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## Burbridge, Richard and Doris Interview 2

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Transcriber: Dominique Jean-Louis

Mark Naison (MN): That's better. Okay, today we have Richard and Doris Burbridge back to talk about their remarkable genealogical research. Today is Monday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, we're at Fordham Univeristy and with us are Natasha Lightfoot, Brian Purnell, and...right. Okay, so what I'd like this to do is if the two of you can begin and talk about how you began to do this kind of research, and then we'll start with the West Indian research and then move into the U.S. research.

Richard Burbridge (RB): Okay. Well you started first...

Doris Burbridge (DB): Well, my mother used to tell me about her parents in Antigua, Freetown, Antigua, which is Caribbean, part of the Antilles. And so I used to write little notes down, but never really done any type of research. But then Richard attended a class regarding genealogy at the Public Library, and then came back and told me all about it.

MN: And what year was that?

RB: That was 1992, just about this time, March '92, yeah. Queens Library did a three part series on genealogy, and I attended it, and I had a little early success, because they gave us homework [Laughter], you know, go to the census, and see if you can find your folks. And I did. And, so that started off a little bit.

DB: Yeah

RB: Well, you know, I might go into my whole thing, and you wanted yours first so...

DB: No, go ahead.

MN: Do it, maybe ten minutes, of your thing and then we'll switch

RB: Right, okay, fine. That same year, '92 I received a telephone call from my brother, and he went to visit our cousin in Mississippi. My parents, my father came from Biloxi, Mississippi, and my mother came from New Orleans. And we went to visit, my brother went to visit my father's first cousin, and she brought out the proverbial shoebox [Laughter], which had some information. In fact, it had quite a bit of information.

Another cousin had went to the National Archives in Washington, D.C., because she had heard that we'd had an ancestor who served in the Civil War. This was unknown to me, I knew nothing about it. And so when we saw, my brother saw the records, we really got \_\_\_\_\_, as Reverend Sharpton yesterday, [Laughter] surprised and infuriated, because I can almost remember his call, he said, 'We have a great-grandfather from Kentucky!' That's news to us. We knew nothing about Kentucky. And some lady got three hundred dollars for his enlistment in the service. It was her slave, she enlisted him in the army, she got three hundred dollars.

MN: Now, have you heard of other cases where slave owners enlisted their slaves in the Union Army to get the cash payment.

RB: Yes. About 4 years later, at one of our conferences, of the African American Historical and Genealogical Society, Incorporated [Laughter], one of their relatives, this young lady's relatives, had three of her, her great-grandfather, and her two brothers, they were also enlisted. And they were also from Kentucky, by the way.

Natasha Lightfoot (NL): Were they from the same town, where your grandfather was?

RB: I don't recall from where...

DB: Well, people talking, I guess. Sharing records.

RB: Her slave-owner got nine hundred dollars. For the three slaves.

NL: Wow, so three hundred was the going rate.

RB: Oh, that was the top rate. Sometimes you got less. But she got nine hundred dollars.

And in our organization, everybody's studying genealogy, so to them, this was old hat, you know, (Laughing) what's so unique about that? But my brother was infuriated, and I felt kind of a discomfort also. So I went down to Jackson, Mississippi, where this cousin lived, and she gave me copies of this information. And it's about this high, maybe more of all the papers, from the Civil War records and also the pension records.

MN: So did she have his Civil War records in the box?

RB: Yes.

MN: Wow!

RB: These were copies, though.

MN: Yeah, but even so, so she had them in the box.

RB: Right. But the astonishing thing: we knew nothing about Kentucky. Because we knew our father came from Mississippi, and we knew my mother came from New Orleans, and they met in Biloxi, Mississippi, and they came up to New York, and that's where we were born, my brother and my sister and myself. So that was the astonishing thing. Kentucky? All I knew about Kentucky was the baseball bats [Laughter], you know that's where they made the...

MN: Louisville Slugger

RB: Louisville Slugger.

MN: I visited their factory when I was there.

Brian Purnell (BP): Is that, you said that you and your brother were shocked by learning this, but also you said discomfited. Why would this cause you and your brother discomfort to learn about this?

RB: Well, if you read anything about the Civil War, about the soldiers, military action could cause you death, but most of the death was by disease. You know, they suffered from dysentery, not malaria, but cholera, and things like that. Especially if you didn't come from a large city, where you're used to millions of people, but those from the farm area, like my great-grandfather, they could have perished easily, and many did. They were so...

NL: And this was your great-grandfather on your mother's side?

RB: On my father's side.

NL: On your father's side.

RB: Right. Yes.

(??)So after the owner was essentially paid, was he guaranteed his freedom after the Civil War?

RB: Anyone who joined into the military, they were free. Once they signed up.

(??)Is it possible that after he had gained his freedom that he would have moved to Mississippi.

RB: No. He came back to the Lexington area, and this is where he joined up, or where she enlisted him.

MN: There's something else extraordinary that, you know, we, at least I was astonished by which is that it's...your great-grandfather also belonged to a freestanding black church, all of whose members were slaves. And when we, you know, learned African-

American history, we were often taught that slave-owners were threatened by independent religious expression among slaves. Yet here was a church with its own building that served African-Americans who were slaves. And you also said in your genealogical society that that wasn't unusual, either.

RB: No, it isn't. But, if you look at the library, because I was writing and I am writing a novel about my great-grandparents, a fictional novel, and I created a scene where they were under a tree, and some of the slave-owner's relatives were watching from a short distance, and one of the relatives is reading from the Bible, and I mentioned that the slave-owners had torn out pieces from the Bible, so they wouldn't get any ideas, you know, of insurrection. Well, there's a book called the Concordat, I believe, it gives a synopsis of the Bible, and if you want to learn anything about the Bible, any phrase or anything, they break it down for you. I looked up slavery in this book, and every records to slavery: 'Obey your masters,' (Laughing), that's the primary thing. So I had to tear that part out [Laughter] of my novel, because this is basically what they thought, it says it there in the Bible.

DB: No, but I think he's trying to explain that you have the service under the tree that when you found out the information about the church, they had their church service inside a building, which they had for themselves.

RB: Yes, that was in Midway, a town called Midway nor-, west of Lexington. See because when I first received the information, everything we had on the Burbridges was from Lexington, Lexington. Then later on we had some records from Woodford County, which is an adjoining county. Lexington is in Fayette County. And what I later learned

is that my folks came from Midway, and this is where that reference to the folks having their own church, which was started in 1832.

DB: We don't have the picture of it though.

NL: That's what I wanted to know, do you actually have any, you know, kind of proof of the actual building having been in a certain spot?

RB: We have drawings of the church.

MN: Do you have any with you here?

RB: I believe, let me take a look.

NL: Where did you get those drawings?

RB: Well-

DB: That's another friend [Laughter].

RB: Yes, a friend of mine...

MN: Actually, why don't we hold up, this is for the camera, this is the Union Army service paper, this was when-

RB: This is the compensation form where Nancy Flemings receives her three hundred dollars, and it's called 'Claims for Compensation, right, slave name Thomas Burbridge. And in here, she mentions that "he was born in my house, and has lived with me ever since."

NL: How old was he when he was enlisted, do you even know?

RB: Twenty-two years old. Twenty-two years old.

Is it possible that that's because your family, or the county has records that you could-

DB: We went through so many records!

RB: We've been to the records in...

DB: Different counties.

RB: Fayette County, Woodson County, Scott, Bourbon, yes. Because one of the things we were looking for is how did we get the name Burbridge, because her name is Fleming, so...

DB: And we noticed a lot of time looking at the records, you know, the slaves are willed to families, as a wedding gift or something like that. So we were looking for some type of document to show where did he come from, or how did he get into the family, you know, that's what we were searching for, to see if he was mentioned at any other time. But not all the time do they put the names of the slaves, they put the age and the sex, but not the name when they have the will. So we looked through all the wills pertaining to Fleming, to see-

(??)And there's no place name, either, around that area?

DB: The place name? No, no, there is none.

RB: Oh yes! Oh yes, there is a Burbridge. There's a General Stephen Burbridge.

DB: Oh, the name. Oh, the General in the army, yeah.

RB: And he's been our biggest clue [Laughter]. As to how we received the name.

NL: Okay, and he was a general from Kentucky in the Union Army.

RB: In the Union Army.

NL: Wow.

RB: Actually, my great-grandfather served under him. But, you know, five or six levels away from him.

NL: So you don't know if he knew him, or had any interaction.

RB: No, we went to Kentucky University and looked at their records...

DB: Looked in every box

RB: ON General Burbridge, and no mention of any slave names or anything like that.

Mostly pedestrian stuff, but as I was telling Doctor Naison this, in Kentucky, General Burbridge was known as Burbridge the Beast [Laughter]. And the reason he's called The Beast is that after his service, and as still during the Civil, he was given the post as sort of an appointed official by Abraham Lincoln to be a civil servant, in charge of this section of Kentucky. Now Kentucky was a neutral state, so some people were for the North, some were for the South. Most of it appears to have been for the South. However, many of those, who were for the South, they used to do military action, but not in the military.

MN: So that would be called guerrilla warfare?

RB: Yeah, guerrilla. However, worldwide this takes place in Vietnam, Japan, Germany, all the wars that have gone on, if they catch you fighting, and you're not in a uniform, they put you up against the wall. It's the standard operating procedure. The rules of-the Geneva Convention rules of war doesn't protect you in that state. So what General Burbridge did, he would take those who were caught, you know, the Southerners, he would take them to their home town, and he would have them hung in their home town. And that's how he acquired the name, Burbridge the Beast.

MN: Tell them where he eventually ended up.

RB: After the war, or probably before the war, he left Kentucky, because his name was mud. He wound up in Brooklyn. Brooklyn, New York, that's where he died.

MN: Some of it spilled over into Canada.

RB: And he's buried in Arlington Cemetery. Now I was juts reading a letter that General Burbridge sent to the higher authorities while he was still on active duty, and he talked

about the conditions at Camp Nelson, which is where most of the recruits went. Training Base. And their families also went to the base, and they lived across the highway from the base. And he was trying to get rations for them, because winter was coming on, and he wrote, he writes a letter stating that please send some rations otherwise these people are going to die, they won't survive the winter. So there was a good side to him also.

BP: (Laughing), give him some credit.

NL: Besides your great grandfather serving in the war, do you have any recollection, or any knowledge of other family members from that area that were enslaved that, you know, might have had other lives, outside the military service.

RB: No, the only ones I know of are the direct descendants of Thomas

DB: And his wife

RB: Yes, you're correct, and his wife, Mary Christopher, and they remained in Lexington for a while after the war, he returned to Lexington.

MN: Now was she a former slave as well?

RB: Oh, yes, oh, yes. She mentions that in fact she's responsible for all the information about Thomas Burbridge because he had problems with his health and they left Lexington, Kentucky, and they went South to New Orleans. And if you've ever been to New Orleans in the summer, it's very hot, very humid. So the people there told them, 'This is not a good place for your husband, you should go further east to Mississippi, and go to Biloxi, because it's on the ocean, you get the cool breezes.' Though it still gets very warm there. And that's where he died. He died in 1885.

MN: Mary Christopher wrote all those letters.

RB: Right.

MN: Was she lit-did she learn literacy skills while enslaved?

RB: From what we gather, yes, she was.

NL: Was she also owned by Mrs. Fleming?

RB: No, she was owned by a cousin. What was the name of the cousin?

DB: The youngest, the Sullivan family.

RB: The Sullivan family.

DB: But they were related, the Sullivans and the Flemings were somehow related.

RB: They were related by marriage.

DB: So they sort of interchanged slaves sometimes.

NL: That's what I was going to ask.

[unintelligible]

(??)It's interesting that she was literate, because that's almost in direct contradiction to Frederick Douglass' book, with the family in Baltimore that the woman who tried to teach him, her husband would be 'they need to remain illiterate.'

RB: Right. Well, her husband died around 1845 or something like that. And we have a will from 1839 where some of the Christophers are listed.

NL: Oh, okay. You're talking about Mrs. Fleming. Mrs. Flemings' husband died.

RB: Yes.

NL: Okay, in 1845.

RB: Roughly around that time. And we have a will that was made in 1839.

MN: Now, as Mr. Burbridge literate at the time of his enlistment?

RB: We're almost-Pause, like they say on Maury's show-we're one hundred and fifty percent sure. Primarily because he joined in June, and early July he was made First

Sergeant. And as First Sergeant, he was in charge of about a hundred men. And later on, before he left the service, in 1867 he was Sergeant Major of the entire regiment, and that's over 2000 people.

MN: Now, is it possible that, in Kentucky, the slave-owners had a different philosophy than let's say they had in Mississippi, or South Carolina regarding literacy of slaves and maybe, using a contemporary term, they would get more out of their slaves if they were literate than if they weren't.

DB: They probably had more responsibilities in the other states like Kentucky, that's what I'm thinking.

RB: Well, also, Kentucky never passed the law, which said that you can't teach the slaves.

MN: So this was a law in most other states with slavery but not in Kentucky.

RB: Exactly.

MN: Some visit, visitation here.

RB: I mean, there are so many contradictions. But let me get a sample of her handwriting.

(??)This is a question, I actually don't know, was is because of the type of farming in Kentucky -----inaudible-----

RB: They didn't have the large estates like you found further south. They did grow some tobacco there, and hemp. But the big thing in Kentucky was horses! Horses! Right.

Exactly.

MN: That's better than-

(??)And what is this letter talking about?

RB: It reads, 'I, Mary Burbridge, age, forty-seven years old, take an oath that this is true,' then skipping a bit, 'I never applied for pension before ---claim, nor did my husband ever apply for pension. I know that he was never in the military until he joined the U.S. Colored Troops,' which they were called, U.S.C. Troops, 'In Company D, one hundred and fourteenth Regiment,' that was his regiment, 'I was present with my husband when he died, in 1885. There are no public records of death in that town, and the only evidence is the persons who saw my husband dead. My husband lived in New Orleans, Louisiana, but I and my husband were at Biloxi on a summer resort, and for his health. And we were really strangers at that place, and it is difficult to procure evidence from that place. Mary Burbridge.' And this is what this reads.

(??)Not only is she literate, she's eloquent.

RB: Right. Very much so. This is 1892, October. And she stayed on their case through 1917 when they finally gave her a pension. And in the process, you have many people testifying that they knew Thomas Burbridge of Kentucky. And this is by John Trimble, and I picked him up primary because he also served with Thomas in the military. He's listed on their roster. And not only that, but I found his grave. This is his grave, right in the African Cemetery, Number Two in Lexington. Now I have a very good friend, her name is Yvonne Joas. And she is dynamite.

MN: Can we hold this up? A picture of the writing and the gravestone. And they called it at the 'African Cemetery.'

RB: Right. African Cemetery Number Two.

DB: That's in Lexington.

RB: Yeah this is the writing here, and this I just transcribed. Right.

NL: Well, back to the church, because I was intrigued in how you were able to find a drawing of where the independent black slave church

RB: Yes, about three years ago, I received a telephone call from a Ms. Brenda Jackson of Midway, Kentucky, which is about, maybe about eight or nine miles away west of Lexington, and she asked me 'by any chance are you related to a Thomas Burbridge', and I said, 'I most certainly am!' [Laughter]

NL: It fell in your lap.

RB: (Laughing) That's right, I've had a lot of things fall in my lap. And she said that she was the church historian, and they were going to have a celebration of the anniversary of the church.

MN: What was the name of the church?

RB: It's the Second Christian Church of Midway.

NL: And do you know what denomination it is?

RB: Ah, yes, it's called the Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ. And so she said that she would-if I had any information on him, and I said yes. [Laughter] Could you send me some information? And I said fine, and I sent her a little bit, and she was very pleased, she sent me some information. I have a binder that's about this big with information on that church.

NL: And the church still stands today, though?

RB: Yeah, a different building.

NL: Right.

MN: But the same church.

NL: --Congregation since the 1830's.

RB: Right.

MN: Now, can we presume that the members of that congregation were literate when they joined it, or not necessarily?

RB: I would have to say yes, because I am, what do you call it, prejudiced, shall we say, because we have this little, that I think I showed you, right? Right here, oh yes, here it is. And this is a letter about the members of the Christian African Church of the city of Lexington. Because after Midway, he went to Lexington.

MN: What year was this?

RB: This is February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1858.

MN: The Christian African Church. Again, the term African.

RB: Right. And they listed members of the church, which is Rosanna Christopher, which is Mary Christopher's mother, right. And Sally Butler, Mary Christopher, Melinda Christopher, Thomas Burbridge, and then they mention some others. And then later on there's a article about 1876, where they have a meeting at the Lexington Church, and it says 'Brother Burbridge was called to the chair on motion the number of delegates was limited to four brothers. H.M. Eyers, T.C. Burbridge, G.W. Reid, and Ellison King, and Alex Campbell.

BP: That's significant

RB: Yes, but while we're in Midway, here's the Freedman's Bureau Report, December 1868. And the Freedman's Bureau, in addition to-

MN: Let's hold these up too. Nobody at Fordham has ever seen things like this before.

RB: Neither have I. But Mrs. Jackson provided me with this information. The Freedman's Bureau also set up some schools. So that the people would become literate.

And this is a list of their schools in that area. And I'll just turn the page when you're ready. Okay. They're listed. And they have Woodford, which is the county, Midway, and it says, 'Trustees, one colored,' meaning the teacher, 'and it's T.C. Burbridge.' And then it mentions the number of students that he had.

MN: Wow.

RB: Twenty-six.

NL: So he taught in a Freedman's Bureau school.

MN: After the war.

NL: Unbelievable.

MN: And he was a Sergeant Major in the Regiment.

RB: Right, yeah, yes. So we had many, I had plenty of help. But Ms. Joas is the one who gave me quite a bit of information. But I also looked on my own. I received the copies of the Adjutive General, and it lists the soldiers. This is his company, D, where he's First Sergeant. And we have a friend who is from Kentucky, and this friend's great-grandfather served in the same unit, 114<sup>th</sup>,

MN: Now, that was the group that was in Camp Nelson?

RB: Yes.

MN: This was the-and so General Burbridge was asking for rations for the black soldiers.

RB: Not for the soldiers, but for their relatives, for their wives and children who were across the road.

MN: So that's who he was worried that they might starve.

RB: Right, because they weren't guaranteed food. The soldiers were.

MN: The soldiers were guaranteed food.

RB: Yes, they would get food.

NL: And often the families came with the soldiers.

DB: Oh, yes.

NL: That was a consideration.

RB: Right, because once the camp opened up, once you made it unto camp, you were free, so you know, folks were coming. [Laughter]

NL: Bring your family, too.

RB: Well, even if you, let's say you're a woman and you have children. This is the place to go to, right?

NL: So you think Mary was camped, or no?

RB: She never mentioned it.

NL: Okay.

RB: She never mentioned it. I believe she stayed in Lexington.

MN: Now, is all this going to be in your novel?

RB: Some of it will. [Laughter] Some of it will.

(??) Did he ever see any action? On the- hold on, my-okay, I thought it was-okay. They held them in ----

RB: Yes, I had copies of his service. They have unit records. And as far as I can tell, they never saw action. And those who received Medal of Honors, things like that, his unit didn't. And there's also records of how much action each unit saw. No record of the 114<sup>th</sup>. But, they did go to a lot of places. [Laughter]

DB: Show them Camp Nelson.

RB: Okay, yeah, well these are pictures of Camp Nelson.

MN: Wow.

RB: And this is in what is known as the Kentucky Explorer. It's a magazine for folks who are interested in Kentucky. And it goes way back, as far as Daniel Boone. There's a lot of information on Boone, and horses, and things like that.

DB: Yeah, we visited that area.

RB: Yeah, we've been to that area. And this is where the families lived. It looks like bungalows in Far Rockaway. [Laughter] That's what I think of when I see it. Right. And a couple of the buildings are still up, there's a church there.

MN: Now, did Mr. Burbridge go to Borea College, or was that-

RB: Yes, he did.

MN: Okay, so we should also mention that.

RB: Right. Let me just show you this Freedman Bureau record, you've heard of the Freedman's Bureau? And this is where the soldiers, and also churches, in fact, any organization could join the Freedman's Bank. This was the Freedman's Bank.

MN: He was five feet, six inches tall.

RB: And our family's only grown about three inches. [Laughter] I haven't met a very tall Burbridge, really. But the thing about this is that he named her mother-

DB: That's the thing.

RB: as ----- Robinson. And no one in the family has ever heard of her before. You know, so this is very, very unique. And after he came out of the service, he went to Borea College, which is in Madison County, in Kentucky, south of Lexington. And this is his grades.

NL: Look at that.

RB: You know, based on attending perfect.

NL: Do you know, that's an historically black college?

RB: Yes. Correction! It's not a historically black college. Because there's a story on this. There's a fellow who's named John Fee, F-E-E, he was a minister, and he was against slavery, and he started Borea College, before the Civil War, and it was integrated, which didn't go over well. I have to assume that, you know, free blacks went to the college. When John Brown did his little raid [Laughter] on Harper's Ferry.

NL: Little raid. I like that one.

RB: The local folks said 'enough of this.' [Laughter] And they burned the school down. Yes. So once the war was over, John Fee started the school again. Again, integrated. And he attended the integrated. Now around, close to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some legislator visited the school and they saw black and white together, and he said, 'This will not do.'" And it was legislated out. The school closed, it didn't close, but blacks could no longer attend. They had to attend a separate school. And it wasn't until the 1940's that they were able to attend the school again. You know, so. And this is one of the few free schools in the United States. You have to have a certain income, and you work, you doing the work. You know, work in the restaurant, which we visited, real nice first-class restaurant. Or, you know, you use a shovel or whatever, but one way or another, you have to work. And they have foreign students there also, which I'm sure is how they gain some of their income, you know, because their country pays for them. This is a wedding certificate. They were married by Alexander Campbell. Alexander Campbell used to work for Mrs. Fleming, in Woodford County.

NL: And what did he do? Do you know, was he a slave as well, or was he a free black?

RB: Yes, no he was a slave. And Alexander Campbell became one of the ministers of the Christian Church, in Midway, and later on, in Lexington.

MN: Has anybody written about this form of slavery in Kentucky, where you have these literate people allowed to attend their own churches- has anyone brought this to life?

(?)Allowed to marry.

MN: Allowed to marry.

RB: Well, he got married after the-

MN: After it.

RB: After the Civil War.

MN: Oh, after the Civil War. Were slaves in Kentucky allowed to marry before the Civil War?

RB: Not that I'm aware of. But what they did after the war, they allowed them to have a civil marriage, registered them as a regular marriage. But I think they had to pay three or four dollars for that benefit. Because I've seen registers of people who got, who were married, you know, through that route. But I never found any earlier relatives in there. So here's, this is Boatman Christopher. Boatman Christopher is Mary Robinson's father. And he lists her as one of his children, Mary Burbridge. And he lists another children in here. And this becomes important later on-

BP: What kind of document was that? With Boatman Christopher?

RB: This is the Freedman's Bank.

BP: Oh, this is the Freedman's Bank.

RB: Yeah, you- came a deposit in there. And I've actually held the ledgers of the bank, because they still have them in the National Archives, in Washington, D.C.

MN: So how many libraries have you been to? [Laughter] If you could just give us an idea.

DB: Well in Kentucky it's not a library, it's a county courthouse. They have the books this thick where you had to go through them, and review them.

Well let's just think, how many archival institutions [Laughter]

RB: I would say at least twenty.

NL: Wow.

RB: Because, you know, I've been to some in New Orleans

DB: Yeah, he's been there-

RB: Lexington, Frankfort, you know, Washington, D.C.,-

DB: Definitely. And Salt Lake City.

RB: Right, Salt Lake City. Where the Mormons

DB: Have theirs.

RB: Have their extensive, large library.

NL: And, you have Mormon connections in your family?

RB: No.

DB: No.

DB: No, they have their- they have the microfilms and the books, the real-

RB: One of their tenets is that you should know who your ancestors are. So, practically every Mormon has done their research.

BP: They collect the information, and they help people do it.

MN: Now, also both Doris and Richard have had their tests to find out their origins, the same test that Gates was talking about.

DB: Yeah, this is a copy of it here

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(Tape malfunctions)

MN: Certificate of ancestry. So it's seventy-seven percent sub-Saharan African, fourteen percent East Asian, nine percent European, zero percent Native American.

DB: Yeah.

MN: And you've also found which ethnic groups from Africa.

DB: Right, yes, that's right, yeah. Yes, I belong to the L1C Hapla group, I got here.

(Laughs). I have a, I share a common history with the Tikaw, the Hausa, and the Fulani people in the Cameroons. And that was done about a year ago. Was that a year ago?

RB: And mine was also done. And I am eighty-one percent sub-Saharan, nineteen percent European, zero East Asian, zero Native American. And my folks are from the Ibo tribe, in Nigeria. [Laughter]

BP: It's a general question. Except this is common, well not common, but a lot of people are talking about this since Professor Gates has done his special. But just curious, you started doing way before the genealogy tests and all that was on channel thirteen. What did-why, why, what compelled you to want to find, to do-This is a tremendous amount of work that you've done.

RB: Yes. [Laughter]

BP: Why did you want to do this?

RB: Well, I've always been interested in history. You know, I was always interested in history, and when this came up about my great-grandfather being from Kentucky, which I never heard of before, you know, never mind that I have Kentucky ancestry. I wanted to

find out more. And so the more I looked [Laughter] the more I found, and the more questions came up [Laughter]

DB: He's always had general curiosity. You open one door and then there's another door to open.

RB: And that's why I wanted to know how, and why. And this is what has really pushed us along. Now I have, as an offshoot of the United States Colored Troops, I don't know if you've heard, but they have a Civil War Memorial in Washington, D.C. Went up about 1998, in D.C. But it's not a, you know, on the main thoroughfare, it's on, it's called the Shell District, in D.C. And they out there, you know, a statue honoring all the two hundred and seventy-five thousand African-American soldiers who served in the Civil War, and so they put up this statue. They had a parade, the whole works. In addition to the statue, they erected a wall around it, that tells a list of all the units that served in the war. And on each unit, they have each person's name.

NL: So, your great-grandfather's name is there.

MN: Thomas S. Burbridge.

NL: Wow! That's a remarkable event.

MN: Hold it up.

DB: Oh, that's kind of small

RB: Right. And this is what propels you. Because there I met many people from Kentucky, and met people who had heard of the name Burbridge, people from Ohio, Kentucky.

(??) Have you met any relatives of the people that he may have served with, or members of the church?

RB: No, but I've met members of the church, and have attended the church.

NL: I was going to ask if you've met any white Burbridges, and whether they've done their ancestry, and maybe if you've been able to wind that up.

RB: White Burbridges? No, I haven't, no I haven't. But one side of my family, everyone is very, very fair. Let me get to show you a picture of my 'duddy'. Yes, this is my father. He had blue-gray eyes, and most of us have green eyes.

MN: Hold it up, can we get that? And that's your mother?

RB: Yes, that's my mother.

NL: I don't know if you don't mind if we jump topics, and I'm going to ask you some questions about your research.

DB: Oh, okay. Okay.

NL: First of all, I wanted to find out, before we even get into that, what we had talked about a little earlier, before the interview because we-just roughly my understanding of kind of a, a budding style of Caribbean immigration in New York

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Tape 2

NL: So as I was saying, the people came by boat through Ellis Island, the main generations of Caribbean folks ended up more assimilating, becoming a little more African-Americanized, as it were, they kind of, do claim a Caribbean ancestry, but tended to kind of, you know-

DB: Fade into the background.

NL: Yeah, fade into the larger African-American population. People post-1965, when the law, when the immigration laws opened back up, and also were coming by plane, technology was a little bit different, people came back and forth, they were a bit more of a commuter population. {Laughter} People were going back and forth, people maintained their identity a little bit longer, through even second-generations born in the United States, like myself. I'm trying to figure out, first of all, how did you end up, because I'm assuming you're coming from boat generations-

DB: Right

NL: How did you end up even strongly identifying with Antigua, or Barbados, or did you, as a kid growing up, in the Bronx?

DB: Well yes, well, my mother was a widow, my father died before I was born. So of course, we had to focus on her, and there was, I was the youngest of seven children, and so we, she always talked about her mother, and she was always sending packages back and forth, and I was always curious.

NL: So she was always talking about-

DB: Her mother, right, yes. I was always curious to know who this person was, and I had no idea what my grandmother looked like

NL: You'd never met her.

DB: No, I was a grown woman, I had already graduated, when I saw my grandmother for the first time, and my mother went back, it was forty years, approximately. So my mother went back to the island, and I went with her.

NL: Wow. And that was the first time-

DB: That was the first time I saw her, right, yes.

NL: So what year was-what year were you born?

DB: 1936

NL: Okay, and what year was your mother born?

DB: 1898

NL: And when did she come-and what was her name?

DB: Pearl.

NL: Pearl-?

DB: Pearl Wanita Thwaites Devonish [Laughter]

NL: A-ha. And when did she come, when did she immigrate to the United States?

DB: She-1916? 1916. October 22<sup>nd</sup>.

NL: And you have her records from Ellis Island.

DB: Oh, yeah.

MN: Now you were the youngest of her children?

DB: I'm the youngest.

MN: And she was 38 when she had you?

DB: Yeah, that's right,

NL: Right, okay, and Pearline Ariana Thwaites.

DB: No, this is supposed to be Wanita.

NL: Oh, okay.

DB: When people write, they write what they hear, not the way it's spelled.

NL: Ah, I see, so you know for sure that that's Wanita. Okay. And the ship she came on was ---unintelligible---the Atlantica.

DB: The Atlantica, yeah.

MN: Hold it up.

NL: And this is the record you got from the Ellis Island-

DB: Records, right.

NL: I see. She came in 1916, in November.

DB: And I'm also writing about her, too.

NL: I wanted to ask you, what did she come here for, do you know?

DB: Well, she came because she wanted to go to school, she wanted to be a doctor, and, you know.

NL: Really.

DB: Her sister, her aunt, her mother's sister was already here.

NL: That's what I wanted to ask you, who are the family members that claimed her.

DB: Right, her aunt was already here. She came here as Emiline Thwaites.

NL: Okay.

DB: She came here for work. She came-

BP: How do you spell her last name?

DB: T-H-W-A-I-T-E-S [Laughter]. Yes.

NL: I know that last name in Antigua.

DB: Thwaites?

NL: Yeah. Thwaites is actually-there's a guy who calls it-Mr. Thwaites, he was a cameraman.

DB: Oh! Yes, yes, yes, I know him. I met him.

NL: He used to take, he had a photo studio-

DB: Right.

NL: My mother used to go there all the time, and take pictures.

DB: Oh! {Laughing}

NL: And I know the story, he told me that the Thwaites family and the Carr family are distant relatives.

DB: Oh, my goodness.

NL: My mother was a Carr.

DB: Oh, Carr. Okay, okay.

NL: So, I feel like, probably-

DB: Related? (Laughing)

NL: If you look far enough, we're probably cousins.

DB: Oh, okay. So this is my mother's aunt, her mother's sister. She came to the United States in 1911.

NL: Oh, wow. And she came with a Comacher. I know a bunch of Comachers, actually. That's so funny. [Laughter] Look at that. They're all Portuguese Lugarans that migrate to Antigua.

DB: She came on the Perina, in 1911. And some of the relatives came through Canada, because they didn't want to go through this business here.

NL: The Ellis Island?

DB: Yes, so they came through Canada as well. So my mother came to the United States to be with her aunt, and she wanted to go to school, further education-

NL: And where did she migrate to, when she came here, what, did she go to Harlem, or did she go to another part of the city?

DB: Yes, she came to Harlem. She didn't go to Brooklyn, but she came to Harlem.

NL: Okay, okay.

DB: Because the census record indicates that.

NL: And, do you know, what was the-

[Knock at the door, door opens]

NL: Oh, lunch. So I don't know if you want to pause it, or keep going for a little while.

DB: No, keep going for a little while.

NL: Okay.

DB: So, but when she was on the ship coming to the United States, she's telling me all this, there was a disruption, in 1916, because the United States was at war. There was the First World War going on. So the German U-boats were in the war, and she's telling me that the boat was stopped, and they examined the boat to see if there was anything on the boat. So I got this information, you know, that I was able to obtain, and I just used that and elaborate on what she had told me.

NL: So she had interaction with German-

DB: Yes, on the boat, that's what she told me. She was, you know, those days they didn't have cell phones or whatever [Laughter], so her aunt expected her one day, and she didn't arrive because the delay of the boat. So she came the next day, so her aunt had to come back for her the next day. That's what she was telling me.

NL: And, so, your mother wanted to be a doctor. What did she end up pursuing, did she end up pursuing a career in the health field, was it possible for her?

DB: No, it wasn't possible for her, of course she had to do domestic work. And then she found how difficult that, and sometimes the people cheated on her, and just the little things that I was writing about.

NL: Where did she work?

DB: In a family, she worked with a family, like taking care of children and things like that.

NL: Right, and was that in the city, or was it outside?

DB: That was in the city, because she had to use the trolley car. (Laughing)

MN: And she did day work rather than live-in.

DB: Yes, well, as far as I know it was day work, she came home every night. And she lived with her aunt. And then the aunt may have had boarders, to help, you know, with their income.

NL: Were they members of the Progressive Society, or any other kind of mutual aid society that you know of?

DB: No.

NL: Because a lot of West Indians form them.

DB: I know about the Progressive Society now, but I didn't see her name. I was looking through those records.

NL: Right.

DB: To look for her name. No, I didn't find her name.

NL: Okay.

DB: Right, that's another thing. So she came, and she worked, and she lived with her aunt, and she wanted to go to school, but it wasn't feasible. So that's what happened there.

NL: Did she, so, she completed high school in Antigua.

DB: Oh, yes. She completed high school. She completed high school. She even learned how to play the piano. Because when I knew her she was, playing the piano. (Laughing)

And I don't know where she learned that.

NL: Probably church.

DB: Church, she probably learned how to play the organ.

NL: My grandmother was a piano teacher.

DB: I heard that my father used to sing and she used to play. You know, right.

NL: Yeah, wow. And what religion was your mom's family?

DB: Well in Freetown, they had the Methodist Church, and that's what she attended. So when she came to New York, she attended the same church here in New York. And the people who came before her had the church going.

MN: What was the name of the church?

DB: Bueller Methodist Church.

NL: I was going to ask you- [Laughter] I know a lot of people at Bueller Methodist.

DB: (Laughing) She knows-

MN: Was that in Harlem?

DB: Yes.

MN: On what street?

DB: It was one place then they moved. Now it's about 136<sup>th</sup> Street, I believe.

RB: Right.

DB: Yeah, 136<sup>th</sup> Street.

NL: Off seventh?

DB: Off Seventh, yeah, right.

MN: Wow.

DB: Right, yeah.

NL: Okay.

DB: So she came to the United States, and settled in, and eventually, I guess she got married. You know, this is 1921, yeah she got married November 14<sup>th</sup>. This was in color, I just made a copy of this.

NL: And where was this, where did she get married?

DB: In Harlem.

NL: In Harlem. Okay.

DB: Right

NL: Okay. Wow.

DB: It wasn't until I was grown and she wanted to return to Antigua, but these immigration-I said you should become a citizen first, before you leave the country, and come back in.

NL: So your mother never became a citizen.

DB: Well, she started with my father, and then after he died, I guess that was in, yes.

Is that common, or uncommon?

NL: Very common. My parents were never-never became citizens. They were green card holders. And they- it was part of a lot of the people that generation that came in the late sixties, early seventies, to not, you know, reject their citizenship from their home island because they always saw themselves as being traitors-

MN: Now is your mother still not a citizen.

NL: Yup, she's a green card holder.

DB: Oh, gosh, yeah. Well I remember my mother having to go the post office, and every year, you had to sign this card, saying that you're an alien. That was before the green card.

NL: Right

DB: No, you had to go to the post office and make a declaration or something like that.

Almost stands to reason

NL: For a long time you were called a resident alien.

DB: But I said if you want to go back to Antigua and see your mother you should become a citizen. So, we went through that, and we had to go to the court, we had to go everywhere.

(??) Did her mother never want to come, that she would leave home and-

DB: I don't think she-she never left the village practically, much more the island.

[Laughter]

NL: Right, right, right.

DB: They didn't travel too far, 'I'm not going up in *that* plane,' you know, when I was-

[Laughter] So this is the petition for naturalization you file, and then you have the affidavit, witnesses and everything like that. Then you have the-

MN: Hold that up.

DB: Yes, this is the final papers, if you can see the-

MN: She looks a lot like you.

DB: Yeah.

NL: Yeah

MN: Wow.

NL: Look at that. So I wanted to know, how did she end up in the Bronx, your mom?  
Your mom and dad.

DB: Oh, that's a good question. I'm trying to-I wouldn't know. Well, they did move around a lot. Because I remember moving from one place to the other.

NL: You were born in the Bronx?

DB: I was born in the Bronx. I was born in Morrisania Hospital.

MN: Didn't you say something about the Father Divine? That was your family who found the Bronx through Father Divine.

DB: Oh, I think my mother also talked about him, too. You know, you hear these names, not knowing exactly-

MN: They had apartment listings in the Father Divine movement.

DB: Right, right,

NL: Well, were your parents ever affected by the Garvey movement?

DB: Oh, my father was a Garveyite.

NL: Wow, really.

DB: Yes, he was a member.

NL: Oh, let me see this.

DB: He was a member of the Garvey-he was-he was part of a-it's questionable as to which picture he is-

NL: Oh, wow! He's part of Garvey's leaders.

MN: What is that group called?

NL: What is that, is it the African Legion? Garvey's army was called the African Legion, I believe.

MN: Oh, look at those pictures!

NL: It's escaping my memory. I know they were-and the Women's Auxiliary was the Black Cross Nurses, and I know the men's leader was the African Legion, if I'm not mistaken.

DB: This is my father, yeah.

NL: Wow!

MN: And his name was Devonish?

DB: Yes, Devonish. He's from Barbados.

MN: Barbados.

DB: And this is the-he wrote something on the back here, that he was the secretary to this. I just made a copy of it.

NL: This is a group of men, the First Regiment, what does that say?

DB: This is the troop of men of the First Regiment of the UAL.

NL: UAL-United African League.

MN: United African League.

DB: You're right. And then he signed his name.

NL: March 15, 1928.

DB: Right.

NL: Sal Roswana Devonish. Wow, look at that. That is amazing.

DB: Yeah. Well he was very active. Here's his dues card.

NL: Wow. The Universal Negro Improvement Association of African Communities League. Look at that. And what's his address at the time?

DB: Must have been Brooklyn Avenue or Boston Road.

NL: Boston Road. [Laughter]

MN: Wow so that was

NL: Forty-seven Boston Road.

MN: What year was that?

NL: It says here August 1929.

MN: He was on Boston Road in 1929! That was way-that was one of the first black families on Boston Road! Wow!

DB: This is my family.

NL: Look at that. Where are you?

DB: [Laughter] He's buried at Woodlawn.

NL: And where is your mother buried?

DB: She's in Ferncliff. These are my pictures, here.

NL: And, so, I wanted to ask you now, you're, you know, you were talking a little bit about your mom, and sending packages back and forth.

DB: Oh, yes.

NL: You wrote letters regularly?

DB: Oh, definitely, definitely, correspondence, definitely. She would send money, or whatever to help her mother, and so on like that.

NL: Was she able to keep up with the events going on in Antigua, or was she pretty much-

DB: Well, through the mail, yes, yes, right, she kept up with that, definitely. Right.

BP: Was she an only child?

DB: No, she had a half-brother, Leonard Lynch. I don't know if he knows him. Leonard Lynch. She had a half brother.

(??) And did he stay?

DB: He stayed. He never came. We were hoping that he would come.

So she really, truly, left on her own.

DB: Yes, yes, yeah. I just wanted to show you the-here's the-here. Lightfoot Lane! Was named after Richard Lightfoot.

NL: My grandfather was Bajan, from what I know, he died when my father was nine, so I never knew him.

DB: Yeah, Lightfoot Lane.

NL: But I've heard that there's a place in Barbados named Lightfoot.

DB: I just wanted to show you that, Lightfoot Lane.

NL: I heard about this place, and I've always been interested. So it's named after the honorable Richard Lightfoot.

DB: Right, one word, right.

NL: Interesting. Yeah, that's how I spell it, one word. Wow.

MN: Now, did your mother ever have a different occupation, after, other than domestic work, as an income-earning activity?

DB: Well, she-like seamstress, so you might say things like that.

MN: But that was at home.

DB: That was at home, and then you know, you get married, you have children and then my father was a stone-setter. He used to put stones into jewelry and things of that sort. And sometimes he would bring it home, and she would help him.

NL: And he worked in the jewelry-

DB: Jewelry business.

NL: Was he in Manhattan or was he in the Bronx?

DB: Far as I know, it was in Manhattan.

NL: Wow.

DB: Far as I know.

NL: And were there many African-Americans and blacks in that industry at all?

DB: I don't think so, no. Very tedious work, it seems to be. Tedious type work, to sit there and put stones into jewelry. At one time they wanted him to carry the jewelry to Belgium, but that's like smuggling, and he didn't go for that. [Laughter] No, that's another story.

Do you know how he was able to get involved in that type of work?

DB: No, no, sorry.

NL: Was your mother in touch with other Antiguans who were in the area?

DB: Oh, yes, our cousins. Oh, yes, they came over earlier, oh yes.

NL: They did.

DB: The Browns, and the Crumps.

NL: Oh, I know some Crumps, too! [Laughter] No, there's a woman who's a Crump that goes to my church, her name is Janet Crump Ford.

DB: Oh!

NL: Yeah, so you never know.

DB: Never know. I'll talk to you about that later. [Laughter]

NL: Yeah, yeah we have to talk.

DB: No, but she had cousins here, and they were always together, you know, holidays, you know, church, Harvest Sunday, Easter, Christmas, things like that.

NL: Right, and did they cook Antiguan food?

DB: Oh, definitely

MN: What's some of the foods?

DB: Coo-coo, and codfish, and things like that.

MN: What is coo-coo?

DB: Coo-coo is like cornmeal, mixed up.

NL: They call it fungi.

DB: Yeah.

NL: My mother called it fungi.

DB: It's cornmeal, basically.

NL: Turned cornmeal.

DB: Turned cornmeal.

MN: Now, when the two of you got married, did you cook Antiguan food? [Laughter]

DB: (Laughing) No.

NL: It's pretty complex.

DB: It's complex, yes, it's that way. And, I don't think he'd appreciate it too much.

[Laughter]

RB: Standard American.

NL: Oh, he wants standard American, he wants fried chicken, mashed potatoes-

[Laughter] Did your mom do pepperpot? The one with the-

DB: She mostly liked fish. Well, she didn't eat chicken, because she saw how the chicken was killed, and that turned her off, so she left that alone. Most of the time she ate fish. She'd cook chicken for us, or turkey or whatever for holidays, but most of the time it was chicken for us and fish for her. She loved lamb and things like that, yeah.

NL: So did you feel like you had an Antiguan upbringing?

DB: Oh yes, because we were surrounded by relatives all the time, you know, people coming in and out and everything.

NL: No, and I'm wondering if that-if you felt that your socialization was a bit different from others that were growing up around you, other African-American kids in your neighborhood.

DB: No, we didn't associate too much with them, you know. Because they thought that we were less than they were, sometimes.

NL: Oh.

DB: So we didn't associate with them.

NL: So your playmates were mostly your relatives.

DB: Cousins, right, and my family, immediate family.

NL: Did you have an accent growing up at all?

DB: No, I didn't have an accent. No, my mother, when she got angry she had a terrible accent. [Laughter]

MN: Can you imitate her?

DB: (In accented voice) No child, don't do that. What's the matter with you? [Laughter]

No, no, no, they thought that they were more, or better than we were, so we didn't have anything to do with them. Well, we were always busy, my mother always kept us busy. I

heard from my sisters that my father used to have the classical music on the weekends, and they had books, and there's always something to do. So, she encouraged going to school.

NL: Did you listen to soca music at all, or calypso-

DB: Oh, yeah, I have soca music, yes, I have music like that. Afterwards, when I was grown.

NL: Oh, okay, but not when you were, as a child.

DB: Well, they had the radio, whatever was, you know, we didn't have a record-

NL: Whatever the popular music was on the radio.

DB: Records weren't really that popular. You didn't have too many records, no.

NL: Not until ---

DB: No, we didn't have any records, just what was on the radio.

(??) And maybe this is an ignorant question, forgive me, did your mother find it hard being an immigrant or a person of color when she first came here, or was that almost a double whammy for her?

RB: It's probably both.

DB: Well, when she first came here, she talked about how hard it was to find the work she wanted to do, and she wanted to go to school, and that was not possible, so that was one thing. And so I guess resigned herself to end up married, afterwards, you know.

MN: Now was there an expectation that you and you siblings would go to college?

DB: Oh, she stressed education. She definitely stressed it. Everybody in my family graduated from high school, all seven of us, and I'm the only one that graduated from college.

NL: And was that-you think that's a difference of, kind of age, and the time.

DB: Well, because they were older and they were able to help me get through, you know.

Very difficult.

NL: So where did you end up going to college?

DB: Hunter.

NL: You went to Hunter? And what did you take up at Hunter?

DB: Sociology.

NL: Oh, wow.

DB: This was my junior high school public school ten.

NL: Okay.

DB: And this was one of the papers from the -----

NL: So you go by your middle name?

DB: Yeah, my name is --unintelligible--[Laughter]

NL: So many Antiguans go by their middle name.

DB: See, after my father died, my mother had a dream thinking that-she already named me Doris, but she had a dream about Aureo, and she thought that was my father talking to her.

NL: And so-

DB: So I had to put the middle name in there. This is Roosevelt High School, where I graduated from.

NL: Oh, wow. Right across the street! [Laughter]

MN: And at the time you were there, what percentage of the students were African-American at Roosevelt.

DB: Very little, very little, very little.

NL: Look at that. That's her graduation picture.

MN: Wow!

NL: From Roosevelt. Wow. And so your teachers were mostly white?

DB: Oh, definitely. I remember one teacher in junior high school, African-American. As you look through the book you can-I'm over here. One of these faces here.

NL: Devonish

DB: Here I am.

MN: Now, where did the two of you meet?

DB: My sister was-my older sister, June, she was a nurse, and his sister was a nurse, and her birthday-my sister's birthday is in June and his sister's birthday is in June (laughing), so they had a party, so they invited us to come, and that's how we met.

NL: Now I wanted to, I still want to ask more questions about your life-

DB: Sure!

NL: But I want to go a little bit into your research and how you were able to do it.

DB: Oh, okay!

MN: You want to take a-you want to keep going, or take-

NL: Yeah, maybe we should take a lunch break, or something.

MN: Let's take a lunch break

DB: Oh, okay, he's all ready with the food.

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Pause

MN: So, let's have a look at the boards that you brought with you, because those are an important part. Now, while Mr. Burbridge is getting the boards, one of the issues we were discussing over lunch was the schools in Morrisania. And you mentioned that you realize the inadequacy of your education when you got to Roosevelt High School.

DB: Definitely.

MN: Tell us a little bit about that.

DB: Well, I attended P.S.23. Elementary, and then I went to P.S. 124 for about a year or so, then I went to junior high school. And you're supposed to learn French, and languages in junior high school, and I found out that the teachers only reading to us, and we didn't have a chance for conversational French. And so when I arrived at Theodore Roosevelt High School, the other children were conjugating verbs, and things of that sort, which I didn't have an opportunity to do, when I was in junior high school. So there were far advanced than I was. So I had to sort of study harder to catch up, to bring myself to that level of the other children.

NL: And was that the case in other subjects as well, or was it-

DB: Well, that I remember definitely, because the teacher she, I guess she stood out in my mind, the French teacher.

NL: The French class.

DB: Yeah.

MN: Now, were you, were people in your family aware that their children were being shortchanged in the schools? Was this a subject of discussion in the household? Or in the community?

DB: Do you remember that, Richard, or-?

RB: No.

DB: Maybe they weren't aware of it, possibly.

NL: But you did mention that your parents talked politics in the home.

DB: They talked about, yeah, politics, and the government, and, you know, trying to, race relationships, and things of that sort.

NL: So you learned about race from very early on.

DB: Yes, yes.

NL: As a child.

DB: Yes, because they were denied certain things.

NL: And what kinds of stories would they tell, about denials, things like that.

DB: I mean, mostly it's employment. And, mostly employment.

MN: That people weren't able to work at the level of their ability.

DB: That they wanted to do. Right. That's basically what it was.

MN: Okay, Richard, you have these boards, so, let's-I'll show them to the camera, and talk about them!

BP: I'll move this out of your way.

MN: Wow.

DB: Is that the number one board?

RB: Number one [Laughter]

DB: Hold on to this.

NL: Okay, we've got to get those over here, so that they're in the view of the camera.

RB: Well, they can hear my voice.

NL: Yeah, so you have to-

RB: They've seen me already. (Laughing).

NL: -That other side, Doctor Naison, will you just push that other side.

MN: Yeah, this way, sure.

RB: All right.

DB: Let him explain.

RB: Yes, the first one in the upper left hand corner is claim for compensation for slave named Thomas Burbridge, was my great grandfather, and he was owned by a Ms. Nancy Fleming. This is during the Civil War, 1864, and the government allowed her, Ms. Fleming, to collect three hundred dollars for enlisting him in the military. And she, paraphrasing, she says, 'I've known him since birth, he was born in my home, and he's lived with me ever since. And, as a result, she received three hundred dollars. Dropping down to the lower left, that's a mustering in record for Thomas Burbridge. And that reads that he's a black complexioned, though I noticed in all the records, it usually said black, or mulatto, so someone could have been brown, or dark brown, but they were listed as black. And he was five foot six, he had black hair, black eyes, and he was twenty-two years old. And he was mustered in in Lexington, and then went to Camp Nelson, Kentucky, which is about fifteen miles southwest of Lexington. And in the middle panel, it's a map of what they call the bluegrass country, let me have a pen.

MN: Can you pass-I can't, yeah.

RB: All right. And this is Lexington, Kentucky, where he was enlisted, Camp Nelson is down below, it is in what is known as Jessamine County. Thomas and Mary came from Midway, in Woodford County, which adjoins Fayette. And they also spent some time in Versailles, but most of their time was in Midway. After the Civil War, they went to

Lexington, it's like the story of most other places, people leave the farm, and go to the city. Lexington was the city. This is a copy of my great-grandfather, Thomas Burbridge, where he's promoted to Sergeant Major, and this is in 1866, he is. Around Christmastime, and that is the highest rank for the enlisted men. Any rank higher would be an officer. And only about a hundred, less than a hundred and fifty blacks were officers in the Civil War, keeping in mind that there were two hundred seventy-five thousand black men in the war.

MN: So the vast majority of the officers were white.

RB: Definitely so.

MN: In the U.S. Colored Troops, 114<sup>th</sup> Regiment.

RB: Right, U.S. Colored Troops. And this is a record of the unit, where they went, they were trained at camp Nelson, and then they moved to Louisa, Kentucky, which is in eastern Kentucky, then they went to Virginia, and they were at Appomattox when the Civil War ended. They later went to Petersburg, and also Richmond. Then after the Civil War was over, they were sent down to Texas. Allegedly they were going to chase Maximillian, who was creating a nuisance on the southern border of the United States. But many people thought that the black troops were removed from the South just to take the pressure of the occupation away from the defeated South. There's a picture of Camp Nelson in 1864, it's quite remarkable that photographs weren't done very well. And Camp Nelson is just like your modern military base that you see, they have provisions for the troops, the barracks there, they have stores, a hospital. They had their own water treatment plant. And one of the unique features about Camp Nelson, was the care of the mules, because there weren't too many trucks around in 1864, so mules were used quite

heavily. The unique thing about Camp Nelson is that they had a rest and recreation area for the mules. They were allowed to rest, and they were taking care of and catered to, so that they could be returned to doing and carry on their work. And I've been to Camp Nelson, in 2001 through 2005.

MN: Now, is it still preserved? Is it a place people can visit?

RB: Yes it is, but when the Civil War ended, this property belonged to resident, so everything had to be torn down. The only thing that remains is what is known as the White House, which was the residence of the owners. But now they're starting to restore it, and they put up a couple of buildings. And part of it is used as farmland. And here are some barracks that some of the men slept in. Many slept in tents. One of the features about the barracks is that they have bunk beds, and that quite often, there were two men to a bunk. So, that meant for very cramped quarters. Let me get my second one.

MN: This is great for lectures. [Laughter] Wow.

RB: And this is my- this is my great-grandmother, Mary Christopher Burbridge. And over here is where Thomas went to Borea College after the Civil War, and this was an integrated college until the 1890's, when the Kentucky legislators saw the college, and saw the integration, and complained about it and integration ended. Thomas attended during the spring term, 1868. And on ten being the highest mark in intermediate arithmetic, he received grades ten through nine and a half. Arithmetic B was nine and a half through ten. Geography, ten, bookkeeping ten, spelling eight, grammar, ten, nine and two thirds, ten. He attended for one term, and I always wondered why he didn't stay longer, but later research proved that he was also teaching at a school in Midway, Kentucky. And this is the family tree, my father's side is over here on the left, my father

William Burbridge, from Biloxi, Mississippi, and my mother, from New Orleans, Louisiana. And his father was Symponius Burbridge. Some of my family members have outstanding names. Symponius had a brother named Leonitus. So I was very fortunate to come out Richard, and my brother, William. [Laughter] And of course, their father's name was Thomas, but from I understand, he read about the Greeks and the Romans, and Leonitus and Symponius both figure in the Greek history. On my mother's side, her father's name was Ferdinand, I never met him, and his wife, my grandmother's Amelia Raphael, Amelia Jones Raphael. And she raised us after my mother passed away. Amelia Raphael and my father raised the three of us. And back over here, I didn't put it on here, but Thomas' mother is Irvana Robinson. He didn't mention any father's name on Freedman Bank record. And this is the Freedman's Bank record here, where he signed it, and we believe he probably did it around 1867, because an officer by the name of Johnson has his signature underneath it, but this is Thomas' signature, because I saw a lot of records where the men signed with an X. Now, not only individuals, but also organizations, such as the Masons, or schools, and in this case, the Christian church, were members of the Freedman's Bank. This is a page from the history of Fayette County, and in it it talks about the black churches of Lexington, and the Christian churches mentioned, and the slave-owner Nancy Fleming is mentioned in here. And Nancy Fleming sent Alexander Campbell to Lexington, and Mr. Campbell became the reverend at the 4th Street Christian Church. And Alexander Campbell married my parents. And one interesting thing about him is that he had several children, and he named one of his sons Burbridge Campbell.

MN: Wow.

RB: The name appears in the census. And below here is the burial of Thomas Burbridge in Biloxi, he died in Biloxi. And I'm not sure if his grave is still-in fact I know it has to be severely damaged by Katrina

MN: Oh, boy

RB: Because they are-the cemetery is across from the beach. There's the ----- highway, and then the cemetery. So I know it suffered severe damage. I haven't been to Biloxi since the-And just reading this, because I received this information from the library in Biloxi, I wondered why no one, during the Mary's search and proof, that he died, no one ever looked for this. And this is where Mary Christopher Burbridge filed for a pension in 1892. And when she does so, she files with the state of Kentucky, and she indicates that her husband Thomas served with Company of the 114<sup>th</sup> Regiment. And she's looking for a pension. And she receives a pension in the same year, 1893, but the pension was eight dollars a month, and a few months later, she remarried, because evidently eight dollars-  
NL: Wasn't going to cut it.

RB: (Laughing) Right. So she married an Augustus Bell, and so once she did that, she was cut off from the family. Well Augustus Bell dies before 1900, so she's back again. Exactly.

MN: So it's a matter of pension.

RB: And the thing about it-

NL: Not many other options for black women at this time.

RB: Well, she did have one, because one of her sons, in fact, there's only two, Leonitus, became a doctor. And so Leonitus had a nice house in New Orleans, and she stayed with him. She also came to New York, to stay with her sister for a while. And she also went

to Biloxi. So, she was of some sort of means, or had available funds for it. But I get the impression that it was just the-the idea that it was due to me, and I should get it. And I'd just like to read something, because she has a large struggle, you know, with various departments of the government. And finally someone says, you know, she should get the pension. And this is a fellow who's interviewed everyone in the Burbridge family, neighbors in the region down there, also in Mississippi and Kentucky. J.B. Steed, and what attracts me to this, he writes, 'the claimant is a typical old-time Negress. And she impressed me as being perfectly candid in making her statement. She is far removed from the commonality of her race, in the point of intelligence, and she is held in high esteem by those who have known her for some time. Both white and colored speak well of her. She owned her own home at Biloxi, Mississippi, and it appears that she lived with her son, Dr. L.T. Burbridge, for a short time in Monroe County. But she was there only a short time. Since that time, she's lived with her son in New Orleans, with whom she now lives. Dr. Burbridge stands very well professionally, and otherwise in the vicinity where he is engaged in the practice of his profession, and he impressed me by being sincere.'

Now, as I mentioned, they had two sons. Leonitus, who became a doctor, and my grandfather, who decided to dig wells, and be a fisherman. And the family sort of split, I believe, on class lines. So we didn't hear too much about them. Now, here, she's finally awarded forty dollars, for a pension, in 1928. And then a friend of mine, a Ms. Joas, through one of her acquaintances, he examined Nancy Flemings' court records, and she found the will of Nancy Flemings' husband, Leonard, and he lists his slaves. And some of the names are Mary Christopher's family that I can make out, America, and Rosanna, and Boatman.

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End of Tape 1

Tape 2

RB: It's an indication of their worth, because they were considered property, and when you allot a will, you give an estimate of what the property's worth. And many of these names can be verified by Boatman Christopher's Freedman's Bank application.

NL: Mr. Burbridge, or Mrs. Burbridge, maybe, can you, yeah, fill out that other side, of the last panel.

RB: This is Mary Christopher Burbridge's death certificate, in New Orleans, and she died in January, 1943, and that's about a week before Franklin Delano Roosevelt started his first term of service as President of the United States. And then, this was a boat of flash from an unknown person, who is now a very good friend, Ms. Brenda Jackson, who gave me information about their life in Midway, before the Civil War, so it takes me back to step deeper. Now, I had mentioned about Burbridge the Beast. He was a general who was quite rough on Southern guerrillas, when they were captured, he would take them to their home town, and hang them in front of their friends and neighbors. He has a terrible reputation in Kentucky. After the war, he went to Brooklyn to live, where he died. He was buried in the National Cemetery in Washington. But there was a kinder side of him. In November 29, 1864, he wrote to the Secretary of War, the Honorable E.M. Stanton, and I quote, 'A large number of women and children have accumulated at Camp Nelson. Many of them are wives and children of our colored soldiers. There will be much

suffering among them this winter unless shelters are built and rations issued to them. For the sake of humanity, I hope you will issue the proper order in this case, as soon as possible. Stephen Gano Burbridge, Major General.' That's dated November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1864. Now I have a few thousand more documents I can fill this hole with.

NL: All right, if you can sit back down, make sure I get the two of you. All right. So yeah, now Mrs. Burbridge, I wanted to ask you, now just a little bit to go into your research in Antigua.

DB: Yes.

NL: Just to talk about how you started it and what you've discovered about your family, going back as far as you can.

DB: Yes, well I was at, in Antigua, I guess when maybe my first or second trip, I went to the National Archives. Now they're very strict, but at that time I was able to make a copy of the birth record.

NL: Yeah, they're very protective of their old documents.

DB: But now they closed it off, yeah. They don't want you copying other people's records, but at that time, they didn't make a fuss about it. So I was able to make a copy of my-this is my grandfather's. Yeah, this is the year 1876. James Henry Thwaites. And then I also had my mother and grandfather, I wrote that in the book, too.

NL: Okay.

DB: So, when I made the first trip I was curious, so I just asked questions of my grandmother, you know, because I had never seen her before, and I wanted to know more about her. And she talked about her, you know, her life, and-

NL: What was, what did she do for a living?

DB: She didn't work, she didn't work. She did not work, as far as I know.

NL: She just was a stay-at-home mother.

DB: Mom, yeah.

NL: Okay, and how many children did she have?

DB: Just my uncle, Leonard. She had other children, but they died very young. Yes, they died young.

NL: So just your mother and you uncle.

DB: Right. Far as I know.

NL: Okay. And then, do you know anything about your family history going back any other generations.

DB: Well, my mother's father was James Henry Thwaites. And the mother was Eudora Chapman. Chapman was the last name.

NL: And do you know what they did for a living, or anything like that?

DB: Probably fishermen.

NL: They were fishermen.

DB: They were fishermen, probably. Things like that.

NL: Right, right. So have you been continuing any family research since then?

DB: Well I've been doing, well I'm trying to get between Barbados and Antigua.

NL: Right.

DB: And whatever I can do here in the United States.

NL: Did your parents meet here in the U.S.?

DB: Yes, they met here. They came here, separately, and they met here. I think they attended the same church, and they lived not too far from each other. And that's how they met.

NL: Okay. Well, yeah, I don't know if there are other-

MN: Well, are there other things you think you'd like to show us, before we wind this up, this is-

DB: Well, I guess-

MN: Other documents that are particularly important to you.

DB: Yeah, you can-

NL: Well, if you want to hold it up.

MN: Yeah.

DB: Well this is the petition for naturalization for my grandfather. It seems that it was late when he became a citizen. He came to this country in 1925. Yeah, he was born in 1872, and he says, 'I am 82 years old,' at the date of this application, which is, signed 1955.

MN: One question-

DB: And it was a long time before they decided they wanted to become citizens.

MN: Did your family feel that the educational system in Antigua was better than the one in the U.S.?

DB: Well they gave them all that they had, in that sense. But they wanted to continue their education, that's why they came to this country.

NL: But they felt sufficiently prepared to do that with what they-

DB: With what they had, yes. Right. They had the English education; some of it was done by the ministers, who came from England. Some of them were taught by the ministers, if they didn't have a regular teacher. In the early days, it was the ministers who was in charge of the classroom. And then afterwards he probably had assistants or teachers that he trained to become teachers.

NL: And they felt that that was-

DB: That was sufficient because they felt that he knew, you know, he was trained, he was an ordained minister.

MN: If you were thinking-I mean, this is remarkable work that both of you done. If you were going to be talking to young people, today, about what you've done, what would you want them to get from this, if you were going to, let's say, speak to a group of high school students. What do you think you've learned from it that you think you would like to transmit to the generation coming up now.

DB: I feel that they're not aware of the struggles that our parents went through, for them to get to this point. I mean, a lot of things they would deny, and they couldn't do, and nowadays, the children today take a lot of things for granted. And they, as you said, they're spoon-fed, and they don't go out and venture and ask questions and read books and things like that. Everything is on the Internet, and they barely pick up a book except what's required. But I want them to know where they came from. Other people know where they came from, and I think that the African-American children should know where they came from as well. And that's why I think it's important. And just to see what they accomplished in the limited opportunities they had, compared to what they

have today, with opportunities. And that's even taking advantage of half the opportunities that are available. That's what I feel. Do you feel the same thing?

RB: Yeah, I feel the same way. Also, in doing research, because we do genealogy and also history, they should know their history. When I was coming up, slavery was equivalent to looking at people picking cotton, that was it, and we knew it was harsh. But now we're realizing that, by research, we're finding out about many heroes in many places. People who led revolts. People who went to Canada. People who went to the Underground Railroad, and some who had to swim across the Ohio River, to get into Ohio, to get away from slavery. And they should know that they have vast opportunity here. When I was going to school, you didn't get into City College, unless you had, you know, very high grades. But then later on we learned that they were playing with the grades of those who did get in, so that only their good grades were presented to the college, but for black students, they gave them everything we had. The opportunities are here, and all you have to do is look on a subway train any evening, and see who's sitting down and reading, and doing their work, reading, so that they can move up. Because people who come from elsewhere, this is a gold mine, and it's a gold mine for our students also. But they have to be pushed by their parents. You know, their parents. And their "friends," quotation marks. But it's very important that they realize the value of education. Because as everything is becoming technical, they may be left behind, and their children might be left further behind.

DB: Yeah, they need that. And somebody ought to encourage them, or push them, or whatever. To, not to do the research, the research is done, not all of it is done, a lot-I'm doing a vertical research, I'd like to do a horizontal, like the siblings, and things like that,

and children, but it's hardly any time to do all of that. And like Richard is doing one side of his family, he's not doing the other side, you know, we could use more help in doing these, documenting this information. A lot of information is not documented. We had to scrape and pull this all together, and you had to go ten different places to get this information. So it's-and we could only focus on one side of the family at a time, because you're in one location. It's like he could do Louisiana, but he can't do Kentucky, you have to be all over the map to get all of this done. But the children should be encouraged to-they should be encouraged to learn to read, and to be aware that this is their family, they did this, they struggled to get where they are, so that they can be where they are today. That's what I feel.

MN: Okay, well thank you so much for

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End of Tape 2