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4700.2510 Tape 4430
Session I
March 27, 2015

[Begin Tape 4430. Begin Session I.]

CHELSEA ARSENEAULT: Okay. Alright, today is March 27, 2015. I am Chelsea Arsenault, representing the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State University] Libraries. We're working in conjunction with the Imperial Calcasieu Museum to document the history of Mossville [Louisiana]. Today we're at the Rigmaiden Recreation Center on Old Spanish Trail. I'm here today with Mr. M.D. Haki Vincent. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed, Mr. Vincent. This is going to be a short interview, about fifteen to twenty minutes.

HAKI VINCENT: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: We will likely be in touch with you later to set up a longer interview, if you're interested in continuing on.

VINCENT: Yes.

ARSENEAULT: And could you state your full name, please?

VINCENT: **[00:40]** M.D. Haki Vincent.

ARSENEAULT: When and where were you born?

VINCENT: I was born October 9, 1935, [very loud crackling] Morocco, Africa.

ARSENEAULT: Where in Morocco?

VINCENT: Casablanca.

ARSENEAULT: What are your parents' names?

VINCENT: Simon Vincent and Juanita Vincent. [creak of a door opening]

ARSENEAULT: [01:16] And grandparents' names?

VINCENT: Eli Sr. and Eli Jr.

ARSENEAULT: And where are they from?

VINCENT: They were from right here in Louisiana.

ARSENEAULT: Where in Louisiana?

VINCENT: Mossville. Toxic Town, Mossville, Louisiana. At that time, though, it was, like pristine. Yes.

ARSENEAULT: What's your earliest . . . your earliest memory of Mossville?

VINCENT: My earliest memory . . . I can't recall too well, because I was about . . . maybe six months old when my mother brought me down here. But I was constantly enlightened or empowered on the history from my father and my uncles. Because we all . . . I was a gofer. I was the one who straightened out nails and went for the water and went for anything they needed. That's a gofer.

ARSENEAULT: [02:42] So you go for?

VINCENT: I went for. [Laughs] So that's how I learned the trade of carpentry and housebuilding and many other trades. So I was well-empowered on the history of Mossville from the 1700s on up until I really experienced it. When I experienced it, I felt it right here . . . in my heart. Yes.

ARSENEAULT: So your family talked about Mossville . . .

VINCENT: Constantly, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: . . . to you? While you were in Africa or?

VINCENT: Well, mainly while I was in DC. That's where I was raised, in Washington DC. But that's where I got all my information, while we were on jobs and whatnot. So I was learning the trade and the history at the same time. From the beginning up until now, it's been a labor of love . . . knowing that your ancestors blessed you with land. Yes. So, when I got of age, military took me. But I couldn't wait to get here, so I had to do four years, three months in the military. When I got out, then I experienced living here, yes. But at the same time, I had a long history of government antagonism . . . from the military up until right now.

ARSENEAULT: How old were you when you were drafted?

VINCENT: [05:07] Seventeen. They drafted me . . . well, they were drafting, in the army. I decided I didn't want to go in the army because it was too much violence. So I decided to go in the air force. Coming from Chocolate City, Washington DC, I was amazed to see all these Europeans on the train when I got on the train going to the military.

ARSENEAULT: What do you mean, Chocolate City?

VINCENT: That's what DC was called at one time, because it was mostly black people there. It was called Chocolate City. You didn't know that? Yeah. So . . . I got on the train on the way to basic training. Oh, by the way, before that . . . When I was sixteen, I had a car. It was basically given to me, but it was an old Chrysler. After I got off of work, I cleaned up and went for a ride. You know, looking for the females. Two white cops pulled me over. It wasn't no more than about three or four blocks from my house. They asked me for my driver's license. I gave

them my driver's license. They say, "Follow us." Went around a couple of corners to a dark street. They brought my driver's license back to me and said, "How much money you got?" Yes, they did. I don't remember how much I had then, but I took it out and said . . . You know, they took what they wanted. Left me the rest. Told me, "We don't want to see you no more." I was so outdone. I didn't tell nobody that for years, because . . . You know why? I felt that they wouldn't believe me. Matter of fact, I knew they wouldn't believe me. From that point on, I been had a bad taste in my mouth for criminals. Especially in costumes. [Laughs] So, like I said, when I got on the train and saw all of these white faces on the train . . . So you kind of know what was back here in my head. I'm in trouble. [Laughs] Big trouble. I was mad anyway, because they were forcing me to go into somebody else's war.

ARSENEAULT: What war was this?

VINCENT: [08:10] World War . . . I was getting ready to say World War II, but I was ten. [laughs] It was Korean War.

ARSENEAULT: I hope it wasn't World War II.

VINCENT: It was World War II. I was in World War II, too. I was working for the government, collecting papers, helping them with the war. I remember that just as clear, because our school collected enough papers to buy a Jeep. When they brought the Jeep to the school and showed it to the people, I said, "Whoa! I got me a Jeep." Hard as I worked, collecting papers and whatnot . . . I had some interest in that Jeep. That's the way I felt, you know. That wasn't

happening. [Laughs] They wouldn't even let me ride in it. [Laughs] But anyway . . . So, when I got into the military, I did nothing to help the military. Need I say more?

ARSENEAULT: What was your . . . MOS?

VINCENT: I was inspecting survival equipment. Yes . . . and every other little thing they demanded you to do. Any other assigned duties . . . That's in most contracts with the government, if y'all read the fine little lines. Any other assign . . . So, they got trash work they need done, look out you might be the one. [Laughs] My four years, three months in the military was an experience. When I got out of the military . . . When I was in there, I got married. Had three children. I got out the marriage . . . lasted about seven years. When I got out, it in was in the sixties. I went to military . . . I went to school, to collect some of my money from the military.

[10:23] Then, here comes nineteen sixty eight. Martin Luther King got killed. That's when all the actions started. Two cops . . . Two white cops pulled me over one night. October . . . I mean, not October . . . June, June 6, '68. About twelve o'clock at night. Pulled me over, asking about my motorcycle . . . I was about a block from my house. They asked me for my ID. I said, "My ID is in my house. I live right there." So, they wouldn't allow me to go get my ID. They said, "Get in the car. You're going with us." I said, "I'm not getting in the car with you and leave my motorcycle here."

ARSENEAULT: Where was this?

VINCENT: [11:20] This was a block from my house . . . Hayes Street, Washington DC. I was talking to a neighbor. We debated back and forth for a minute there, and they said, "Okay, you can ride the bike to the precinct." So I walked around the corner and saw that she got in the house. I got on the bike and started heading for the precinct. Stopped at a stoplight. They pulled up beside me and asked me do I know where it was? I said, "Yeah." He laid his gun on the seat beside him, said, "We going to be following you, don't try nothing." So I start thinking, I'm going to the precinct with them. I don't have no ID. They still don't know who I am. So I decided not to go. I turned on off and headed back home. The first block I went, they start shooting. The first block. So, there was maybe about ten blocks from my house. They were shooting all the way. Matter of fact, the shotgun rider got the driver's gun and started using it because he ran out of bullets. But he shot me in the back, about a block from my house.

So when I made a wide U-turn to go to my house, I hit some railroad tracks and it threw me off. I got up and was limping towards the house. The passenger was right behind me. He came up, and I went down in this little area way . . . about maybe four feet wide, four steps down. I was knocking on the door, for my brother to open the door. The cop that was behind me got in between me and the door. He pushed me back against the wall, and I was kicking on the door. He had his gun on me. When the driver came to the little area way . . . He had a flashlight. He shot me in the right ankle with a Derringer. I fell down on my left side, and my head was on about the second step . . . second or third step. He started kicking me in the head. The one that was in front of me shot me point-blank in the chest right here. When he shot me in the chest, I started cussing him out and spitting blood on him. At that time, my brother opened the door . . . He turned kind of on my brother. My other brother came to the top of the steps, and he was

coming down . . . The cop said, "You can't come down here." He said, "You're a damn liar. That's my brother you got there." So all hell broke loose then.

The rest of the cops came, the ambulance came. They handcuffed me . . . The handcuffs were so tight, I couldn't even feel the bullet wounds. That's how tight the handcuffs were. I was in the ambulance going to hospital, and I told the cop, "These cuffs are too tight." The cop just looked at me like a black snake. So, I told the attendant in the ambulance, "Feel these cuffs, man. They're too tight." He checked them, and he told the cop, "You need to loosen them up." That's when the cop loosened them up. We got to the hospital. Here come cops, detective, and everything . . . Running in there, asking me questions. One of them lit a cigarette and stuck in my mouth. I spit it at him . . . The doctor told him they had to get out there, you know. He was asking me, "What happened?" I said, "You ask your racist coworkers what happened."

[15:38] After that . . . They had a cop at my door the whole time I was in the hospital. I got out . . . They took me to court. The cops didn't show up, so they dropped the charges. They had a charge against me for assault on a cop or something. The cops didn't show up, so the judge dismissed it. When he dismissed the charge, they reinstated the charge or whatever they do. And they were back at my house that night, with the guns drawn and all around the house, you know. On the . . . The next year, which would be sixty-nine, we filed a suit against the cops and the government for two and a half million dollars. When they found out that suit was against . . . When they found out that I didn't even have a juvenile record, no criminal record whatsoever . . . they came back, October tenth. What day was I born? October ninth, right? They came back October tenth with the no-knock. At that time, they were killing [Black] Panther Party members all over the country . . . in bed, sleep. Justified killing them. So they tried that on me . . . didn't work. When I heard them breaking my door in . . . And I sleep naked . . . no clothes . . . a gun

under my pillow, a gun in every corner of my house. When I heard them breaking my door in, I jumped straight up, grabbed my .38 from under my pillow, heading for the front door . . . Put my .38 in my left hand. [phone ringing] When I got to my bathroom, I reached in on the shelf and grabbed my .45 . . . cocked it. When I got to the corner of the door, they were this far . . . this close to me. Eight feet. Door burst open about that wide.

[18:06] The first shot they fired out of this twelve-gauge double-aught buck shotgun was that close to my head . . . that was the first shot. After they fired that shot, I went into a squat. The other four shots was right here. They had the drugs with them, because after they ran out, I shot . . . When they were shooting the four shots, I shot two rounds out of that .45. [slaps hand] They were gone with the sound. Trust me. When the sound left, they were with it. [laughs] They went outside, and they shot thirteen canisters of tear gas through the front window. I was in there with a wet towel on my face. We stayed in there . . . I stayed in there for three hours. We were negotiating. "Where's your search warrant? What you here for?" Nobody knew where the search warrant was because they dropped it when they were running down the steps. So they say, "Can anybody come in and talk to you?" I say, "My brother can come in, but anybody else is dead." My brother came in . . . When he saw the attaché case laying there, he opened it up and looked in it and he frowned. Then he leaned it over so I could see. They had drugs and papers in it.

ARSENEAULT: Were they trying to frame you?

VINCENT: Absolutely. They couldn't kill me, so they had to do the next thing . . . Frame me. They wanted to kill me and frame me at the same time. So, we talked about it and

whatnot . . . and the whole community was around by that time. Because they knew, you know, the history . . . I had got shot by the cops, what now.

ARSENEAULT: [20:09] We would love to sit down with you again and get a longer interview.

VINCENT: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: We have to wrap it up, just because we have people waiting.

VINCENT: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: I wanted to ask you one last question, relating to Mossville . . . and kind of what this community means to you.

VINCENT: It means that . . . We have been, us as a people here . . . I'm talking about African people . . . have been duped so bad as criminal. Because this system of capitalism has become a system of imperialism. I know that we should be doing better than we are, as a people here in this so-called filthy rich country. It means to me that . . . We are better than the ones who doing what they're doing to us.

ARSENEAULT: Well, our time is up.

VINCENT: Alright.

ARSENEAULT: On behalf of the center and the museum, I just want to thank you so much for sharing that with us. Did you want to add anything before we close it up?

VINCENT: Only thing I want to add . . . That's just the tip of the iceberg.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, definitely.

VINCENT: [Laughs]

ARSENEAULT: And that concludes our interview. Thank you so much.

VINCENT: Alright.

[21:50]

[End Tape 4430. End Session I.]