Roosevelt Wilson: Oh yes. My mother used to use— We have colds, to go out in the woods. I mean, send my dad in the woods and get some of this tea. Can't remember the name of that tea. And make it. I mean, we didn't get over the counter medicine. Well, I remember Black Graph. We used to do that. But it used to be tea and put— Won't get colds put— I don't know, some kind of stink stuff on us, but much of it was home remedy. But even things like if you get a cut, get things like spider webs, cotton webs, and things like that and mix it with stuff. Yeah, that was very common. Yeah.

Paul Ortiz: Who would apply those? That always—

Roosevelt Wilson: My mom. Yeah. Yeah. Or my grandma.

Paul Ortiz: Were there alternative kinds of spiritual beliefs when you were growing up?

Roosevelt Wilson: And I didn't— People used to call them root doctors and I never knew much about them, but I would hear my folks talk about them. And I guess these are— What would we call today? Psychics, I guess. Because they would say, go get things that they put roots on you. I mean they put spells on you and stuff like that. Yeah. I mean that was very prevalent.

Paul Ortiz: Would you ever hear anybody talk in terms of putting a spell on somebody else or there being a fear that that would happen to people?

Roosevelt Wilson: It was like I would hear adults talking about it, but I never knew anyone who would like to tell me. I mean, because this is when I was a child and let's see, by the time I got— Well, when I went, by the time I got out of high school and started college, it's kind of like I got away from— And so the people I was interacting with and we were kind of moving to another level, that kind of thing. But where I heard all of this is when I was coming up, particular until I got maybe junior high, you know, that kind of thing. But then I wasn't old enough to interact with those people, but I was very much aware of it.

Paul Ortiz: What kind of stories would your parents or elders tell about that?

Roosevelt Wilson: I don't recall particularly who told it, not like my parents or my grandparents. But I do recall stories about people going off, getting things, and they'd come back and then after a while the enemies would start getting ill and they start drying up and actually they would die, but people put spells on them, things like that. And they would go to see people and particularly say people would go to South Carolina. South Carolina was one of the favorite places they would go and get these roots and things like that and come back and put on people.

Roosevelt Wilson: Those were common stories. And I don't know how much it was coincidence, but a lot of

times, I don't know if somebody got ill and just died and then people just say, well here's what happened. Or if somebody went off and got something, they say, okay, here's going to happen. I don't know. But I do know that they related that with some kind of herbal or what they call a root doctor or something. Some kind of roots they put on people.

Paul Ortiz: Now would this always be intraracial within the Black community? Was he ever employed, say [indistinct 00:04:54] the White?

Roosevelt Wilson: No. That's interesting. No, it was always Black on Black.

Paul Ortiz: Mr. Wilson, who was responsible for discipline within the family?

Roosevelt Wilson: In my family, both. My dad, I don't recall my dad ever physically disciplining me, but he never had to. I mean, it was just a word work, but now my mother used to tear me up all the time. I mean I'd go out and I'd wear the knee in my pants or something like that and she'd just go to— She'd tell me one that kind of thing. But it was an equal type thing. There was— And the other part about that was with the teachers at school.

Roosevelt Wilson: And I know, I remember my dad threatening me once because I had an ag teacher and he would come by and we'd have our projects and he'd come by and visit us at home. And my dad asked him one day how's I doing in school? He said, "Well, he's doing fine." [indistinct 00:06:16]. Who does, but my dad threatened to decapitate me. He said, "You gotcha get your work." And if a teacher saw it fit to give you corporal punishment in school, well we didn't bring that message home because we get it again at home.

Roosevelt Wilson: So it was definitely a— I know you've heard this about where they're talking about takes a community to raise a child. That was true when I was coming up, anybody could discipline in the community. I mean, there was a lady used to live next door to us named Ms. Lizzie. And she saw us getting out of line. I mean she would tan our hides and was my parents blessing and we didn't have all the problems we have now either.

Roosevelt Wilson: But it certainly was a, it's a community-type thing.

Paul Ortiz: Did you ever feel as a child that the punishment was unfair?

Roosevelt Wilson: No.

Roosevelt Wilson: No. Because I'm trying to remember, there may have been a couple times when I was wrongly accused, but it wasn't— I mean, see I knew deep down inside that my folks thought they were right. Okay. And most times they were all right. But a couple times, I was a victim of circumstances, but they never mistreated me or abused me. And so one of the couple times when they were wrong, I never took that as any kind of meanness, or being unfair, or whatever. It was just that, of course I didn't want to get spanking or whatever. Because my mother's the one who would do it and I didn't want to do that. But at the same

time, I couldn't get bent out of shape because I know that. But now, interestingly enough though, my brother was— He just refused to take a whipping. He ran away from home.

Roosevelt Wilson: So again, I don't know what that does to the mix. But my sisters, they— My parents weren't unfair to any of us. It was just, I think a peculiarity that my brother, plus he used to get into a lot of stuff too.

Paul Ortiz: Where would you get the news from during those years growing up? Who would you say the most common news sources?

Roosevelt Wilson: Well, we used to take the Pittsburgh Courier, Pittsburgh their newspaper. We always had a radio and tell you what we used to do for recreation is we used to listen at the Grand Ole Opry. I mean that would be our Saturday night recreation. But see that the Pittsburgh Courier was basically it. Because when you listen at the radio, there wasn't anything on there about Black people. Fact that we had listen at the Grand Ole Opry tell you what kind of choices we had about entertainment. So as far as news, and sometimes it'd be two or three weeks old, we got it through Pittsburgh Courier. What time is it?

Paul Ortiz: As you would read that as a coming up, were there editors or reporters that stood out in your mind and particularly admired opinions?

Roosevelt Wilson: No, when I got that age, again, we've gotten into the sixties and I was in another world so to speak. I was in the college atmosphere. So I mean, by that time I was reading Shakespeare and all these folks. And so I've developed a whole nother level of appreciation for writing things like that. And I was reading the daily newspapers. But in terms of when I was in that sheltered part of my life, so to speak, in my Black world so to speak, no, just whatever we got there was fine.

Roosevelt Wilson: And one of the things that I remember about the Pittsburgh Courier is we played, well I didn't play, but my mother, just about everybody I knew played— What do they call it? We call it [indistinct 00:11:41]. And in the comics, they'd have all these numbers all over everywhere. And they'd be searching and they'd find that and they'd play those numbers, it was kind of strange kind of lottery type thing. I remember that vividly. Everybody would be. I remember people coming around selling those numbers. But as far as, no, I mean as far as writers, no, I don't recall that.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, it was kind of a lot— Believe it was kind of a lottery game in the Pittsburgh Courier?

Roosevelt Wilson: Well no, it was a local lottery game.

Paul Ortiz: Local lottery.

Roosevelt Wilson: People run numbers, but they look in the Pittsburgh Courier to find numbers to play. See what happened in Pittsburgh Courier, people would just at random, just come up with some numbers. You just put all over the comics and people say, okay, well here's the lucky number. They play it. Sometimes

they'd be lucky and get it, but it was a good promotional thing for the Courier. I didn't realize what they were doing until much later.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, the writers in the Courier themselves were putting, they would put the numbers in the paper or people, local people put numbers in paper.

Roosevelt Wilson: Well, it was only in the comics, only in the comics section. And the people who did the comics section would do it. Yes.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, so it was actually be done in Pittsburgh.

Roosevelt Wilson: Yeah. Yeah.

Paul Ortiz: Would they know that people were playing this game?

Roosevelt Wilson: That's why they put it in.

Paul Ortiz: [indistinct 00:13:16]?

Roosevelt Wilson: And they put— See they play them all over the country.

Paul Ortiz: Play it all over the country?

Roosevelt Wilson: Yeah. Yeah. It's this numbers racket. I mean I used to be big time money and I know people used to, they used to come around just like insurance sales when— I mean, they'd come around with a little ticket and they'd sell, I think it used to be a dime or something like that. They'd sell them. Children couldn't buy them for adults. And they said that the number comes out that they'd pay off. They'd come by next week and they'd pay off. So that was very popular back then.

Paul Ortiz: What kind of transportation did your family have access to?

Roosevelt Wilson: Ever since I can remember we had a car. My dad was a mechanic, well self made mechanic. One of the things about him was that he could look at something and he'd take the car, he could put it back together. And so he would always have something to ride. And so we always had some kind of vehicle.

Paul Ortiz: Now you entered college in the early sixties was that right?

Roosevelt Wilson: No, actually '57.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, '57. And you went to Bethune-Cookman?

Roosevelt Wilson: Well, my first, no, I first went to Savannah State. '57, '58, I went to Savannah State. And then my family moved back to Bonnell. And so I wound up going to a community college. So in an effect, I started all over. So '58-'59, '59-'60 I went to community college in Daytona Beach. Then I graduated from there and Bethune-Cookman gave top two students in the graduated class scholarships. I had no idea how I was going to school and I just happened to finish number two. I got this school scholarship with them. And so I went with them and I graduated '63 with them.

Paul Ortiz: Was there an expectation when you were growing up that you would go to college from your family? Or was it more personal?

Roosevelt Wilson: I thought I'm the youngest of four and my dad said, "Look, if you want it, go. If I have to eat bread and drink water." He said, "If you don't want it, don't waste my time. You don't waste my money. Okay." I'm the only one who said he wanted it. My brother said he want no part in it, my sisters. So I'm the only one who said he wanted it. And sure enough, he went through some rough times, never, never told me to go to work. He just told me to get my lesson. And I mean times were really rough there for a while. I didn't know one time when he was out of work and he said, "No, stay in school."

Paul Ortiz: So you wanted to go back and work to help out?

Roosevelt Wilson: Yeah. Matter fact, I did once my junior year, in high school, the second semester my junior year, my dad had a bad case of appendicitis, in September of junior year and he went to the hospital. He was out of work. So I dropped out of school, my second semester and I worked the rest of that semester and that summer.

Roosevelt Wilson: And he got back on the street that summer. So he told me to go back to high school, which I really should have gone back to 11th grade. And this is one of the advantages that we had when we had all-Black schools, that kind of thing. I got back, my homeroom teacher told me, he said, "Look, boy, let me tell you something." He said, "Now, you got a good head on your body." He said, "Now, you haven't been doing anything but goofing off." And he was right, I've been doing C's, stuff like that. And he said, "Now, what I'm going to do?" He said, "I want to let you go on to the 12th grade on trial." He said, "Now, if you get your work, you can stay there. If not, you're going to have to repeat the 11th grade." That was my inspiration. I was an honor student. Every single grading period since that point and basically got, for the most part, got scholarships the rest of the way. And that couldn't happen today.

Paul Ortiz: What were you thinking about in terms, were you thinking at this point in college in terms of career or more in terms of studying particular subjects?

Roosevelt Wilson: When I— See college was, college was a dream. It was a goal, but I had absolutely no idea what it was about. I went to Savannah State, I thought I wanted to be a mechanical engineer. I didn't even know what that was. And I got in the program where they had a machine, they called machine shop practice type thing, where it would give me an introduction to engineering and all that kind of stuff. And I found out that I just wasn't suited to that. Well anyway, after that one year we moved back to Florida. So when I went

to community college, I thought I wanted to be an accountant. So my two years in junior college, I majored in business administration with an emphasis accounting. So I got an associate degree in business administration.

Roosevelt Wilson: And near the end of that I tried to say how am I going to spend the rest of my life sitting behind a desk juggling with these numbers and it wasn't appealing. And then the blessing, I think came when Bethune-Cookman gave me that scholarship, only place in the world I could go. They did not have business administration as a major. And I had gotten into this literature thing and I had a friend of mine, he said, "Well, I'm going to major in English." So I said, "Okay, so I majored in English." So I got a degree in English. And I started teaching high school English after that. But one of the things that happened is I was teaching high school English and I, at the end of the month, I got— I'm making $4,050 a year in '63. Okay. $4,050.

Roosevelt Wilson: When I got my check at in the month, I spent it all my check and I still had some bills left. So my wife was trying to help out and so she started doing day's work, maid's work for a publisher, [indistinct 00:21:33] newspaper. And so she told her one day that I was looking for some part-time work. And I honestly was thinking about something like circulation, just delivering papers. Fortunately, a lot of things fell into place for me. It was an afternoon paper, which meant that the paper was delivered somewhere between eleven and one o'clock during the day, when I was at school. So I couldn't. But anyway, we were walking. So he had said he would find something for me to do. So we were walking through the newsroom one day and he said, well, what is it you want to do? And heaven knows that had never occurred to me.

Roosevelt Wilson: I said, "I want to write." It had just never occurred to me before, but I don't know where it came from. So he said, "Well." This was in '63. And he said, "Well," and this was during all the turmoil with the Civil Rights thing and all that. He said, "Well, we do need a link with the Black community." And he said, "You could be that link." And that's how I got into this business. I started doing little stories. I wound up in sports, doing columns and stuff like that. And that's how I got into the newspaper business. And it just kind of evolved from that.

Paul Ortiz: So did you see yourself in terms as actually fulfilling that role as a link to the Black community in the sixties as a newspaper professional?

Roosevelt Wilson: It became critical. I had no idea it was going to become that critical because this was during the time when they were debating what to do with the schools, about the integration, and everything. And to give another example. I had started writing columns and people pretty much respected that. I always tried to be rational with what I write. And although I didn't pulling any the punches, but I tried to be rational and not just go off.

Roosevelt Wilson: But anyway, one of the things that they did when they closed this Black high school in Ocala, and I guess it's like anywhere else, people get obsessed with athletics. Well, the Black high school had all the best athletes, no question about it, all right. And so the folks knew that they were going to close the Black school, but they didn't want to wait. The White folks now, didn't want to wait until the year until

they got the new school built. Because they wanted to get these athletes.

Roosevelt Wilson: Because these kids, the year before as juniors, they had lost only one game. So they were going be seniors coming up. And so they said, well, we can get all these kids from the Ocala High team, we might win the state championship, that kind of thing. Well, so they decided to close Howard and have double sessions at Ocala High. You had one school that was perfectly fine, but they closed it. They had double sessions at Ocala High in order to get all these athletes over there. And so suddenly now the question is who's going be the coach? The Black guy had been winning everything, right? This White guy over here been struggling.

Roosevelt Wilson: But what happened, the school superintendent ultimately offered the job to the Black coach and the coach turned it down. And so the school superintendent called me in and he said, "This is very important," because, it's really, all those times, because people were— I mean, that was a big question in the community who was going to coach? And he said, "I want you to know that I offered the job to EK, and EK turned it down." He said, "The people will believe you." He said, "It's important that you let the people know that EK turned the job down."

Roosevelt Wilson: And the superintendent, of course, is White. But anyway, I said, "Well, I'll have to talk with EK," because EK was a personal friend. And so EK said, "Man." He said, "I wouldn't touch it." He said, "Anybody who wants to try to win a football game so badly that they're going to inconvenience a whole school full of kids in order to get it." He said, "I don't even want to be bothered with fanatics like that." He said, "No, I would not touch it." He said, "I don't want it. And you can say that." All right, well I did. I wrote the column, wrote the story, and said, "Explain it." The community accepted it. No disturbance or whatever. They just simply accepted it.

Roosevelt Wilson: And I think probably they accepted that from me, honestly, I don't think they would've accepted it from a White reporter the same way, because my community trusted me. And when we were negotiating about the double sessions and all that kind of stuff, I had to attend these board meetings and I had to write these stories in the paper from the proper perspective so that they were believable. And so as a result, we had no major disturbances in Ocala. And we went through something, major, major changes.

Roosevelt Wilson: And I felt that, in retrospect, and I've thought about that, as long as our people believed that we were being treated fairly within the context of the whole thing, that they were okay, they didn't get violent, there were no protests, that kind of thing. And so things went pretty smoothly, Ocala during that time. One the few places in Florida where made it smoothly. And I'm not accepting responsibility for it. But what I am saying though, I think that communication, that clear communication, so that the community understood what was going on, I think that had a lot to do with it.

Paul Ortiz: Do you think that the Black media continues to play that kind of role in the same way that you played it as a young writer, considering?

Roosevelt Wilson: Well, some newspapers, yes. One of the things that we in the Black Crest have to guard

against is irrationality. And that is lashing out, being upset, being irrational and unreasonable in the way we react to things. And sometimes we can be incendiary, so to speak. I think we have a responsibility to react responsibly, because a lot of times our readers look to us for leadership and a lot of times they take their cues from us. And so it's important that we are credible, because when we're always lashing out, we are anti-White, or just always lashing out at people, suddenly we're going to lose our effectiveness and then suddenly we become a voice that nobody listens to.

Paul Ortiz: And how did you come into starting the Capital Outlook?

Roosevelt Wilson: Well, I didn't start The Capital Outlook actually was started in '75, 1975 by guy named Steve Beasley, who was a photographer, still is a photographer. He never really intended to have a newspaper. He looked at it as a moneymaking opportunity. He said he'd go to these parties and everything. He said, well, if I print all these people's pictures and everything, I could sell a lot of papers. So in time, I make some money. And so basically was it. But then it went through a couple of hands and then in '91 I got an opportunity to purchase it. And it was at that point that I decided that I wanted to make it a really serious newspaper dealing with issues. And that's when it took on the character that it has now, in terms of the editorial pages, dealing with the issues, challenging government, the whole thing.

Paul Ortiz: You at times look to pass African-American newspaper men, such as Emory Jackson, people like that for kind of a spiritual guidance or do you see yourself as part of a heritage of Black newspaper editors?

Roosevelt Wilson: Absolutely. And actually the two that I look to are John B. Russ-Warren and Samuel Cornish. And they started the first one at 1827. And I often think about that first editorial they wrote and they said, "We wish to plead our own cause, too often others have spoken for us. And I laid out misdeeds out while ignoring all the good things we do. We have an obligation to educate, to be advocates, to inspire." And that's where I get mine my direction. Yes.

Paul Ortiz: And if you were writing your autobiography and you coming to perhaps the conclusion and trying to think of the inspiring points in your life or inspirational things that have really kept you going and helped you transcend barriers that you engaged, what would be some of those things? Be person, historical figure, saying?

Roosevelt Wilson: I think they are basically two things, other than the obvious, in terms of a family that kind of, I mean things are given, I think. Okay. But beyond that, I think that I teach because I love it. And I've often said that the two things I would do if even if I had won that a hundred million dollar lottery, the two things I'd continue to do is teach and publish this newspaper. And that's because I love them. And to have students 5, 10, 15 years after I have taught them to tell me that I was a positive influence on them, that keeps me going. And to have people to write, to call, not to say we really need the Capital Outlook, that keeps me going. That's what I do. And if there's a demonstrated appreciation for that somehow, some indication that it's doing some good, then that kind of stokes the fire that makes me want to continue.

Paul Ortiz: Well, Mr. Wilson, certainly thank you for sharing your time. Do you have any other stories or

remarks to share that we didn't touch on earlier?

Roosevelt Wilson: Well, I guess, what I have a problem right now, in that— Sometimes I wonder if we've put and made progress when we can have a situation like this gay situation and when just on a strictly racial, along racial lines, people don't see anything wrong with what this guy said. In fact, suddenly the victim becomes the perpetrator. I mean Senate— Now, these students who were victimized by this mean statement, now they are the problem. Because I articulate how misinformed the guy is. Suddenly, I'm denying this guy's academic freedom. This is 1994, so we can talk about Jim Crow, but where are we in 1994? That's my concern. And I guess that's why I'm still out there struggling because I wonder if the issues have really changed, or if the faces have just changed but the issues remain the same. That's what concerns me.