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Jalin Mack
David Slutzky, Portia Morgan
Summer 2013, St. Helena, SC

DS: Good afternoon, I'm David Slutzky, here with Portia Morgan. Today, we are interviewing Jalin Mack who is a rising junior at Savannah State University. Thanks for joining us, Jalin.

JM: Glad to be here.

DS: As you know, we're here to chronicle Gullah history, sea island history, and some rich history of the island here we can bring to our students back in Cleveland because so many don't know their history and how much of it is steeped in the South and the Great Migration. You were born in here in St. Helena?

JM: Yes, sir. Right across town, Beaufort.

DS: So let's just start off just growing up. What was family life like for you?

JM: Family life was like, you know, was like a little bond, everybody get together. When I grew up, parents recommended their child to come here for Penn Center purposes like, know more of the culture and to know like, how everything was there like, back in the day. And there's a camp and they teach you all the foundation of Penn Center from the background they tell you like, the founders, Ellen Murray, and they told you the teachers, and it's like, mostly history. They got books to in the library that they go to. It's like a good camp to go to.

DS: Oh, okay. Any favorite childhood memory you want to share?

JM: Memory? I like going on the vacations, like, somedays we just take a break and go to the swimming pool, go to the skating rink, yeah. Take the mind off of too much studying.

DS: Right. When I say the word family to some people it's your immediate family. I get the feeling when you hear the word family here you're not just talking about your immediate family.

JM: Yeah, immediate family. Talking about like, just any like, a neighbor or helping hand, you know, their support, that's how they define it as family here.

DS: Yeah, it's more like an extended thing. How old were you when you heard the term Gullah for the first time?

JM: Gullah. I'll say I was about ten years old.

DS: Okay.

JM: Ten years old, fifth grade because that was my first time when I came here. And then they was just speaking all kind of language. We had learned a "St. Helena Hymn". I don't remember by now but it's basically Gullah, how they used the terms and different words as today.

DS: Did they teach a lot about Gullah history in school growing up here, elementary and high school?

JM: Not that much. Not that much as they do at Penn Center.

DS: No, so do you think you were unique that your family found it important enough to make sure you knew your history more than your classmates?

JM: Yes, and then it's like more advanced because, you know, you would go home and tell your parents what you learned today and there like, "Oh, I didn't know that, you know, when I was young". It's a good experience.

DS: Yeah, it is good. How big was church in your life growing up?

JM: Church, church was very big. It made like a huge impact for your character, you know, like how to handle situations and things.

DS: So for you it's really more than going to church on Sundays, doing more life lessons as an extension of the church not just-

JM: Right, yeah, about more about life, you know, there's more in it.

DS: I understand. Other cultural things you wanna tell us you learned about in your history growing up here?

JM: Cultural. Besides the songs and the hymns I think I learned dances and every winter, like around November, they have a heritage for like everybody from different towns to, you know, explore St. Helena, Penn Center, and just talk about the culture, and just learn more about different countries as well, that, you know, learn Gullah too.

DS: Okay, you acted in heritage days they have here every year?

JM: Yes sir, it's in November.

DS: Right.

JM: They have like, a big banner like, when you come past that road they tell you the dates. It's like a three day weekend.

DS: Okay, but how many people come into town for that?

JM: I'll say over a thousand. It's a big event, a huge event.

DS: Wow, real celebration. How about leisure activities, sports and what not?

JM: We have like, competitive activities sometimes. Sometimes we have like awards at the end of the Penn Center year. And it's just academically, you know, like that best writer, they'll do everything you can think of. They just support as well as your parents do. You know, they want to teach just as much as the other school. And you like have free time to play kickball, volleyball, you know, other basketball, the basketball courts over there. Just a lot of free time on your hands too.

DS: Okay, what do you think are some of the important messages you got from school or the Penn Center, your parents?

JM: Important messages. I heard it's not where your from, it's where you're going. I heard that a lot when I was growing up. As far as, you know, never forget where you've been at, you know, like how far you succeed and everything.

DS: Right, I understand. What are some things that you think students and, you know, children that are not from this area should know about this area?

JM: Should know, they should know that, you know, it doesn't hurt to learn any culture, you know like, especially to understand so if you was to come across it, you know, you would know how to may be like, "Oh yeah, I learned that and it's good", just like everything. Everything about it, it's just a new experience. Honestly, it's a new experience, you know, it's something to try something different, especially like learning, being around home, you just not know too many stuff. But once you go out and learn, you can never find problems with too much learning, like learning everyday.

DS: We understand that growing up you won some awards and other achievements for involvement in different things, anything you want to share about those?

JM: Awards, awards I got most obedient 'cause when I was around, I was with a crowd. The crowd that I was around, you know, just talking to, you know, misbehaving I just know from the church and my parents growing up as- and my father, my role model, so he just told me, you know, just, "You got nothing good to say, don't say nothing at all". And I was just being to myself and being the most obedient child.

DS: Well, that's an important lesson to teach anybody just to be respectful of your fellow citizens. You're a college student now, what're you studying at Savannah?

JM: I'm studying computer science and after I graduate in two years I'm trying my masters in business, so I'm just ready to create my own business and experience the world.

DS: That's a good one two combo. I know it's kind of early but any businesses in mind?

JM: Business in mind. I want to say like computer graphics like studying more the graphic design, the web design, the data and communication.

DS: Okay, well, that's a growing field I'm sure it'll be a good one two combo to use in the future there. We definitely need more people in that line of work.

Portia Morgan: So at Savannah State, do you and some of your fellow students talk about this culture?

JM: Savannah, I would say I don't know too many people from where I'm from, from home. And so it's like different 'cause every time I was asked, you know, like, "Where you from", this and that, "Have you heard about South Carolina, St. Helena"? Their like, "Why you talk like that"? I was like, "I was raised. This is how I talk". And because Georgia is a different accent too and so their just not from South Carolina, so they wouldn't understand.

PM: How far is Savannah from here?

JM: 45 minutes and 2 hours.

PM: And so there's a big difference?

JM: There's a big difference, a big gap. Savannah is like borderline.

DS: We hear sometimes that in St. Helena the sea islands, you'll hear the word Gullah. In Savannah and part South, you'll hear the term Geechee. But they're interrelated.

JM: They're the same thing it's just how people use different terms. Like we was raised to call it Gullah but they just say Geechee like, you know, just like a Chinese African-American word.

DS: Okay, I was wondering the, you know, your fellow students in Savannah there, do they relate more to that word then understand-

JM: Then Gullah? Yeah, I guess, in the way we talk they just say it's Geechee but they don't understand the behind, the background understanding of the real term Gullah because it's from way back, past tense. There's a lot of meaning towards Gullah then Geechee but that's, it's more popular like around other states that the term Geechee has developed.

DS: Did your teachers here pay special attention to your dialect as opposed to maybe the person sitting next to you, or wasn't that much of a difference?

JM: It wasn't that much of a difference.

DS: Okay, did your parents tell you about those experiences where they sounded a little different then other students?

JM: Yeah, my mother said she was born in Virginia and so when she was staying in Virginia a little bit, you know, things changed and, I guess, when she moved back 'cause my grandfather was in the military, so he kept moving back and forth. So when he came back here she was like, "Oh, it seems different from Virginia, you know, everybody talking different and I'm understanding a couple words". They used to have like events that other people that was born here,

that moved, they would come back and just talk about the Gullah culture, and sing songs, and everybody would be reunited, like family.

DS: We hear family a lot in any interview that we've done here in a very positive, special way. You mentioned music a few times here, what are some musical memories or favorite hymns?

JM: Spirituals, like another Gullah spiritual is Kumbayah.

DS: Right.

JM: Yes, it's just about like, you know, the lord and you just calling onto him when you need help.

PM: Well, Jalin, someone comes into town and they run into you on the street. Tell me the two things I should see or do, while I'm on St. Helena. What would those two things be?

JM: To see or do. One, I would say, you know, as you come to St. Helena, you stop by, look through the museum. The museum is the foundation of everything and it tells you like where everything started from, from the beginning until how it is today. And second, I would just tell them to have fun and enjoy the time they're here.

DS: Okay, how about food? Any favorite traditional dishes that maybe your mother or grandmother, any older relatives?

JM: Food, we have like a different combination everyday but you just grateful to have food any day 'cause some people don't, you know, eat or whatever. So it's just nice, I mean, it's good. There's nothing wrong with the food I just like deserts, you know, like they have cake and cornbread and other types. We get milk, you know, they tell you for your bones and good too, for the vitamins.

DS: Right, we've definitely sampled some of the local fair and we've never gone hungry. We're not satisfied.

PM: Any plans to come back to St. Helena? Are you part of the land owning families here?

JM: Yes, my father-in-law own a couple of lands. My granddaddy own some lands down towards the end. It's just no place like home like I've been told. And it's like no matter how far you stay away from home you're always going to come back to home and, you know, see if anything change or whether it remain the same. It's really nice.

PM: One of the things that we picked up is that people who live on St. Helena like St. Helena the way it is. Would you be able to stand McDonalds and Burgerking? Do you think that they're lacking in progress because they don't have all the modern conveniences?

JM: I would say, in a kind of way, they would lack but McDonalds and Burgerking, it's not good to eat all the time 'cause, you know, when you eat fast foods, you know, the calories and all the

carbohydrates you need. Penn Center they'll treat you just like, you know, any other home or any other person. You'll get treated as anybody else, the same. That's always good because, you know, many people we'll just be like, "Oh, I like South Carolina", and, you know, and the food, and this and that. It's different from there, you know. everything is just well made, well constructed.

DS: When were you first taken to Penn Center? How old were you the first time?

JM: First time, I'll say I was nine. We used to have summer camps at Darryl Hall, over at Darryl Hall. Every morning we would go sing a hymn and after that we would just learn about more of the culture and more everything just about the Penn Center like where the buildings were established and how they get the names. And the president, the executive director, Walter Mack, he showed us everything, showed us everything. He took us around the tour. He tried to get as many people to understand about the culture, so when they go back home they can tell more and then more people can bring up more information about it.

DS: That's what were trying to do ourselves here, in hope that we can bring this to a more extensive population than just in the immediate area, for sure. Anything else you'd like to share with us about, you know, life in St. Helena or...?

JM: Life in St. Helena, it's a good vacation spot. Everything is just completely calm, relaxed. Every part, especially back on down to Land's End Scott, you'll find more history about Penn Center too. I also was told about the learning center. That's where they build from a toddler until you get to the age that I am now, that you should be packed with information and everything. They read stories and, you know, you'd always have nap time. I wish I had more chances to take naps when I was little then now because it's much needed.

DS: I understand that. You mentioned you're part of a land owning family, with all of the rich history of land ownership here, are you a little concerned about development like this won't turn into the next Hiltonhead because there are offers made by developers on all the properties here.?

JM: I think with Hiltonhead, trying to do what they can it's impossible to help in their situation. But I think the people from St. Helena might fight that issue. So, you know, and then one day we might come together, you know, might resolve this issue and that issue and make it so they can stay and last forever.

DS: Right, something tells me your family and including you and the future are going to hold onto it.

JM: Yes sir, we'll remember it from next generation to the next generation.

DS: Right, right.

PM: Any last comments you'd like to make? Now, these videos we'll be viewed by students in Cleveland and so is there anything you'd like to tell them, again one thing you'd like them to know about St. Helena?

JM: About St. Helena, if there's a chance to come to St. Helena don't miss the opportunity. Come ASAP, right now and explore. And tell your friends about how your vacation went, or how your time in South Carolina, St. Helena and tell them what you learn about the term Geechee, or Gullah.

DS: Okay, Jalin, thank you very much for joining us today.

PM: Thank you!

JM: Glad to be here. Appreciate it.