourself black. I said, yeah. She was a dark skinned person. She said why do you call yourself black? I said, well, I sat in the back of the buses. I didn't go to white only restaurants, you know. A lot of things I didn't. I said, that's my experience. That's what I am, you know. Some people, you know I told you about the Seventh Floor. One of my co-workers when I worked for the city said all you Seventh Floor Creoles just alike. Ya'll think ya'll so good. I said, huh? I really didn't know what she was talking about. Well, come to find out they had some very prejudiced people who would say, you know, you can't come in if the fine tooth comb can't go through your hair or if your skin is darker than the paper bag. But I didn't grow up in that. I didn't even know about it.

MICHELE MITCHELL: When did you first hear about that?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: I was really dumb and stupid. That was in the 80s. I grew up all my life not knowing it, because we didn't, it wasn't like that in our family and with the people we
knew and we knew people of all colors. It was like we just never talked about anything like that. My sister, oldest sister, is dark complected. My first daughter-in-law is darker than you are and the one that my son is getting married next year, she's about your complexion. We've never had, you know, it's never been anything, it's never been anything about color. I had to get use to it. And you can tell people, but nobody believes you, you know. People may have that opinion. They don't believe you when you tell them that not that ( ).

MICHELE MITCHELL: When you get the question, why do you call yourself black more from darker skinned people or more from white people?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Well, probably more from white people. I remember when the buses were first integrated and I was waiting for the bus at the bus stop and there were two elderly white ladies standing there and me, just the three of us. And they started talking about how terrible that was, you know, ( ) to those people. And they went on and they went on and they went on and finally one of them said, well, what do you think? Well, I said, Darling, I'm one of them. I said, it don't worry none what I think. And they were too embarrassed and that was my whole point. You don't even know who you talking to so what difference does it make. People, like races, I tell people it's only one
race. It's the human race, you know, and then the human race may have a lot of different complexions, hair colors, types of hair. But it's just one race, you know, you have different cultures, different nationalities. But it's only one race. There's no Mongoloid race. There's no Caucasian race. It's only one race. It's the human race. A couple of years ago I went in to get a fishing license, because we were going to go fishing in the summer and I needed a license and they asked me for my race, in Slidell. I said, I'm human. She said, oh, I can't put that on this fishing license. You can't get a fishing license if you don't tell me your race. I said, well, I did tell you my race. I'm human. She said, well, I can't give you one. I said, do you know it's illegal to even ask race anymore. And she went and she got the floor manager. In 1991! There's a story in it. There's a story in it she had to tell him if she wanted to fill out her fishing license, you can put human. Get her fishing license. That's crazy. Crazy.

TAPE 1 -- SIDE B

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: I have had good experiences though with a lot of folks and I have learned that there are some people who just see other people as human, you know.
MICHELE MITCHELL: Would you say that that's been true across your life?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Not really. It's only, some people question whether integration had any effect and I think it had. It had some positive things because of integrations, because people have gone to school with other people, have worked as equals in the work place and have seen that everybody, you know, that people of any race can be competent or incompetent, both ways. All the same things. People of any race can be corrupt or honest and I have seen a lot more people who don't just judge people on the skin color or anything. I have seen a change, but I guess I haven't seen as much as a change as I would like to. Sometimes I think are hard to change.

MICHELE MITCHELL: You remember the first time that someone, anyone, questioned who you were? Do you remember when that happened?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: When I was aware of it?

MICHELE MITCHELL: Uh huh.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Oh, I guess the first time that I
remember it happening, Charity Hospital used to be segregated. There was a white side and a colored side.

MICHELE MITCHELL: What was the name again?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Charity Hospital.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Charity Hospital.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: There was a white side and a colored side. It was called white and colored. The white side and the colored side. And I had mentioned to you that I had problems with my pregnancies. Well, once I went up there I was having labor pains and I was in this special program. I know I went up there because I was in labor and they put me on the wrong side of the hospital. See they didn't ask me my race or anything. They just looked at me. Honey, this was this nice air-conditioned. I mean totally different from the other side of the hospital, but being placed in the, I didn't realize what was going on. I thought it was a special unit or something and I got better and I went home and then the next time when I went in and went in on the right side. Then I figured out what had happened. But see, I wasn't aware so I know what they must have thought, but nobody asked me. I remember when I was like a freshman at SUNO and I tried to get a job on Canal Street working in a department store as a sales
girl. I couldn't get a job on Canal Street.

MICHELE MITCHELL: So you were a freshman at SUNO?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yeah. I had finished high school. I
had gone to a semester of college. It was the semester break, you
know, with the Christmas holiday. They didn't hire anybody except
whites. They didn't even have to probably finish grammar school,
but I could go on Dryfus Street in the black shopping section.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Was this in the early 60s?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yeah. It was in 1960. But, you know,
I guess I don't see a lot of attention, because a lot of people, I
have found is that a lot of people have assumed that I was white
and I didn't know that was the assumption they were making. For
instance, when I went back to school at UNO. I had been married
for 10 years. So I had gone to school, stayed out 10 years, my
kids were small and I went back to school. And my semester in
college, I don't remember the man's name, it was an English poet
and I was made to read liberal arts ( ). Oh, he would tell me how
brilliant I was. That's the part, you know. How you understand
it? And I got cyst on my ovary and had to have surgery during
that first or the second semester. I was in spring semester. But
I didn't want to miss anything, so I had a friend of mine go and
pick up my assignments and I did my work in the hospital or at home and sent them my work in so I wouldn't fall behind. Well, my friend had her little Afro and everything. Went back to class. Number one, I had taken the mid-semester exam. So I went to him to see if I had missed the mid-semester exam and he told me I couldn't take it. He wasn't going to give it to me. I had to go to the dean to get him to give me my mid-semester exam. Then I go in class. He wouldn't call on me. He'd have all of these negative comments on my papers. Now this is the same man who told me how brilliant I was. See? So when I took the final exam and I went to pick up, I always picked up my papers, he actually pulled mine out and somebody's else's and it was a two part test. You know, the first part objective and the second subjective. I always did better on the subjective. Well, the one ahead of mine, I could see the grade and it was like the tope part of theirs was like 20 over 30 and the bottom part was something over 70. On mine he reversed it. The top part he counted 70 points and the second part where I did very, very well he counted 30 points. So he ended up giving me a "C" in that course, but I should have had an "A" in that course. I thought that's what he did, but I figured, well, that's just how it is. I didn't even go to the dean. I just said I'm not going to take him again. It was just a slate with no ( ) I had. When I went to register at UNO, the first semester I went to register, I went in and I was talking to the advisor and oh, he just seemed. I told him what I wanted to
take and, oh, great, great, great. And then he looked at my transcript and saw I had gone to SUNO for a year. Well, you know what that means, right? So, all of a sudden, I can't take this. I can't take that. When I started SUNO, I said I was going to major in art. So I had taken art courses and I wanted to take art as an elective. I think ( ) said you can't have it. I said I can have it, you know. The man, I'm back and forth between the dean's office and his office to make him give me art. They'd send a note. He wouldn't put it on my schedule. So someone had to come down to his office and tell him, stand there and make him put it on my schedule. I said, the other elective I want to take is Creative Writing. He said, well, I teach that course and I know you couldn't pass it. This was the first time he saw me. My grades from SUNO were excellent. I took 18 hours each semester that I was there and I had like a 3.8 out of 4 or something like that, average and yet my English grades were "A's". Yet he's telling me that he knew I would fail it, because he taught it. So he said, what you have to take, you have to take Shakespeare. You know what he's thinking, right? You going to flunk this. So I said, well, if he's going to teach Creative Writing, I definitely don't want it. That's how I took the course at Xavier during the summer, because I wouldn't take it from him. So I took the Shakespeare. It turned out I was brilliant in Shakespeare. (laughter) I did all my honor work in Shakespeare. Got "A's" in all of this. So I thought that then apparently he was sitting in
somebody else's office and the name on the door was not his name, but I thought it was his name. So whenever I saw that name I wouldn't take the course. I avoided that name. So finally I got to meet the man who really was Vern Tosson and it wasn't him. But I still didn't know his name. And I ended up taking a course from him. It was like in my last year and it was a drama course, drama and literature, with *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Well, that man was so prejudiced he gave us a test, again, they like to do this one half subject, half objective and I always did well on the subjective. Well on one particular test, I really prepared for that. I said, I know he's going to give us almost all the same. I did extremely well on it. Everybody who was white in his class always got "A's". Everybody else struggled to get a "B". Well, he came to class and he said, he actually said this. The students in my class who usually get "A's" did not do well on the subjective part of the test, so I'm not going to count it. He said, now, if you want me, if you think you did well and you want me to consider it, you can give it back, but whatever I give you as a grade, you have to take it. You don't have a choice once I tell you what you had. I was so angry, because then I knew who he was because I remembered him once I got in his class. I knew the face. I said, right in front of the class and tore up my paper. Well, obviously Mrs. Davillier doesn't think she did well. I said, on the contrary. I think I did superbly well, but I don't think you're objective enough to give me what I deserve. Now this
crazy man, after that I was changing my work study and I was going to go over, I wanted to do tutoring for the veterans as my work study. He told the guy, he didn't know that the guy's cousin was married to my brother, the black guy that was over that program, he told him don't hire me because I was unstable, mentally unstable. That I would call cabs and send them to his house in the middle of the night, that I would send a dump truck to dump sand and dirt in his yard, and he shouldn't hire me. The other guy told him, he said that I've got the job, but I went over there. I really lost my temper. I cursed that man out so much he ( ). If you ever tell anybody else anything like that, I'm going to sue the hell out of you, after I cursed him out. I was really, I was really angry. And on top of that, see, he did those grades. In fact, I got a "C", two "C's" in English. One in his class and one in that other clown's class. That kept me from graduating with honors in English. The only two "C's" that I had. In all of my honors work, I had all "A's", my honor classes, but I didn't, and the dean at the time taught me ( ) and I got a "E". And if I had known that he wouldn't have been discriminatory, you know, discriminated, I probably would have challenged those things, but I figured everybody in the system was like that and you just had to accept it, you know. But that was, that, I was, I don't know, you know, if he had said something about me that was true, I could deal with that.
MICHELE MITCHELL: But this was totally concocted.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Totally! Totally! I had never heard anything about it before and I had no idea. And I said, now who else has he told it to. You know, what is his problem? And you know what I think his problem was? He was so nice to me thinking, oh, she's a nice white girl and when he found out he was wrong, he made this mistake. He couldn't forgive himself. So he took it out on me. You know, stupid stuff. And eventually they got rid of him. But see, after that I'd tell everybody I knew that was black don't take any of his courses. Don't take. You know how you have your networks? Don't take his courses and if you do and he treats you like that, go to the dean. Don't take it. Eventually they got rid of him, but it's been mostly not people telling me why do you call yourself this, but assuming and then seeing what happens when they find out.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Okay.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: You see, and the way people turn and the anger and the resentment. People ask why, I didn't change? I was the same person who went in there that he thought was so nice as I was when he looked at my exam too. Nothing about me changed when he looked at my exam sheet. As a person. But to him, I was something totally different and I didn't ( ) some ( ), you know.
He made me so mad. He liked Blanche Duvall. So when we were on the Streetcar Named Desire, I said, well, I don't know why you think she's so much all she was was a prostitute. A drunken whore. That's what I think I said. He turned colors, but I guess that was my way of getting back at him because he kind of idolized, he thought she was the epitome of southern womanhood. Blanche Duvall. (laughter)

MICHELE MITCHELL: How you know that?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Crazy. And I'm not talking about the 60s or the 50s. See, this was in the mid-seventies. The one in graduate school was in the late 70s, '79. It's just crazy.

MICHELE MITCHELL: I'm curious about what you remember about Miro Street when you were little.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Well, where we lived there was a bakery next door to the house and the guys who owned the bakery shop were white. There was a drug store on the corner. The drug store owner was white. Okay. The neighborhood was an integrated neighborhood. Okay. Of course, people who owned the businesses were white, but we really did get along. I mean I don't recall any kind of racial incidents. Now this I do remember. I do remember this. When I went to Jones School which is right down,
Selina C. Jones, in the first grade almost everybody was much darker complected than me. And one of the things people used to say is, oh, you can't dance. You don't have any rhythm.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Really?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: They assumed that because I was light complected I didn't have any rhythm.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Really?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: It was funny. My sister, now she can dance. That's what they'd tell her. You can dance. And I used to want to learn to tap dance and everything. I dance very well. I have good rhythm, but they, you know, stereo-type. That's what they said. And in Slidell, that's another thing. My hair would blow all over, you know, and they would tease me about my hair blowing all over and if I'd go and wet it so it wouldn't blow, they would tease me and say you look like a wet chicken. I was self-conscious, very self-conscious of that old hair.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Was it very difficult, you mentioned being self-conscious, was it very painful?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: You see, at that point, because my
father had stayed in California, I think I was dealing with so much because of that that I just pretended to like to be by myself, you know. My cousin and I were good friends, but I always did like to read or draw. Quite kind of things. Never did like, I'd go out and go to dances and things. See how some people don't like to be by themselves. I can be by myself all the time and never be unhappy. I used to like Slidell when I could go in the woods, you know. go do different things. My cousin and I would make up poems or songs and things like that together. The two of us. I could deal with a small, but a lot of people at all, and I think part of it was my nature because I didn't like being around a lot of people and part of it was dealing with my father's. So those were some painful things, but I think most of it is related to that. I know my grandmother, I remember my grandmother sometimes when I was in about 9th or 10th grade. We'd go visit and I had a nice little dress on my step-father's mother had made for me. She'd say, now you put on your dress and you go visit Miss So and So, I forgot her name, a white lady she used to work for and show them we just as white as they are. And I felt humiliated, you know, but I had to listen to my grandmother. But I really thought, I said now, what am I going to go to this lady's house and say other than, oh, Mrs. Curtis, my grandmother said to come by and tell you hello. And she looked me over from head to toe, you know, and I felt like I was on an auction block. The way, people ...
MICHELE MITCHELL: ( )

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yeah. I remember that very well. I remember how that lady's living room looked with her little kid and I remember how they used to call my grandmother Mattie and she wasn't that much older than me and my grandmother had to call her Miss So and So. That burned, that irritated me. And I always made up my mind that anybody who called me by my first name I would call them by theirs. I don't care how much older they were and if they called me on the job by my last name I'd call them by theirs. I had people now all different colors, all that are working for me now and I have a couple that call Miss Brenda. I said, no darling. Either call me Brenda or Mrs. Davillier. Don't call me Miss Brenda. Said it just takes me back to my grandmother having to say Miss Nellie and Miss Mary and Miss So and So. If you have to put that title in front, put Mrs. Davillier, but my name is Brenda. I'm comfortable whatever you call me it's up to you, but just don't call Miss Brenda. Somethings is hard to get over.

MICHELE MITCHELL: What would be the reason?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: I remember once my mother, it was around Christmas time, we were in Slidell and my mother worked at
this restaurant. It was called Docell's. Her brother worked there and two of my cousins. Now as I told you, we had all colors in our family. They were all complexions and then they had another friend. I think his name was Fred Cook. He was very dark complected and he was one of the cooks. Well, for Christmas Mrs. Docell got mad and fired him for no reason at. I forgot what stupid thing it was, but you know back then it was hard to get a job because back then most jobs you couldn't get anyway. You know, clean somebody's house, cook in a restaurant. You couldn't even go in the front of the restaurant. You had to go to the back door to go into work. If you wanted something, you have to go to the back to order it. So on Christmas Day when she fired them, a lot of our cousins, all of them quit. Say you fired him for nothing. If he can't work, we don't work, and they all quit. She said, but it's Christmas Day, you can't do this I have a restaurant full of people. Said, that's your problem. And they all went home. None of them ever went back, cause I remember my mama sent me to pick up her check when it was time for her check. She wadn't ever going back to get her check. They all quit. The restaurant eventually went out of business. It was awhile before it did, but it did go out of business. And then so much inter-marriage, one family that owned this other restaurant in Slidell called the White Chicken. It was the Blackgum family. Well, this man and I think his father was from Spain but he married. I don't know if she was of English or German, whatever, and the lady that
took care of the children, well, they called themselves Creole. They spoke Creole, lived down the bayou, but they were all mixed up, you know. Indian, French, African, everything all mixed up down there. She took care of the children. Well, the woman died and he ended up marrying her. Okay. So he had children of both races and that's my husband. One of her children, the children he had by the second marriage is my husband's grandfather. So the parents ( ) is about your color, your complexion.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Really?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yeah. So this was his brother's ( ) the white kids, but they were segregated, you see. So everybody black had to go to the kitchen. Phillip would go there and he'd go sit in the front. He said, I don't know what you talking about. That's my brother's place. It's my family's and this went on and nobody ever said anything, you know. Phillip was right there. This is family. It's really, it's crazy. It's crazy. All of it is crazy. And I remember, I don't remember seeing this, hearing him say it myself, but I remember hearing people say, Earl Long said that there are less people of a pure race in Louisiana. You have more red beans in a handful of beans, something like that, than you have people of a pure race in Louisiana. Something like that. In other words, saying everybody is all mixed up. So it doesn't make any sense, because you have to deny your heritage
somewhere. You have to deny some part of your heritage if you're going to be a racist. It doesn't make any sense.

MICHELE MITCHELL: That's what's so ( ) about it. None of it makes any kind of sense.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: It doesn't. It really doesn't. I remember, I guess it was about 15 years ago. They had this priest in Slidell called Father Dindo. He died last year I think, but he was down the bayou at the parish down there. I think he was from Holland or somewhere. He had a nice accent. Oh, he was just a loveable person. And one of the customs down here on All Saints Day, the day after Halloween is to go to the cemetery and bless the graves, to pray for the people who died. Everybody, have you ever seen an All Saints celebration over here.

MICHELE MITCHELL: No, I haven't.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: The graves are all cleaned and white washed, put flowers, and you'll put candles. Each family, if you go for the blessing of the grave you stand by your family's graves, you know. Our children are buried in Slidell, the three we lost, and my mother. And you go stand by your family's graves for the blessing of the graves. Well, the Sunday after All Saints Day, when Father Dindo first got there he got on the altar, he
said, you know, I came here and I hear everybody talk about white this black that, but he said, you know, I never want to hear ya'll say that again because when I went to bless graves, white and black standing at the same graves. All of you all related. And he said, and I never want to hear anything else about this as long as I'm here. But see, he wasn't from here. He was from Holland and when he saw it, as he said, there was white people on the black people. White flesh on the black flesh. Like he said, and he started calling names. And it's true, you know.

MICHELE MITCHELL: What year was that?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: That was about 15 years ago. Maybe a little longer. You get older the time flies. You don't realize how many years it has been. I'm going to be 53 this year. Now one of the things that I had a hard time accepting is the people who call themselves Creole down the bayou. Don't you remember I told you we didn't live down there. The only thing I knowed about Creole was language. But the people down the bayou because they grew up speaking Creole called themselves Creole and a lot of other people called them Creole. But I just didn't know it. I had never heard such a thing. So, my husband would say he was Creole. I say you not Creole, you black. I'm not. I'm Creole. And a lot of people if they grew up believing that they were Creole they resent being called any -- they don't want to be
white.

MICHELE MITCHELL: They don't want to be white?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: No. Don't call them white. They not white. They call them self Creole. And I had a very difficult time. I used to get very angry about that. Get very angry about that.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Was there a lot of them when you were growing up?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: When I was growing up, I didn't hear it. That's what I'm saying. I didn't hear it growing up. This was after I met my husband and I was 17 years old. See that's the first time I heard people call themselves Creoles. Now we used to go, actually, we didn't go down the bayou very much even though my mother's family, they were from down there. They were living in town in Slidell. So when we'd go by my grandmother's house, we'd basically be right in that area. Sometimes I'd go by my grandmother's brother, Uncle John, and I would hear them talking Creole, but I never heard anybody call themselves Creole or call anybody else Creole. I only heard Creole talked about as a language. Do you speak Creole? Are they talking Creole? You never understand what they're talking about. There they go
talking Creole. This kind of thing. But, it didn't make sense to me, because to me he said he's Creole and I'm saying Creole is not a race it's a language. So how can he be Creole? That's a language. And then I understood it's also a culture. There's a definite Creole culture. Just like there's a Yat culture down here. It's kind of like in Saint Bernard Parish, I think, and it's kind of white or whatever they mix with. I know they had some Indian in there too, but it's like the ray Yat and they have a certain kind of language and idiomatic expressions that they use. There's a little column, a carton that they always have in the paper or they used back then. I can't think of the name of it, with the Yat talk. Y-A-T.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Y-a-t?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Y-a-t. Yes, and it's not part of the African-American, but it's another, just like they have Creole as a culture, it's kind of a culture. And you have a cajun culture that's a little different from the Creole. It's all kinds of culture you have here. You even have one part of New Orleans that they have Asian-American culture. You got a lot of different cultures, but when people start calling a culture a race, you know, it's not. And you can have people of any complexion in these different cultures. They speak the same language, have the same culture. It's really we have a lot of cultures and cultural
diversity is good. Nobody hardly argues that culture diversity is good. Most people agree. Oh, yes. Culture diversity is good, but then race, you know. Without stopping to think, they're not really talking about race at all. They're really talking about cultural differences.

MICHELE MITCHELL: That makes so much sense, just making you think straight. And I have to say I have never heard of a Yat culture before.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: It's like, the lower ninth ward. Oh, they have the po' boy sandwiches. And they talk, oh dat shop and, you know, the ways of grammar they use. They use a lots of dats instead of that and its, oh, I'll have to see it. I can't think of the name of the little carton that they put in the, with the funny little drawing. You know how it is with the squiggly little lines, outlining the noses and things like this. Nately and Biggs, or something like that or Vick and Matley I think it is. That comes in the local, in the Times Picayne. I think it's Vick and Matley. That's part of the Yat culture, you know, and one point they were doing a lot of commercials, you know, based on that particular culture.

MICHELE MITCHELL: This really has been wonderful. I really want to thank you. I have a few questions I want to ask you
concerning your family history. I really appreciate your time. I'm not sure. you told me that your father was a carpenter and then a contractor. What was his name?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: His name was Francis with an "i" Edwin Bozant. B-o-z-a-n-t. And everybody called him, he didn't like Francis, so people called him Edwin or A. T. Now where the A. T. came from I don't know.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And, your mother was from Slidell, but your father wasn't?


MICHELE MITCHELL: And Slidell is Tammany Parish?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Saint Tammany. Yeah. ( ) first ( ).

MICHELE MITCHELL: And do you know when your father was born, about?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: He was born around 19, I think it was 1917, because my mother was in '21.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And your mother's name?
BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Thelma.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Thelma with a t-h?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: T-h-e-l-m-a. Thelma Laura Laurant. Her maiden name was Laurant, l-a-u-r-a-n-t.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Your mother still living?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: No, my mother died in 1977.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And your husband's name?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Lloyd, l-l-o-y-d.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Middle name?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Joseph.

MICHELE MITCHELL: The reason I'm reacting like that is I just interview another woman who's husband was Lloyd Joseph as well.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: What was the last name?
MICHELE MITCHELL: Smith. And your husband's birthday?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: August 10, 1940.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And he was born in Slidell.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: A totally different experience.

MICHELE MITCHELL: It sounds like it.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yeah. Totally different experience. See they grew up without, see they had their own school and everything down on the bayou and it was like that was their town down there. You know what I mean. That was their territory. They didn't grow up with the kind of discrimination and the guys from the village, the people from the village who were darker complected they might go out and get into it, you know, with like a fist fight like the cowboys and then they'd be drinking beer together. So, they were friends, but they also had this little thing, it was more of a territorial thing though, you know. People would think it was racial, but it really was more territorial. He went to high school in the same school and one problem that they had then because like my mother's generation they went to the, not my mother, but the other one, you know, from
down the bayou went through 8th grade in the school down the bayou that was French and everything. Then they went to high school and couldn't speak English and they'd be speaking French or Creole and the other ones would think they'd be talking about them. So there was a lot of resentment. And then they couldn't pass tests and everything, because they couldn't read English. So they had a lot of resentment on that basis, but they really didn't have the kind of a racism. It was kind of like a territorial. Like this my neighborhood and that's your neighborhood. And if I go into your neighborhood, we're going to get into it and if you come in mine, we're going to get into it. And they'd get in their little fist fight and then they'll sit down and drink together. So it was, but he didn't have the kind of experiences that I had with racism because his grandfather, that's the one I was telling you, the grandfather's father had two sets of children and that was Theo's grandson or that was Theo's great-grandson and they didn't treat them, even if they got drunk in the bar room. You know how they do in these little country towns. Oh, that's Theo's grandson. Just let him go, you know. But they did that with all the kids. They'd say even if they were white folks, no matter what the complexion. Well, this is so and so's child or grandchild. Oh, send them home. It was like in a country town. If they knew who the parents and grandparents and all were and they knew ( ). Send them home. It wasn't, well, if you're this color, we'll send you home or if your daddy is white, it's like if we knew your
family. No matter who it was. It's not like that anymore, but he didn't have that kind of experience with racists. His was the other way. When they went to school in Slidell, some of the teachers would think that because they were light complected, you know, like you have some people figure you're prejudiced because of your complexion and so you get an attitude. But he had that kind of experience. He didn't have the kind I had.

MICHELE MITCHELL: It's amazing how much you can experience ( ) according to where they are.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yeah, and what it's like.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And your husband occupation?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: He's a bus driver. Drives a bus, three, how many years? Twenty-six years.

MICHELE MITCHELL: He's not tired of it yet?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: He's got a back problem now. He hasn't worked. He's got a ruptured disk and he hasn't worked for about two months. ( ) He had been a brick layer before that, but he kept getting pneumonia out in the weather and with the cement dust. So he stopped. He started driving a bus. His father had
been a brick layer. In fact, he bricked our house and I helped him.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Yes. ( ) happy attitude.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: What?

MICHELE MITCHELL: Does he have to deal with the public a lot?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: He does, but you know like, you know, he's, because he gets along pretty well with people and when they ignorant, he just lets it. He doesn't pay attention most of the time. He's got this little cup like I told you how they used to be in the country with a couple. I remember once, they used to carry the money changers on the bus and somebody was always stealing, holding them up and taking the money changer. Well, he had lost his money changing box, a couple of times they had taken it, and one night the middle of the night, like 1:00 in the morning, he had one person on his bus. He was going into the station. Guy went to get off, well, it was a Florida housing project right by the stop. And as he was getting off, he pulled a knife on Lloyd and said, I want your changer and your watch. So Lloyd gave him the changer and he gave them the watch and the guy got off the bus and went right into the project and then Lloyd
thought about it. He got off the bus. He went running by him. He didn't catch him. I told him he was crazy. He said he was just mad. He was so tired, taking his changer and his watch. And another time, a gang of young, young guys from the Saint Bernard project were on the bus cutting up and he put them off. You're not going to stay on my bus and do this. So they said alright. You have to come back through the projects. We're going to get you coming back. So through that night and when he was going through there he saw them all standing there with stones. Waiting to stone the bus. So he just slowed down to a snail's crawl when he went though, and he said, now throw them. And all of them dropped the stones and went home. I guess they figured he might had something with him, if he could slow down. But, you know, most of the time he's a friendly person. He waits for people. I remember some of the little kids in the project, little guys, would always bring him their report cards. They'd talk to him. Bring him their report cards. Show him their report cards. And, they would call him daddy. They didn't have a daddy at home. They'd call him daddy. I said I think you got children I don't know about, huh? But, I remember one little guy. He didn't have a jacket. It was cold and he didn't have a jacket. Well, my son had one that was actually a hand-me-down, but it was a, you know those leather Michael Jackson jacket with the epilauts and everything. Well, Lloyd's nephew in Los Angeles, it was his and he out grew it and he sent it to my youngest son. John had out
grown it, but the jacket was still there and it was nice. He came home one day and said, Brenda, you still have that jacket John out grew. So I gave him the jacket. That little child was so tickled with that jacket, you know, and the kid would say, oh, my daddy gave me this. He'd call him his daddy. And when Lloyd changed buses, he wasn't on Saint Bernard anymore.

END OF TAPE ONE

TAPE TWO -- SIDE A

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: ... some boy got on his bus. They used to hear everybody call Lloyd Red. Well, he got on the bus laughing one morning. Hey, Mr. Redneck. He couldn't remember it was Red. He called him, hey, Mr. Redneck. But he'd always get along with kids, you know. Look at their report cards. Children wasn't cutting up on his bus. They knew how to act. And it's a funny thing, because, you know, you get a gang of kids going to school and you know how they can cut up on those buses. They didn't cut up on his bus.

MICHELE MITCHELL: They didn't?
BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Uh huh. And some of them, he'd tell them if he'd put them off his bus, he'd tell them, now, look. When you see me coming, don't get on my bus. Said they'd step back and wait for the next one 'cause you not going to get on. He didn't want to listen. Don't get on my bus. And they won't.

MICHELE MITCHELL: That makes sense because, you know, no one should have to be putting up with that.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: See the other thing is, it just goes to show you people complain about the kids, but it's what you expect out of them and what you let them do. And I think his expectations were you can do as well as anybody else. You know how to act. And they do it. They do.

MICHELE MITCHELL: You told me about that you had an older sister, another sister, and a brother. What are their names?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: My oldest sister is Lynne. My younger sister is Alonda, A-l-o-n-d-a, and my brother is Ronnie, Ronald.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And are you right after Lynne.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yes. Now my father remarried in Los Angeles. So I have two other brother, Lester and Frank. He was
named after my father, Francis Edwin, but for awhile we called him Eddy. He doesn't like Francis. They changed it to Frank. And then my mother remarried. So I have two other, a sister and another brother. Sherrie, S-h-e-r-r-i-e and Herman. Yes. Their last name was Cath, C-a-t-h.

MICHELE MITCHELL: So your father, you don't think are college people?

(discussion of coffee and dessert with waitress)

MICHELE MITCHELL: This is terribly unfair of you, of me. Terribly unfair of me.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: I just talk too much is all.

MICHELE MITCHELL: No, I really feel bad asking you this about all these people. Do you know when everyone was born? About the year?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Barely. Lynne, let me make sure of this before I tell, she was born August 31, 1940. Alonda was born March 31, 1944. Ronnie was born April 21, 1946. Now Eddy and
Lester, I don't know. I guess Eddy and Lester were born around '50 and '52. Something like that. I'm not sure.

MICHELE MITCHELL: That's fine. And they were born in California.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yes. I didn't really meet them until my daddy died and I went out there. And my youngest sister, Sherrie, was born in 1959. October 13, 1959. And Herman, Junior, was born August 17, 1954, I think, two years after my daughter.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Then. I need your children's names and everything.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yeah.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Isn't the oldest Elizabeth?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yes.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And when was she born?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: July 9, 1962.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And was she born here in New Orleans?
BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yes. All of them were born here in New Orleans.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Daniel?


MICHELE MITCHELL: And John?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: December 16, 1968. And the three children that died, did you want their names? Gerod was born May 21, 1963. No, that was Dariun. That was Dariun, not Gerod.

MICHELE MITCHELL: How do you spell that?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: D-a-r-i-u-n.

MICHELE MITCHELL: D-a-r...

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: i-u-n. First boy. Gerod was born September 8, 1964. And Jeanne, J-e-a-n-n-e. Jeanne Marie was born January 21, 1966.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Now you've got two grandchildren. I'm
going to pester you for, you told me that you were born in New Orleans, that you went to Slidell, and you lived in California. Anywhere else that you've lived?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: No. No. I lived in New Orleans from the time I was born until I was in second grade. I had finished first grade. So I guess that was around 194-, I guess it was around '47. We lived in California for about nine months and then I was still in second grade. We came back here and lived in Slidell. So I finished second grade, went third, fourth, and fifth grade in Slidell. Then we came back to New Orleans. What happened, my mother's sister died. She had a sister who lived over here. Her sister had 12 children. Her brother-in-law worked for the post office on the railroad. He'd be gone a few days at the time. He couldn't get anyone. The kids ranged in ages from eighteen months to twelve years old. And when she died, he couldn't get anyone to keep them. Well, my mother was separated from my father. So she said she would stay there. So we lived there for five years and she kept 15 children for five years. So that's when we moved back to New Orleans and stayed here until I was a senior in high school. I went to the convent for a year, two hours in the convent my last year in high, would have been my last year of high school. I went to convent and stayed there a year and then we went to Slidell and I finished my last year there. That was 1959-60. And that's when I met, actually I say I
met my husband, but he was actually in the same classroom with me in the second grade, but I don't remember him and he didn't remember me.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Really?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: We were in the same classroom. Now we were at the same school for third, fourth, and fifth grade. We were not in the same classroom, we were in the same grade. I don't remember him and he doesn't remember me. Strange.

MICHELE MITCHELL: That's something.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Very strange. And then since then we lived in Slidell for about nine months after we got married and we've been here every since.

MICHELE MITCHELL: I want to make sure I've got this right. In 1941 to 1947 --

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: New Orleans.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Then you lived nine months in California. Los Angeles. Then you were in Slidell from the second grade to the fifth. Then you came back to New Orleans and stayed here
BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Well, actually until 1959, until 1959 and then I lived in Slidell from '59 to '60. Came back here and then when I got married in '61 we went back to Slidell for about nine months. So most of my life has been Slidell or New Orleans. Mostly New Orleans.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And you said that you went to Selina C. Jones. That was your first school?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: First school.

MICHELE MITCHELL: That was just the first grade?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yeah. Now, oh, you know, I went to nursery, because after, there was this nursery school. There's a church on Miro Street around, around Turow. Maybe not that far down. I don't know if it's a Baptist church or what. I can't remember the name of the church, but they had a nursery, day care there, and it was a black church. My father wasn't sending any money or anything. My mother went to work and I remember being there in nursery school and I remember a very, very traumatic experience there. They put me in the crib and they played funeral. And they carried me out like they were going to bury me.
Everybody in the school was dark complected except for me. And I remember that was a terrible experience, you know. I had forgotten about that, but I still remember how the building looked. When you went in the side, the first entrance and then on the side there was an entrance to the nursery and when you got in there off to the right there was like a little stage where you'd have plays and stuff. And they had the little things for the babies there and little things where you could play with your dolls, you know. The little kind that you could rock. And I was terrified and the teacher made me stay in it. Because I was light skinned. I didn't know it at the time why it was, you know. It took a long time before I remembered it. I went to that school. The things we do to kids sometimes.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And the teacher condoned this?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: The teacher orchestrated the whole thing. It was a long time before I remembered. I had to go through a lot of inner healing to deal with it and finally I remembered being really upset and my Mom was telling me, you know, because then you didn't question the teachers. You didn't question the teacher. And that might be why when I went to school I always wanted to sleep by myself. I had forgotten about that, but I know all through school I had a hard time trying to be friends. I didn't want to be friends with people. The way we
look at things today, we don't know how. Things are so different and I think it goes both ways, 'cause we've had crisis based on color going both ways.

MICHELE MITCHELL: I think now that people want to pretend that it doesn't happen or that it never happened.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: You know, but it still happens. I told you my son, both of my sons, all my kids are about my complexion. My husband is too. But I told you my daughter-in-law and my future daughter-in-law are about your complexion. One of them's darker. They went to school together like Daniel and Germaine would be taking classes together and you could, there were teachers that didn't like, they would give them bad grades, lower grades, because Daniel was dating, some of them assumed he was white going with a black woman. And they would discriminate against him and give him a hard time in class. Tracy and John would be walking down the street and people would stop and stare. I mean, this is not 20 years ago, you know. People still do stupid things. John, now John is an engineer and I'm not going to say where he's working. He's in training up in Minnesota. He just came back Thursday. He and one other guy I think are the only two blacks. A lot of people look at him and don't know what he is. One of the comments when they first got out there, this lady, white secretary, they were asking for somewhere to eat, and
she was telling them where they could go. And then she said, but, oh, you might want to go to this place and pointed to the dark complexioned because over there you can get some friend chicken. I know you like that. John said they, some of the things are meaner. They'll put 10 reasons why the company's moving to New Orleans and they'll have things about blacks. You know, just some kind of racial things. And some of them around him made different comments not knowing who they were talking to. Racial comments. I remember when he did an internship with ( ) while he was still in college and the guys were making all kinds of racial jokes and things. They didn't have any dark skinned people working there. They didn't know what he was. He doesn't say anything. He's just, I don't know, he's not like his mama. Daniel. Daniel has more my person, he's the one that just finished law school and he'll jump on you. John was always little, a little guy. So he's always even at school when things would happen with the teachers he wouldn't, he wouldn't say anything. I remember John was in 10th grade at Saint Augustus. You familiar with Saint Augustus High? Well, both of them went to Saint Augustus and they had cousins who went there before them, Davilliers, terrible. When my boys went, they had this bad reputation before anybody knew them. So when they would give Daniel a hard time, why Daniel would come tell me about it. When they'd give John a hard time, and I'd go to school and raise hell, you know. I wanted peace. If it was something they deserved, sure. Take your punishment. But if it
was something that they didn't deserve, like one teacher lost Daniel's paper and didn't have a grade and I knew he had done a good paper and I said where's the paper. What did you do with the paper? And he said, well, I can't find it, but I guess it was a "B" paper. So Daniel would tell me stuff like this. John wouldn't tell me. Both of them were in academic games. Are you familiar with academic games? It's one of these high school kind of, like Quiz Bowl and stuff, but they have these different games and they have competitions in the school and between schools and then city-wide and then state-wide. Well, when Daniel was in the 9th or 10th grade, he went to the national play-off. It was probably John's freshman year, cause he was a year behind Daniel. In his freshman year and Daniel's sophomore year, both of them went to the national play-offs. So Daniel used to help John. Well, John had this teacher, a white guy Brothers, a religion, and when we had to sign the papers to give them permission to go to the play-offs, he taught them Religion now, not Algebra, not Science or English. He taught them religion. He went a note home saying I don't think John ought to go, because of his grades. I said, well, what's his grade? He had a "B", maybe a low "B", almost a "C". That's no problem, he can go. How often do you get to go to the national play-offs? It was a week long thing. I let John go. At the end of the school year, he ends up with a failing grade in Religion and the only way he can go to the 10th grade is to go to summer school for Religion. I said, well, go and get
your exam, because if you have to go to summer school, I'm going
to make sure you know everything that was on this exam by the time
summer school is over. We went to try to get the exam, Brother is
not there. I called the church where he was assigned. He never
returned my calls. So finally John got the exam. I looked at the
exam and he answered 10 questions out of like 35. I said, why
come you only answered 10 questions out of 35. Don't you know you
were going to fail? You know, I was really upset. Said, well,
mama, Brother told us to choose any 10 questions and answer any 10
questions. But he had marked everything wrong and took points off
for everything he didn't answer. I tried calling the man. The
man simply wouldn't return my calls. So I called other students
in the class. I said, well, what were your instructions. I
didn't tell them what I said, just wanted to know if your final
exam was what we interrupted. Oh, Brother, told us to choose any
10 items out of 35 questions and answer them. Well, after I
talked to enough of them I went to the principal and I said, we
either change this grade, and he ended up with like a 97, or I
said I'm suing the hell out of the school and he's not going to
summer school and he's going to pass. They wanted to know the
names of the other students that told me that. I said I don't
have to give you any names. I said, you could call any of them
yourself, anybody can answer. Better than that, ask Brother to
give you the tests and look at them yourself. Now all this
happened because I asked ya'll why would Brother do that. He
said, oh mama, the guy's cheating on himself. When he went to the academic games, Robert told the class I want to fix that yellow fellow. Because of his complexion. Because of his complexion. And John had a friend, Gerold. Same complexion. He failed that boy. He did him the same thing, but his mother didn't follow through to find out what was going on and I didn't know that that had happened to him too until after he had gone through summer school. Cause if I had known, I would have called his mama and told her. See, John is not the kind of person like Dan is. See, John knew this. He knew he was putting up with this stupid man and he didn't tell me anything until it got down to me trying to figure out why would he do this. And I was like John. He hears all these different things, remarks people make and he doesn't respond to them. But this is what my children are going through now. I don't know how to tell anybody how to deal with, but what George was seeing with Daniel, I'd always be into it. But somebody over there acted ignorant. But see, Daniel was different from John. Daniel, in a way he's got a personality, that little tough guy personality like his daddy. But John always was easy going, you know, try to get along with everybody and he doesn't really like confrontations. He just doesn't like confrontations.

See the thing that bothers me is how much of this can you take internally without responding to it some kind of way. Why should they have to listen to stupid stuff like that? Why do they still have to listen to stupid stuff like that on the job? People
shouldn't have to do it.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Exactly.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: And, you know, it's so hard to get a job now. So I guess he figures, well, let me just ignore it and not deal with it. So, you know, you don't expect things like this and people say, how you stay Catholic? You know, the different kind of things and I had to deal with it. How do I stay Catholic and you have some kind of discrimination and I guess it comes down to the faith that you have in God and what you believe about the religion. Cause the religion, the Catholic religion, the Catholic church does not teach discrimination. It teaches just the opposite and I figured out one day that the priest are human, the brothers are human, and whatever prejudices they grew up with in their homes they bring it to the church, you know. And you can't judge all of the religion based on the people who are, supposed to be practicing it.

MICHELE MITCHELL: No, not at all, but it's still got to be difficult.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: It has been difficult, but it's one of the things that I've found, for instance, at one of the churches that I go to, Catholic church, Center of Jesus the Lord, and its
predominately white, but people of different cultures that go here in the city. And I've found a lot of acceptance there among different people. And again I find that people, we have our prejudices and we don't even realize we have our prejudices. We all have our prejudices that we struggle with. But most people, honestly, are trying to deal with it. A lot of people are trying to deal with it. I found a lot of them that are trying to deal with it and a lot of them that have acknowledged it and moved beyond it, you know. So I found it where I worked. I found it in church, that it's change going on, but its so much of it that's not changed, you know. I think one of the most insidious forms of racism that we still have today are against black folks who happen to be poor. It's as though they are labeled. It's as though they are labeled, "no good", "trifling", you know. Everything negative you can see just because the income is not at a certain level. I'm in housing right now. I'm the executive director over at Xavier Triangle and because I did work in housing before I went to ( ). I'm familiar with housing programs and with policy, some of the problems, you know, and in trying to design programs we have over 60% of our residents are renters in the city. Most of them black. Extremely high rate of poverty. A lot of working poor. Say you work at a minimum wage job, you're poor. You can work two minimum wage jobs and still be poor. When I talk about designing programs to make it affordable for poor people to own a home, a lot of people say, oh, well, you can't have grants. Now some
people the only way you're going to get into something is through a grant. Some people who may be ( ) shopping, the only way they're going to fix it is with a grant. They don't have any money to pay a loan, not and pay the rent or the mortgage, and the lights and the food. Try to help their children go to school. Yet, this mentality that's anti-welfare, they call it the anti-welfare mentality, they don't see anything wrong with helping the S & L's. They don't see anything wrong with the tax credits. It's like it's a whole different standard. They don't call that, it's a grant. It's a give-away, but they happen to be making a little more money. So that's alright for them. I find this extremely, extremely hard to deal with. It's more of a class mentality and a lot of folks that came up moved up from one to the other turn against them. You know, like I don't understand. It happens in this city that the majority of the low income folks happen to be black, but that's changing as you get more people coming in. Hispanics coming from Latin America and other places. I don't know how many illegal aliens we have here, but we have an increasing population that don't speak English. They don't speak English. But again, this is coming in now and it's racism, because most of them are non-white. And you can see, I've seen, you know, the teenagers that get into this, what is it when they wear the leather and the chains and all of this. What do they call it? I don't know what they call it. They call it something else, but the leather, the chains, earrings all over. A lot of
them are white, young kids. People would have a negative view of that, but not the same as young blacks. You know what I'm talking about?

MICHELE MITCHELL: Some of them shave their heads?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: They shave their heads. They do all.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Skin heads?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: They don't shave them all the way. They have all of these different kinds of things.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Different things in their head.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: And they wear leather. A lot of black leather and chains. I don't know. I forget. I don't know what they call them. But they look at them and say it's a problem. I don't know if I can explain what I'm talking about. But if you have young black kids that are doing that, oh, you know how they are!

MICHELE MITCHELL: I know what you're saying.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: I don't know what it's going to be like
for our kids. I don't know what it's going to be like for our grand-kids and all. It's a lot of, see down here in New Orleans, one of the things I don't like, I have mixed feelings about is the Catholic church is quick to get tax credits. You know, use public money to pay for Catholic private school education. The reason why is because the Catholic schools were integrated and they don't want to send their children to school with black folks. That's the reason and I've spoken against that. Letters to the editor. All kinds of stuff. They have a lot of segregation, we have a lot of prejudice in the Catholic church still that's why you have so many white churches in the suburbs. And the inner-city Catholic churches are having a hard time, because they would rather move than sit in the same pew and send their children to the same school. And you can look at it. Whenever Catholic schools start getting too many black kids, all the white ones, that's why you have so many more white private schools now because the Catholic schools are getting too integrated and it's pathetic. It's pathetic. If you do that, what are you teaching your children. What are you teaching your children? You claim to be, no matter what religion you are, but when you do that what are you teaching your children. You profess to anything racist.

MICHELE MITCHELL: That's exactly it. Sometimes I think I want to find something better out of a church, you know.
BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: You know in many ways church has gone out on a limb a lot farther than ( ) in many ways, but the church can't change the people in it. You have the church, doctrines and the official church teachings, but that doesn't change people's attitudes.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Well, even if there is a difference between the church and the people who belong to church.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Huh?

MICHELE MITCHELL: There's a difference between the church and the people who belong to church.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yeah, and no matter how much church, you know, like for instance the pope, comes out with pronouncements. If people don't want to believe it, they'll say, oh, well, we're still Catholics, but we just don't believe that. Oh, we're still Catholics, but I'm not worried about that particular part of it. And race is the same thing. It's some people with a bar ( ) or some of the other controversial things ( ). They take what they like. Pick and choose and still call themselves Catholic -- or Christian.

MICHELE MITCHELL: I didn't ask you for your middle name.
BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Ann.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Ann?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Uh huh.

MICHELE MITCHELL: With an "e" on the end or?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: There's no.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And in terms of written materials, do you like to be Brenda A. Davillier, Brenda B.?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Brenda Bozant Davillier. There's a Brenda Davillier who, that's her maiden name.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Really?


MICHELE MITCHELL: And you live on Miro, North Miro? The number?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: 1677.
MICHELE MITCHELL: 1677?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Uh huh.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And the zip code there is?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: 70119.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Oh, yeah. After Selina C. Jones, you went to Slidell?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: I went to school in Los Angeles and then, I don't remember the name of it. And then I went to Saint Tammany and at that time Saint Tammany was an elementary and a high school. It was the black school in Slidell, Saint Tammany. And then I came to New Orleans and I went to Polk's Christian for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. Then I went to Xavier Prep for three years. Then I went in the Holy Family Convent for almost a year.

MICHELE MITCHELL: After Xavier Prep?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Xavier Prep. Three years. Holy Family Convent for almost a year. And then I went to Saint Tammany for my last year of high school. I went to SUNO for a year and then I
got married and 10 years later I went to UNO, University of New Orleans.

MICHELE MITCHELL: You went to school and all in the 1960s.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: '60 to '61.

MICHELE MITCHELL: And then you went to UNO?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: '71 to '74 for undergraduate and then I got my master's degree there in 1980. I remember when I was at school. Her mother never told me what to do, but when I had, I had a scholarship to SUNO and I knew I was going to get married a year from the time I graduated. So I was going to work and mom said, well, at least you have a scholarship, why don't you go at least a year. I said, okay. I'll go a year, but I'm telling you after that I'm getting married. So I went to year. And when I was at SUNO that's when they were having the pickets on Canal Street. Picket the lunch counter. I told mama, I said, mama, I think I want to go and, you know, picket. And she said, well, Brenda, I wish you wouldn't. And since she never asked me, you know, that's the only two things I ever remember my mama asking me to do. To go to college at least one year and not to picket. So I didn't picket, because I said, well, you know, I didn't.
MICHELE MITCHELL: And this was the same time that you couldn't get a job on Canal Street?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Yeah.

MICHELE MITCHELL: What stores did you try to get a job at?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Woolworths, I think. McCorey's. I think I ended up working at McCorey's on Dryer Street. A college student who couldn't go ring up sales on a cash register.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Exactly. Can you give like your most important jobs. Which ones would you say would be your most important jobs that you've had in your life.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: When I worked for the city. Well, I've done teaching. I think it's important to teach. I've taught elementary school. I taught elementary school about six years.

MICHELE MITCHELL: When was that?

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: '74 to '76. Then I think it was like '78 to '79. Something like that. I don't remember. And then again, I taught, again a couple of years later that was '80, I guess around '80 to '90. Right before I kept my granddaughter.
'80 to '90. Two years there. So I'd teach a couple of years. Then when I worked for the city I was the housing coordinator and the deputy director for housing under Judge Morio. And now I'm the executive director of the Xavier Triangle. I did some consulting work, you know, after I left the city. One of the things I did, I directed part of a housing discrimination study here in 1989. It was part of a national study and I directed the part for the metro-New Orleans area. That was steering and other things the way they asked me to be, you know how they treat one person. In many instances, you didn't have any, they were given the same information. Everything the same information. And some of them, one person, the white person was given a better deal, lower rent. Some places you'd tell them you were buying a house, they would steer you to one place. In response to the same ad, others did and others wait.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Like in Chicago.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Like if they went to Slidell in answer to an ad in the paper, if they were white they were sent, oh, I know you came here looking in Slidell, but I think you would much rather live in Covington or Mandeville. There was one complex. It was like a big sub-division. I can't remember the name of it. This place, they didn't even allow the black person to go look at anything there. They'd act like the ad was for some other place.
That one was a real trip.

MICHELE MITCHELL: Do a lot of, do any whites live in Mandeville? I mean, that doesn't sound familiar.

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: Mandeville? Oh yeah. Mostly whites live in Mandeville and Covington ...

---

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: One of the things I've found is that some of the people who are most, very active in trying to promote justice have not been black. I see a lot of movement among people who are not black working for racial justice for all in a lot of places. I've found people who worked with me in the discrimination study. Now they were very sincere. They had to stick their necks out to participate in that. A lot of the people I was working with on the different jobs. Right now on our board we have those ladies. I still meet quite a few people who don't have the kind of prejudice that I, and who seem since. You know, they haven't yet turned. I don't think that they will. I see a lot more people now who want the city to be better. You know, want the community to come back. I guess, I know people who want
to bring back only certain people to the city. My point is let there be decent housing for people who already live here. Let's do that here. Let's get some people back in the city, but let's make sure that everybody who lives in the city has a decent home. Everybody. Everybody who lives in the city deserves a decent place to live, a safe community to live in and their children can be safe.

MICHELE MITCHELL: ( ) found one ( ).

BRENDA B. DAVILLIER: That's a minimum. Everybody deserves that. A lot of my good experiences have been also in the church. When I was like in studying for first communion in Slidell where you had all of the segregation. Our catechism teacher, I was in the public school, it was segregated, cause you couldn't go to the Catholic school, it was segregated. But when we went to catechism and we prepared for holy communion, for communion, everybody was heading for the same classroom. We had an integrated class, and the teacher, we had an integrated ( ) club. She gave all of us passes to the show that they owned. So that was a really positive thing. This nun treated all of us the same when we were preparing for catechism. It was a different experience. The sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, and at that time all of them were white, I never experienced any discrimination from any of them. I never remember any of them talking down to any of the kids. You know
what I mean? It was always, they were always trying to get the best out of everybody. It was a very, very positive experience and I had a lot of encouragement. I've seen a lot of encouraging things and I guess because they were nuns, I didn't consider them white. I couldn't consider them white. (laughter) This was at the Blessed Sacrament. At Corpus Christi School and they had, and I think here in the city and wherever they've been they've been an extremely positive influence. They have been, I remember one pastor, Father Time. My husband's aunt was dying. She had been away from the church for years, because of a racial experience in that family years and years before. And when I found out she was dying and asking for a preacher -- he had never seen her before. I called him up at 11:00 at night and he said well, pick me up and take me over there. And he went to her bedside, gave her the last sacrament. As soon as he finished, she died. When I told him about the experience that her family had gone through, he went to () and apologized to the family for what had been done to them. You know, I've had, just like you wouldn't know I had those, some negative experiences. I had some very positive, experienced a lot of encouragement, you know, praise, support. I had one of my teachers in Urban Study who really helped me in terms of getting a certain job. You know, for every negative experience I had, I'm sure I had at least twice as many positives. And that's what helps people get through. That's how I got over. And I just don't want that to go unnoticed and the same is true with your
friends. People of all different complexions. I've had positive and negative experiences everywhere, but I've always had more positive than negative. Always had more positive than negative. From the teachers, you know. Even people in the work place. They'll be helping you out and being supportive in different ways.

And sometimes I think when we start to remember things, so often we get caught up in the terrible things that happen that we forget all of the good things. I remember this lady. She lived down the block from me right after I got married. I was on New Wood. She was on Log. And she had diabetes, heart trouble, high blood pressure. You name it, she had it. And most of the time she was just in her house, taking her bed, in her bed taking her insulin or whatever. Her husband was so grouchy and so mean. He said, would you get me a quart of milk when you go to the store old woman and he'd start to fuss. So I sat there one day and I said, why do you stay with him and he's so mean. Said, oh, that's just his way. He's going to bring the milk. And after she died, before he did, and after she died, he'd come over to the house sometimes and sit there and talk to my husband and talk a minute.

And I saw him as a different person and he acted different. And I said, I guess this is way she saw him a lot of times even though he was gruff and he was mean to me -- the way that side appeared to me when I saw him talk to her. And I think sometimes that's how we are with racists. Some things happen and it evokes something, provokes her feelings, you know, and we act certain
ways. But if we put it into perspective, God is still good. He brings us through a lot. I'd like to see all of this when ya'll finish whatever you're going to do with it.

MICHELE MITCHELL: I really want to thank you so much ...