



In collaboration with

DARRYL MALEK-WILEY

**Senior Organizing Representative for The Sierra Club's Environmental Justice and
Community Partnership Program in New Orleans**

Date: April 30, 2023

Interviewer(s): Amanda Ostuni

0:00 **Amanda
Ostuni** **How are you?**

0:00.01 **Darryl
Malek-Wiley** I'm doing great, how ya doing?

0:00.03 **Amanda
Ostuni** **I'm good, I'm alright. I'm in my finals of my Master's program,
so a little bit stressed, but surviving.**

0:00.11 **Darryl
Malek-Wiley** I can understand that.

0:00.13 **Amanda
Ostuni** **Thank you so much for doing this.**

0:00.15 **Darryl
Malek-Wiley** Glad to be here and doing this.

0:00.17 **Amanda
Ostuni** **Were you able to sign the consent form yet? I just wanna—**

0:00.23 **Darryl
Malek-Wiley** Probably not. So, if you can resend it to me.

0:00.26 **Amanda
Ostuni** **Ok, sure. You can get it [in] afterwards, that's fine. Cool. Did
you have any questions about [this] or do you want me to just dive
in?**

0:00.34	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Just dive in. I've been, done an interview for—the Sierra Club has an oral history program on our environmental justice stuff. So, they had a guy here for three days, interviewed me for six hours.
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0:00.50	Amanda Ostuni	Oh, wow. You're a pro. Okay. Alright then, so yeah, I will start with just your back story, but we can kind of go general first, so just share an overview of who you are and what it is you do.
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0:01.06	Darryl Malek-Wiley	<p>Yeah, my boss keeps askin' me, 'what do I do'? So, growing up, my father was in hospital administration, so that meant we moved a lot; Indiana, Ohio—Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, west [Virginia], North Carolina. And I was in college in North Carolina, UNC-W [Wrightsville]. And that's where I first met up with the Sierra Club. And they had a meeting, and I went, and it was interesting, and [I] went back, and I... And then they said, "we need somebody to do" —I don't remember, even remember what it was they asked, they needed help on. I said, "I'm an intelligent person, I can do that." So, I did that, and then, that led to something else, and then all of a sudden, I was in charge of the group... [and] just sort of went from there, and...</p> <p>Our first campaign that I was actively involved with was, I was living at Wrightsville Beach, but the beach just—the island just south of that, in the seventies, they were proposing to develop it. And we thought it was better bein' a natural reserve. And so that was our first real big campaign that we worked on and preserved—and I forget the name of the island—but it's the one just south of Wrightsville. And that was sort of my taste of how community members could come together and really push a policy forward that protects the environment.</p> <p>So... that was pretty empowering to me, that we were able to do that, able to get—I remember, it took, [a] year, year and a half to do it, but the fact that we were able to stop more development of coastal...Carolina; the coast was good—something we thought was worthwhile.</p> <p>And then I sort of got involved with the Brunswick 1 and 2, which are the nuclear power plants down in Brunswick County [North Carolina]. [The plants were] owned by Carolina Power & Light [Company]. There had been a nonprofit formed that was concerned about, not so much the nuclear power plant, but the fact that they were gonna use the river, the Cape Fear River, as a cooling water, and just suck it through the plant, and then discharge it out in the Atlantic [Ocean]. And they were concerned about the impact on</p>
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aquatic fishery life being sucked through the plant and having thermal shock.

So, they followed all the steps, went through the nuclear regulatory commission steps, and were successful in getting a consent decree that said Carolina Power & Light agrees to build cooling towers at the nuclear power plant, and thus, eliminate the need for that, for the once-through [cooling] system, so. And after they won, they dissolved the group.

So, four years later, a Sierra Club member in South Carolina got a call from [the] EPA, [they] said, “we need your help on this; We need a Sierra Club representative to be at a hearing and support our efforts to hold them to that consent decree”. So, I said, “sure I can do that.”

So, I was at a hearing in Raleigh—I was unemployed at the time, so for like four weeks, I was in Raleigh, and every day I'd get up and go, and they had this big table full of experts, and I read all the documents. And I wasn't—I was a history major—but I am a very quick read, and [I] looked at their assumptions, and still thought that there was a need for the cooling towers. So, I just said, “hey, you signed an agreement, you stay with that”—and they did. The EPA ruled that they had to build the cooling towers, because of the Sierra Club objection. And then as a young man, that was very powerful, the fact that just me sitting there... and they had, they tried—they took me out to dinner, they tried to just wine and dine me, [and] say “well, you know, we've got the studies.” And I read the studies; they weren't that conclusive. It was just... [frozen/audio issues]

Break for technical issues.

0:06.29 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Ok? So yeah, it blew my mind. While I had stayed at UNC-W, my parents had moved down to Florida; I was fine, I had an apartment on the beach, it was college years—“I'm good, go head to Florida.” And so that was a time, it was the early 70s, and if you weren't in college, that means you were being drafted for the military. And I...I stayed in college, I didn't—and I was studying history, but I'd go to see my advisor and he said, “oh you're taking a history course this semester, that's good, you should take more of those so you can graduate.” I never told him that that wasn't the goal. I took Sociology, I took Psychology, I took Women's Studies early on, and Economics, and everything, just sort of—I have a very eclectic reading knowledge. And so, they stopped the draft and I decided I had had enough college, so I quit, and went to work at a chemical plant, because—

0:07.52 **Amanda Ostuni** **Oh wow.**

0:07.53 **Darryl Malek-Wiley**

Yeah, it just, it was available, the—where we lived in the subdivision, I was still livin’ back at home, and the guy across the street was a chemical engineer, so he said, “this plant needs people.” So, I went to work, for three years, I worked at a Hercules [Inc.] chemical plant on the Cape Fear River. And all the time I was workin’ the plant, I was still actively involved in the Sierra Club. In fact, when I was at work, if I saw somethin’ going wrong with the boilers and they [were] polluting too much, I would call the state agency and file a complaint. And they didn’t like that too much.

And then, I’ve always been one to ask the question “why” and I found out that the Hercules was payin’ the people who worked in the New Jersey plant \$27.50 an hour. They were paying us 15. I was trying to figure out where the other 12 went. The plant in New Jersey, of course, was unionized. So, I started... talkin’ to people and tried to form a union. I learned later that I should have sent them a certified letter sayin’, “Dear Sir, I’m gonna start a union”; that kicks in your legal protection. I got fired for “being out of my work area” `cause I was talkin’ to guys in another part of the plant. And the National Labor Relations gentleman who investigated my claim said, “I can see where because of what they’ve done (the different things they put in my file), how they were trying to fire you, but I can’t prove that they knew you were forming a union; therefore I can’t help—rule in your favor.”

So, I learned about that. And at that time my parents had moved from Florida up to Alabama, and when I got fired from the chemical plant, I started doing construction work, `cause that was easy to get into, you didn’t have to have any skills. So, I started as a laborer, became a carpenter’s helper, and then a carpenter. And my parents bought a house in Dothan, Alabama, that need[ed] some renovations, and I said, “well I can come down and do that.” So, I moved to Dothan, worked on their house, helped them renovate their—it was an 1870s-style home that just needed some updating on some different things, some new plumbing and things like that.

But while I was there, I got a job at a plant that, and started also lookin’ for people workin’ on environmental issues. And when I was in Dothan, Alabama, right nearby, there’s two nuclear powerplants on the Alabama side, where Alabama and Georgia come together—`cause Dothan’s sort of in the southeast corner of Alabama, where Georgia, Alabama, and Florida come together, down in that corner. And there was a nuclear plant, so I started looking at it and started

talkin' with other folks around the state, and there weren't—wasn't many people in the environmental movement in Alabama at that time; This [would have] been [19]73, 74.

0:11.39 **Amanda
Ostuni**

Oh wow, okay.

**Darryl
Malek-Wiley**

Yeah so... so I wrote to the Alabama Conservancy [Nature Conservancy in Alabama], which was the biggest environmental group in Alabama at that time, and said, "do you have anybody workin' on nuclear power," and they sent me five names.

So, I wrote a letter to all five, because we didn't have Internet, we didn't have phone—I didn't have [a] phone; So I wrote letters, and I got three responses out of 5. And I said, "that's great, we can have a meeting." So, we held a meeting up in Huntsville [Alabama], 'cause most of the people that were workin' on this were working on Tenne—TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority] nukes. There was a big push for TVA to build nukes all along the Tennessee River. So, we held a meeting, and had, the first meeting, we had 20 people show up, and it really surprised me that, once the word got out that there was a meeting, there were folks from Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi that came to the meeting. And we talked about some kind of unified strategy, and we formed—at that time, there was all sorts of anti-nuclear activity in the Northeast, with Clamshell Alliance, with other folks actually doing massive civil protests and events, so we said, "well, we can form the Catfish Alliance, we're in the South, we all like catfish." So, we formed the Catfish Alliance, an anti-nuclear alliance, and we said, "how do we wanna announce ourselves?" So, we said, "well, we'll do a balloon release, at these different plants."

And now I know I would not do that because of the dangers of the balloons and things like that, but we—I was in Dothan [at Alabama Power & Light's Joseph M. Farley plant] and I was the only one there, so I got a U-Haul trailer, filled it with balloons, and they all had cards: "if you get this card, you're within an area of radioactivity, possible radiation from this plant, if it leaks." And when I got there, drivin' the car with the balloons, and stopped out—there was an empty vacant lot, I stopped. And they had security guards every 50 feet along the plant fence line, and the fence line went for miles, and they had security guards every—and I found out later that the state police strike force was there also, 'cause they thought we were gonna be there en masse and go over the fence and it was just me and my balloons. So, I released the balloons one at a time, and... the news coverage covered the southeast event of the Catfish Alliance, and the Atlanta paper said—it had a story about all

the different places we released balloons and said, “in Dothan, a lone Catfish”—and named me, Darryl Wiley at that time—“released balloons.”

And so, we continued to do stuff. We had found—some folks in Florida got interested, in Gainesville [Florida], and one of them was an artist who did drawings for textbooks, so we had our T-shirt was a catfish hook—it was beautiful, it was wonderful.

And we were going to all sorts of—at that time there were all sorts of anti-nuclear activities around the South. There was [Barnwell County]¹, South Carolina, where they wanted to put a nuclear waste recycling facility, which they did, which has never worked and is a bad, contaminated site. And so, we went all these different places, and we did the balloon release in August of [19]77. In January of `78, I was hired as a laborer to work at the nuclear plant, and it took `em six months to figure out that I was the same guy that was outside releasin’ the... so I worked for the plant and I was—laborers have no intelligence. We basically cleaned offices; We vacuumed stuff, we picked up stuff after the work crews. And so, I cleaned up. I went into offices and I cleaned up all sorts of papers. I brought them with me to—out of the plants. I got them in a university library now. And because they were concerned about people stealing tools, that was their concern, I wasn’t—I never stole tools, so they just saw papers and they’d say, “well go on, go away.” We had metal detectors; I never tripped a metal detector. So, I’ve got hundreds of pages of documents that I stole from the nuclear power plant. And when they fired me for, “you were supposed to work the whole 8 hours without sitting down except on breaks”—so they found me sitting down on the job and that’s what they fired me for. At the time, I was married to my first wife, and she was not very—she said at one point, “you care more about the environment than you do about me.” So, I didn’t do a bunch of PR after I got fired. In retrospect, I should’ve been a whistle blower and done bunch of stuff, but that’s how life goes.

So, I stayed in Dothan and worked construction, different buildings around Dothan. And then Hurricane Frederic hit Mobile [Alabama, in 1979], and in one of the jobs [in Dothan], I had actually bid and won a job, for the city, to clear a couple blocks—there were only a couple buildings on it—for a park. And so out of that, I came out with a `47 Chevrolet dump truck. So, I drove that to Mobile and started doing hurricane clean-up after Hurricane Frederic. And at that time, I had divorced my first wife, so I [was in] Mobile—wonderful city, definitely more progressive than Dothan. Dothan was not a beacon of liberal thought into the South. So Mobile was much better,

¹ Narrator originally refers to as Barnesville

more interesting folks. [I] stayed there from `79 to `83, because in my work, one of the people I worked for said, “well I’ve got a house in New Orleans, would you go paint it for me?”

At the same time, I was doing environmental stuff in Mobile. The biggest fight we had in Mobile during that time was Waste Management [Inc.], which is a big waste company, wanted to have a ship called the “Vulcanus” dock in Mobile, take on hazardous, liquid hazardous waste, take it out to the Gulf of Mexico, and the Vulcanus was an incinerator ship. So, they were gonna burn all this stuff, and they said it would never impact the aquatic life. And I [was like] *right, ok*. So, we were able to stop them, `cause I found out that where they wanted to load from, the land was owned by the AFLCIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations], and I was able to convince the AFLCIO that this was a bad deal for them to lease the land to Waste Management, `cause Waste Management had a bad union-busting history all over the U.S.

So, the woman [I had met through work] asked me to go Mobile—to New Orleans—to paint her house, and I did. I painted her house, I painted the one next to her house, I painted the one across the street. People, friends said... I said, “there’s no need for me to go back to Mobile,” because Mobile versus New Orleans, Mobile was successful in the `70s in gur—gaining urban renewal money, and they tore down hundreds of blocks of historic buildings to make [a] “modern” city. So, in New Orleans, they never got the urban renewal—so, there’s thousands and thousands of beautiful wood houses that need work and need ten—[a] carpenter’s dream—beautiful wood to work with.

And for my life, I worked as a carpenter while I was still doing environmental stuff, so it sorta balanced my life. `Cause with carpentry, at the end of the day, you see something, you build it, you know it’s gonna be there for a while, it’s solid. With environmental issues, it’s ephemeral. I’ve still—there’s some questions about [the] Clean Water Act that I dealt with back in the `70s that we’re still litigating now in the 2023s. So, it was very, it helped me center my life as far as... and in New Orleans, as shifting from Dothan to Mobile, there were more people working on a whole range of things. When I got to New Orleans, there were actually people working on environmental issues. In Mobile, there were like 20 “activists”, and it was sort of, “ok which hat are we wearin’ this week? Are we anti-death penalty, are we anti- this?” So, in New Orleans, there were groups organized workin’ on different issues, and the first group I – the Sierra Club did have a group and I didn’ at first get involved with them, and I later did.

The first group I got involved with was the CND—Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. And this woulda been `83. And CND is a group that was formed in [the] UK about nuclear disarmament stuff. And in `83, that’s when President [Ronald] Reagan was in office and he wanted to send all these new missiles and base them in Europe. And bein’ a real “tough guy” on—during the Cold War—so we were very active; Using my carpenter skill—the cruise missile is one thing he wanted to put there, and other things—so, I built a cruise missile for us to carry to take to protests. And it was about 12 feet long and it had, it took 3 people to carry it, one on each wing, and one in the back, and so we could navigate through the streets just like a cruise missile is supposed to navigate around terrain to get to the target.

And we did weekend protests. And I have a bad habit of reading—I read a lot, but I read the paper, not only read the paper, but I read the edit—the official notices that are in microprint. And so I was reading one, it said, “a company, Freeport-McMoRan [Copper & Gold | known as FCX], wants to have wastewater discharge into the Mississippi River, so I started investigating that. That woulda been [the] end of `83, into `84. And once I started investigating it, I became really concerned. Freeport-McMoRan, which is now named Mosaic, because another corporation bought `em out [Mosaic Global Holdings]², made phosphorus fertilizer. In North Carolina, there’s a facility up in, on the Neuse River; It does the same thing. But in the one in Louisiana, Freeport [Mosaic] Uncle Sam [plant]—and it was named after the Uncle Sam Plantation that used to be there before they built the plant—and they strip-mined the phosphorus rock in Florida, they shipped it to Louisiana, they react it with sulfuric acid, and they get PO₅ [phosphorous pentoxide], phosphorus and five oxygens. That’s what they want. That’s a product they want. For every ton of that, they get five tons of waste.

And until the Clean Water Act was passed in 1980—1972, they dumped it all into the Mississippi River. That’s why they put the plant there to begin with, because they knew they could use the Mississippi River as a sewer. When the Clean Water Act came in, they had to get a permit, and the EPA at that time said, “no, you can’t

² Fact Check: Mosaic was formed in October, 2004 from a combination of IMC Global Inc. and the fertilizer businesses of Cargill, Incorporated. Prior to this combination, IMC Global was a publicly held company with the ticker symbol IGL which was based in Lake Forest, IL. IMC Global had previously merged with Freeport-McMoRan Inc. (FTX) in December 1997, when holders of Freeport McMoRan (FTX) received 0.9 shares of IMC Global for each share of FTX they owned. They also received 1/3 of a warrant (IGLWS / CUSIP #449669118) and approximately 0.2 share of Freeport- McMoRan Sulfur Inc., which is now known as McMoRan Exploration Co. (MMR). The warrants expired in December 2000 with no value. Mosaic has no relationship with MMR, or with Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold, Inc.

discharge it into the river.” So, water permits are a 10-year permit. So, `83 was the time it was up for renewal, and I started reading it, I started telling other folks about it, and [the] EPA was proposing to have one public hearing in Baton Rouge, which is north of the facility, so it [the city] wouldn’t be directly impacted, and the city of New Orleans takes its drinking water out of the Mississippi River. So, we were the impacted community, but the EPA was only gonna have one public hearing.

So first we had to fight [the] EPA to have a public hearing in New Orleans. Then I had to read the documentation that went along with their proposal. And if it was on the floor, it would stack about 7 feet tall, of binders and documents. I read through all of it. It’s—they have a class some place in college, they teach how to take out anything interesting when you write an environmental impact statement. I mean it’s just, oh God [makes pass out motion] and you’re asleep. But I went through and I kept getting—one point I read, they said, “negative impact on aquatic life” in the mixing zone, which is where they put the pollution into the river. And then they had a footnote. And the footnote wasn’t in that volume; you had to trace down two other volumes to find where the footnote was. Then you get to where they’re talking about it and they said, “well, if we take 90 percent Mississippi River water, that’s got guppies in it”—the kind of fish that the EPA said they should test it on—and we pour in 10 percent of our wastewater, we have 100 percent mortality.” That’s a “negative impact on aquatic life.” That’s just craziness.

So, we started raising all sorts of Cain. We had allies—one of the biggest allies we had was in New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board, `cause they were concerned because they would have to add additional treatment capability for the water going into New Orleans, if this thing was allowed to discharge stuff in there. Because, also the other caveat was, when they mine the phosphorus rock in Florida, it has naturally-occurring radioactivity on it. And so, when they do the process, it stays with the waste product, the gypsum waste³, so that the waste material is slightly radioactive, and they wanted to dump it all into the Mississippi River.

So, I found the numbers of the level of radioactivity we’re talking about and gave it to some medical doctors in New Orleans and asked them to do an analysis. And they said it would have increased the risk of leukemia in New Orleans by four percent. So, all these facts sorta came together. It helped that—in too many environmental issues, it’s not black or white; it’s shades of grey—[but with] *this*, it

³ A mixture of different calcium sulfate dihydrate sources from certain materials...aka industrial solid waste.

was very clear, and we were able to make it very clear. Freeport-McMoRan dumps this in the river, makes more money, you get sick and die. That's clear-cut. It was just, no shades of grey.

And it helped that the CEO of Freeport-McMoRan was Jim Bob Moffett. He was a “good Texas boy,” and he was a PR person's nightmare. He would make all sorts of stuff—statements off the cuff. It made me look really reasonable, which is hard to do, being a Far Left environmental radical. But he would make statements like, “we get treated better in a third world country than we do in Louisiana.” I later found out that the Freeport-McMoRan also had a plant in Indonesia, where they mined gold and copper. And when he was in Indonesia, he would stay in a dictator's palace. And the military of Indonesia was his security force, and they were killing off the Indigenous tribe. So, I would think he was getting better treatment in Indonesia than Louisiana, 'cause they didn't send the state police out to kill us.

But the issue became so publicized, up and down the river, and working with the [New Orleans] Sewerage and Water Board, Marie O'Neil was their sorta PR [person], and she knew where all the political levers were. We were able to get all the—in Louisiana, we have parishes rather than the counties; it goes back to our French settlement rules—and every parish south of the discharge passed a resolution opposing the permit. And so, we had hearings in Baton Rouge—I think I testified at four hearings over a two-day period; One in the morning, one in the evening in Baton Rouge, and same thing in New Orleans, morning and evening, and bringin' up different issues and concerns. At one of the meetings in New Orleans, a fourth-grade teacher brought her class in...they had come up with a song, “Please Mr. Jim Bob, Don't Kill Our River,” and they sang it. And the television loved it. It was just those type of things, you can't think about—you can think about, but you never plan them, and so it became so publicized that people were sayin', “yeah we don't want the plant, we don't want you discharging in the river.”

And the state set up a Blue Ribbon panel⁴ to look at the issue. And there were 12 people appointed to the task force—Blue Ribbon panel. And I was one. And the first meeting I went to, I looked around, they were all White men. And I said, “no, this is not gonna work; the town of New Orleans is 80 percent African American—where's the African American representative?” And they were—they said, “well it's already big.” I said “I don't care, we need to have

⁴ Group of exceptional people appointed to investigate, study or analyze a given question.

somebody from the impacted community.” And we were able—I was able to push, and got on an African American gentleman.

And we had meetings once a month for almost a year, going back and forth. Freeport-McMoRan—in Louisiana, it’s very easy to endow a chair at a university—so, Freeport-McMoRan endowed two chairs at LSU, Louisiana State University, in phosphogypsum reuse. They endowed a chair at Tulane [University] in Environmental History. They endowed a chair at Loyola University in Environmental Communication, they endowed a chair... in Environmental Modeling. So, they were throwing around lots of money—any nonprofit except environmental that wanted money, they were writing checks, to sort of build the public base of their support. And we finally, the way we were able to stop the whole process, all the time, we were having scientists look at the concerns they were having. And the hook that we were able to stop it on was, it would have changed the [phosphate] nitrogen ratio of the Mississippi River totally, and that’s a bad thing. It would’ve really messed up the aquatic system in the whole Mississippi River. So, we stopped it, and it sort of evolved from there. And if you... have any questions—

0:33.18	Amanda Ostuni	Yeah, that’s a good—that’s a really good overview. Ok so... let’s backtrack to, you said that the Sierra Club in North Carolina was the first time that you got into any environmental activism; Is that right?
0:33.46	Darryl Malek-Wiley	That’s correct.
0:33.47	Amanda Ostuni	And, so tell me—well, and you also moved around a lot. So, is there somewhere that you do consider home or not until recently?
0:33.59	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Well, I’ve been in New Orleans since `83, so New Orleans is my home.
0:34.04	Amanda Ostuni	Ok, ok. What... experience did you have growing up before you got to North Carolina with the environment? Did you play in rivers, did you have any major storms? What experience did you [have]?
0:34.22	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Yeah, when we moved from Chicago—and I don’t remember Chicago `cause we moved when I was three; We moved to, out in the countryside near Chesterton, Indiana, which is right up on the Great Lakes—Lake Michigan. And it’s now, where we live is now part of Indiana Dunes National Park. So, we were in a cabin, or small bungalow, and the nearest neighbor was a mile away, and it was woods and sand—I mean I had acres of sand piles. So, every day I’d

go out after school, I just had a great time. There's nobody around, I dug castles, I made—and some of my earliest memories were of me in a stroller, with my mom takin' me up to see the lake. So that's some of the—and since, we always, our summer vacations, we were always some place. We camped—and not this light-weight stuff; we had the canvas tents that weighed, especially when we got them wet, weighed forever.

So, we camped in the—especially after we moved to Canton, Ohio, 'cause we met, the family next door to us, behind us... our family had three kids: myself and I've got two younger sisters; Their family had an older daughter and four other kids. So we were about the same age, so we got to playin'—know each other—and my father worked in a hospital and their father worked at the YMCA. So, we got to know 'em, and we went on joint camping trips [to] different places. One time—they moved, the Brighthop family moved from Canton up to Saginaw, Michigan—and so we'd go up there and visit them in mid-Michigan. And one time, since [the father] was head of the YMCA there, he was able to get us into a summer camp in Michigan when nobody else was around. It was just the two families. And they had canoes and... So, it was great, just growin' up, and...

After we moved to Cincinnati, my mother had an aunt that had—my mother and father were both born in West Virginia, but they met in Chicago. So, they had—my mother had an aunt in LA, so we decided to go drive from Cincinnati to LA, and, with the canvas tent. So, we drove and we would, every night we'd, it was—we'd camp two nights, and then we'd stay at a hotel for a night. And that's the way we did all the way up. We stayed in Walnut Creek Canyon [Walnut Canyon National Park] south of Flagstaff [Arizona], beautiful place. So, I saw—driving across the country from Cincinnati to LA—saw all these different beautiful places. We went to national parks. We went to Dinosaur National Park [Dinosaur National Monument, in Colorado/Utah]. We went to—and then we got to LA, and I had asthma growing up, so when we got to LA, the smog didn't treat me right. So, I had an asthma attack and we had some problems there, but so...

And then driving back from LA, instead of continuing the southern route, we sorta went the mid route and we went up to [Grand] Tetons National Park and Yellowstone [in Wyoming]. And that's the first time I'd seen mountains like that. It was amazing, for—Ohio's flat, basically. There are hills, and West Virginia's got some mountains, but nothing like Teton. And then after another two years, we drove from Cincinnati out to Portland, Oregon, which my parents had

friends that they had known in Chicago. So, growing up, we did do a number of things going outside.

My mother's family in West Virginia lived near Fayetteville, West Virginia, which now is a hot spot for whitewater rafting on the New River. At that time, there was no kind of recreational thing there. Actually, I can remember one time that we went, there was a coal mine where they—there was a railroad track down to the valley, and the guys would come up this track, and we went there to see `em at shift change and all you could see were their eyes, everything else was black.

So, [I] had a wild—wide experience of seeing natural places, being outside, so that was sort of growing up.

0:39.50 **Amanda Ostuni** **How about your experience as a kid with any activism? Did you know people who were active in any social justice?**

0:40.00 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Not really. Canton, Ohio was not a center of real activism. One thing that did change my awareness significantly, when we lived in Canton, in the high school—[the] elementary school I went to, had two African Americans in the school. And when we moved to Cincinnati, [my father's] job there provided a house next to [a] Jewish hospital, that we lived in, and we were the only Whites within the whole area. Everybody else was African American. So, [it was] a real culture shock to me as a—just going into high school. [I] couldn't understand why people didn't like me just because of my skin color, and so that really formulated my ideas that skin color doesn't matter—it's who the person is, who you're talkin' to; it doesn't matter what color their skin, it's about the quality of their heart and what's going on there. So, it—and it...

It was—it has carried through to me, on. I was always, and since my father was in hospital administrations⁵, once we moved from Cincinnati to Charleston, West Virginia—now that's where I went to high school; I was more at home with the—there were different groups in the school, as always, [and] I was more at home with the guys that came from the "hollers," we'd call them, `cause that's where they're from, from back o' the mountains. And I worked in the hospital—my first job was a dishwasher, which I have a problem washin' dishes 'til this day. But when we moved to Wilmington, I got another education in that I was workin' in a hospital as a short order cook, so the administrators would come down and get a sandwich and they would treat me one way because I was a short order cook, but then when they came to my parents' house for an

⁵ His father's job was as Director of Nursing

event that my father held, they treated me different because I was “son of a co-administrator.” So, I got the all the different layers of how we—how people interact with society, [and it] helped form my thinking process.

Also, in the late—in `76, I got involved with The People’s Bicentennial [Commission], which, 1976 was the year—two-hundred-year anniversary of the American Revolution, and I was studying history, and [the] American Revolution is sorta the area I studied a lot. So, The People’s Bicentennial was sayin’, “well, if it’s 200 years, it’s time for another revolution.” And so, I was involved in that, and got, “yeah, there needs [to be] some major changes to look at how we are, how our democracy works, and how the Constitution had African Americans at a 7/8ths of a man, didn’t include women.” So, I’ve always been very active in asking the hard “why” questions, “why not” so...

0:43.24 **Amanda Ostuni** **So—oh, yeah, go ahead.**

0:43.26 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Nah—I’ll stop.

0:43.29 **Amanda Ostuni** **Ha. So how did that switch in the schools’ demographics—what was that experience like in terms of the conversations that were had around race and justice, going in the all-White school, did they acknowledge there was only two Black people, and then when you went to the other school, were there different conversations happening?**

0:43.57 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** They were—I was young and naïve. One thing I did learn when I went to the school in Cincinnati, I got tutored by some of the African American students in that, “don’t mess up the curve, you’re doing too good; don’t—we know you love Algebra, but don’t mess up the curve for the rest of us.” Because we were grading on whoever the highest grade was, everybody had to match. So, that sort of—I had never had anybody tell me that, that you shouldn’t try to excel to be the best you can. And it sort of, it still—it definitely made an impact on me, and on, seeing the challenges they had with education versus what I took as normal. And I’d always read—I still read; If I took off this [Zoom background] picture, you’d see thousands of books around me. So that’s not everybody’s, how they are raised—they don’t have the same access I had to educational experiences, but they were expected to accelerate, expected to get the grades to make sure they didn’t fail, and so, I had—it was an interesting time, for sure. I had to be bussed—reverse-bused, `cause if I woulda went to the school I shoulda gone to, I woulda been the only White in the school, so they bused me to anoth—which was probably illegal—but I went

		to another school where it was 40 percent African American, 60 percent White.
0:45.52	Amanda Ostuni	Oh. Wow. Ok. But you started at the one school?
0:45.57	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Right.
0:45.58	Amanda Ostuni	Oh, okay.
0:45.59	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Yeah, and well, the house where we lived was right in the—it had been a Jewish neighborhood, but it had gone downhill historically, so it was a part of—it was surrounded by African Americans, where I lived, in my house.
0:46.14	Amanda Ostuni	Ok. And who was your community as—growing up, because you did move so much, did you form relationships, was it your family; Who did you count as your network?
0:46.28	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Yeah, I didn't have a lot. That was always a problem. It was more...it was more family. I had family, but I was, in Cincinnati—in Canton, I wasn't old enough to get out on my own. But in Cincinnati, I would take the bus and go down to the natural history museum for all day, I'd take the bus down to the library, so that was sort of what I was doing. I would bury myself in books and other things. And...not a social interaction, was not at a lot of parties. Even in high school, I was always considered one of the quieter ones that sort of didn't interact with folks.
0:47.23	Amanda Ostuni	Ok. How did you end up choosing to study history [in undergrad—sound garbled due to technical issues]?
0:47.31	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Yeah, I always—when I was growing up, I read lots, but I always liked history. I liked studying history and trying to understand how things happened, how we're here, and so that sort of got me into the history stuff. And once I got into history, in college it was different from—I learned U.S. history in Ohio, at my elementary, and then junior high, and then I re-learned U.S. history in West Virginia, which is a little bit different, and then when I moved to North Carolina, it was a different way of lookin' at U.S. history that wasn't Ohio or West Virginia, and then when I moved to Louisiana—New Orleans, I found out their view of history was completely different from all the others. So, history is sort of from understanding “who wrote the book? Were they winners or losers? What viewpoint were they coming from?” And so, that's what I sort of studied and tried to understand, and trying to understand how people were talking about

		what happened in their time period. So—I don't know if that makes sense.
0:48.52	Amanda Ostuni	Yeah, sorry, I'm keeping it on video to see if it helps because my quality is [inaudible from poor connection].
0:49.00		TECHNICAL ISSUE
0:49.31	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Put the question in the chat, and I'll respond.
0:49.36	Amanda Ostuni	Ok... [Written in Zoom chat] So was there something you wanted to be in terms of career, growing up, or you never had a plan like that?
0:50.03	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Ok... I never really had a—when I studied history, I thought about I was gonna be a history teacher, but I never really, I didn't have a plan. Especially in college, it was—because the plan was not to go to the Vietnam War, it was more taking all these courses to, for my own intellectual curiosity. And then when I worked at the chemical plant, and then I sort of fell into the construction stuff after that. So, it wasn't really a plan, didn't have a life plan, didn't have [a] high goal.

The one goal I have continually had, while working with Sierra Club is protecting people and the environment. That's sort of been my overarching goal since protecting the natural island in North Carolina, raising all sorts of questions and concerns about nuclear power, trying to stop the waste water discharge into the Mississippi River. So, all of them have sorta been tied together with the idea that there are other, better ways to have our society advance, to look at other ways to do things, that just because it worked for everybody else, maybe it's time to think about new ways to do things that are less impactful on the environment.

`Cause that's one thing, in the Sierra Club work I've done—went back up to West Virginia on a trip with a number of Sierra Club activists and visited mountaintop removal sites, which is just horrendous, horrendous environmental destruction. `Cause I remember going there as a child, always seeing the beautiful mountains and hills and then they'd go in and just, for money, cut the top off. I just, this whole idea just, I don't—I do understand it, I do understand the corporate greed, and we see it and live with it every day in Louisiana; The, my [screen] background is [an] Exxon refinery in Baton Rouge. So, people live with this every day and it's all about Exxon's getting more and more money. It's not about prot—they talk about being green and protecting the environment; No, it's about protecting the bottom line.

0:52.49 **Amanda Ostuni** **Why do you think that this, that environmental justice ended up being the space that you found this activism? Was it just circumstances, or do you think there's something else that makes sense for you?**

0:53.03 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Right. It was a combination—I... it was a combination of things. And serendipity is definitely part of it, but when I was in Mobile, the KKK—this woulda been `80, `81, the KKK hung a young African American man in Mobile. That was the last time there was a lynching in Alabama. And I was part of—I was working very closely with a minister at the Methodist church in Mobile, and we were part of the White community response to the hanging, and during that, I met Pat Bryant, who's an African American—at that time he was a journalist with Southern Exposure magazine⁶, out of Chapel Hill. And so, we got to know each other, talked a lot, and became friends, very close friends. And then when I moved to New Orleans, unbeknownst to me, Pat moved to New Orleans.

And then we met up again at some kind of event, and Pat was organizing community groups in housing projects up the Mississippi River—[the] Gulf Coast Tenant Organization. So, they had just—and Pat knew that I was [an] environmental activist, and he had, one of the groups he had worked with in a community called Hahnville had just won a two million dollars settlement with HUD [the Department of Housing and Urban Development] to improve the living conditions of their housing project. But the concern was their children were getting sick. They had pink eye, they had respiratory problems, so Pat said, “hey, Darryl, you're the environmental guy, come here and help us out.” So, I went and started looking at what was going on and smelling the air, which had a definite odor to it, and [a] Union Carbide plant was close by, and it took me a while to figure it out, because if you drove from the housing project to the Union Carbide [Corp.] plant, it took about 20 to 30 minutes, so it felt like a long way away, but looking at the map ... [inaudible.]

0:55.39 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Because the river has so many twists and turns, it plays with your psychological sense of place. If you're in New Orleans downtown, in the French Quarter, there's a platform where you can look cross the river at the “west bank” of the river. That's just how it's termed, but if you're there at sunset, looking over the west bank—to the west bank—the sun will set actually behind you, over St. Louis Cathedral, because the river is making this gigantic bend, and even though it's called the west bank, the sun's setting behind you. So, the river plays with peoples' sense of how close to harm they are.

⁶ Pat Bryant was a reporter at Southern Exposure and then Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Tenants Organization

And so that's one thing that I've—and working with the Gulf Coast Tenant Organization, which I did for, on and off for two or three years, I got to meet people who lived in housing projects, which was a new experience for me. I had met people in the communities, but I had never gone to a housing project where everybody was African American, and started talking with them. And [I] have met people and have developed friendships, and once again I couldn't understand why they were getting impacted by poisons, just because of their color. And I found that more and more as I went up the Mississippi River workin' with different communities. They were bein' impacted because of how the land use set up under the plantation system had been evolved into this system where the plantation is now replaced with a chemical plant, and when they were freed in 1885⁷ after the Civil War, they were given land on each side of the plantation, so basically, the chemical plants have replaced the plantation, but the people most impacted during slavery and post [slavery] are right next to the plants, so. It helped me evolve my thinking about environmental justice, environmental racism, and so... and the Sierra Club, at that time, had a regional organization that met with people from Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida, and we were seeing similar situations where African American communities were the closest impacted community, so it helped reinforce—and as volunteer activists, we pushed the Sierra Club into hiring the first Sierra Club environmental justice organizer, in the '90s, so... And just working up and down the river, it was...

Louisiana's [an] amazing place. Unfortunately, we have all these petrochemical plants, and they're here because it's an amazing place, with the oil and gas deposits, and sulfur and salt, which are the building blocks of the petrochemical economy. And also, the Mississippi River, which, before the Clean Water Act, was a great sewer—they're still discharging stuff into it, but it's limited by permits, and you can get ocean-going ships all the way up the Mississippi River to Baton Rouge, which is 220⁸, I think, river miles, so it's—and the history of Louisiana is just so much different from the rest of the country, with its French and Spanish heritage, and other things.

And one other story that—when I was doing my organizing with both Pat and others, I got contacted by members of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union [OCAW], 'cause they worked at chemical plants; Most of the plants in Louisiana are not unionized

⁷ Fact check: 1865.

⁸ Fact check: Approximately 230 river miles.

`cause we're [a] right-to-work⁹ state, but the BASF [chemical company] plant was unionized. And so, they called me up and asked me to help consult with them, because BASF had—when workers work at a plant and they unionize, they can call a strike, which means they're gonna go outside and then not gonna work. The opposite of that is a lockout, where companies say, "we don't need your labor anymore, you're outside, and we'll lock the gates." So, the BASF lockout lasted for five and a half years.

1:00.40 **Amanda Ostuni**

Oh my gosh!

1:00.41 **Darryl Malek-Wiley**

Yeah, it was the longest labor lockout in U.S. history, and if you google "Locked Out," there's a video that talks about that.

And so, I started working with the Oil, Chemical, [and] Atomic Workers Union, and helping them understand, `cause they were trying to broaden their campaign, because they had run basically a labor organizing campaign, and it wasn't working. So, they were looking to expand it and make it more international. So, at one meeting I was at, they brought out a map of the plant, a large-scale map and they said, "ok guys, show us on the map where you've buried stuff on this site." And the guys would come up and they'd say, "yeah, my foreman told me to bury this—these ten drops, and they're here." And so, they went through that process and then they took that map to the state environmental agency and said, "we want enforcement; we know that toxic chemicals are here because our workers put them there, at the order of BASF". So that was one thing they did.

The other thing, they were communicating with the German union with BASF. And then one of the strategy meetings that we had, myself [and] Richard Miller, who was a key organizer for Oil, Chemical—OCAW—and there might have been a few adult beverages that went down that night; We were trying to think of a term to talk about what we were seeing, because the community members we were talkin' about—talkin' to—near the BASF plant could list on their hand who died from cancer, who had cancer; Their sisters, their aunts, themselves. And so, we were trying to think about some kind of framing of the issue we were sayin', so we came up with the term "Cancer Alley".

1:02.49 **Amanda Ostuni**

Oooh—YOU were behind that?

⁹ One that has passed state legislation stipulating that no individual can be forced, as a condition of employment, to join or pay dues to a labor union.

1:02:51 Darryl Malek-Wiley Myself and Richard Miller, yeah, we both came up with that term. And so, the work—OCAW—one of their workers owned a billboard, big gigantic, it was on his land and he owned it, so they put up a giant billboard sign [that] said, “Welcome to Cancer Alley, brought to you by BASF.” And every press release we did after that, we would tag it “from Cancer Alley.” And the term caught on. We didn’t have the scientific proof to back up what we were saying, we were just doing backyard epidemiology; And now, this is `23—last year, a couple scientists at Tulane did some analysis where they found direct correlation between pollution, poverty, and excess illnesses. So, for all those years, we were just going on gut feeling, because that’s what the reality we were seeing. And industry has fought that nom—Cancer Alley term—heavily, `cause they think we should call it “Industrial Corridor.” Corrid—that’s, what is that? Cancer Alley evokes a different term and feeling, and that’s something I learned through my evolution of myself and my work—words matter. Words matter a lot. And how you talk about something define[s] the reaction you get from your opponents and from allies.

Like the Freeport-McMoRan, when we were able to say “radioactive water”—“discharging radioactive material into your drinking water,” that was a frame that... caught fire, and people were all upset. And with the Cancer Alley, I’ve been basically workin’ up and down the river since `83, `84, first with Freeport, and have been involved in, I forget how many fights on opposing chemical plants, trying to reduce emissions from chemical plants.

Right now, I’m working with the community Rise St. James, which we’re fighting a Formosa plastic facility [Formosa Plastics Group]. I’m working with Concerned Citizens of St. John, which has the DuPont Denka [chemical] plant—which [the] EPA’s own data shows is the highest cancer risk from airborne pollution in the nation. And Inclusive Louisiana, which the steel mill [Nucor Steel iron plant] there [in St. James Parish] emitted sulfuric mists out in the community for 8 years¹⁰ without telling our state agency or the community, and the mist was eating off the roofs of houses and the paint jobs, and you can imagine what impact it had on their lungs and their skin. So, the fight in Cancer Alley—we coined the term back in `84, `85—but the reality of it is, it’s still here. It’s still a major fight, and we’re just now seeing more official attention to it from [the] EPA. And it should have been [given] official attention in the `80s, but here we are in the 2023s, and all that time, people were exposed to pollution.

¹⁰ Fact check: According a 2021 article in The Advocate, this facility was releasing these mists for 6 years.

1:06.44 **Amanda Ostuni** **Speaking of that, you've been involved in that fight—you've been involved in the [environmental justice] movement from the beginning. How do you feel about the state of the environmental justice movement right now?**

1:06.57 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** I think it's definitely much stronger than it has ever been. We have many more organizations and groups founded around the country that are actively workin' under the banner of environmental justice. If there's any downside, it's inter-coordination among all those groups sometimes falls through the cracks—which is with any social movement, that always happens. But I think that with the funding that's coming out from EPA to a number of different places for air monitoring, for additional testing, and that money's going to community groups, [has] really been a sea change in addressing issues of environmental justice.

So, I think we're definitely moving forward at a much faster—the fact that Formosa Plastic proposed the plant in 2018, and they said they were gonna start construction in [2020], okay we're in 2023 and the lawsuit that we won against all their air permits is still in the courts. The permit they had from the Corps of Engineers has been revoked, and the Corps has to do an environmental impact statement, which will take one to two years, so—massive projects, it's harder to get massive projects in, in Louisiana, and other places. The communities [that] organized in the Ohio River Valley have been very effective in their stuff... but it's always—here in Louisiana, we have more people, volunteers and on staff, than we've ever had before. But you look at Exxon, and their annual budget for PR is larger than all the budgets of all the environmental groups in Louisiana. Those are the facts we face.

We're fighting a proposed project in, where they wanna inject carbon underneath a lake, that's a very beautiful natural lake, and the community groups have been actively involved in fighting it—we had a public meeting and over 300 people showed up. So, we got a number of bills introduced to this year's legislative session—8, 9, 9 bills. The company response was to hire 25 lobbyists; estimated budget 600,000 dollars, just for those lobbyists. That's the kind of inequity that still is here today.

These mega corporations have more money than sense, and the proposed facility that they wanna build, it's all about takin'—using natural gas and exporting the ammonia to other countries, so they can call themselves green, but that's—by polluting the community here in Louisiana, which is wrong, morally wrong.

1:10.18	Amanda Ostuni	So, what do—what are some points of victory of the movement overall, whether that’s a specific topic or a specific event?
1:10.27	Darryl Malek-Wiley	<p>Right. There’ve been lots of movement victories. The executive order that was passed by...Bill Clinton, the first executive order¹¹ on environmental justice, and then updated just this year by president Obama [see correction below]—those type of documents are really amazing. The fact that in Louisiana and other places, we’ve been able to stop major projects, we stopped Louisiana—[the] South Louisiana Methanol plant from building, we stopped [the] Wahan company [Wahan Engineering Corporation] from building, we tied up the construction of Formosa and other plants, so we’re definitely moving forward with progress we have had. In `91 and `92, the first People of Color conferences were—and we have a White House council on environmental justice, with the members of that council are leaders in [the] environmental justice movement, and so that’s definitely a big step forward from where we had been.</p> <p>A lot in the past has been all talk and no action, we’re starting to see some action from the Biden administration. They’re not perfect. I won’t—they [have] permitted an LNG [liquefied natural gas] export terminal [in] Alaska, and the Willow Road [ConocoPhillips’ oil drilling-based Willow Project], so they’re not perfect, and we’re gonna keep their feet to the fire as we move forward.</p>
1:12.21	Amanda Ostuni	And we can—you meant that the [Clinton executive order on environmental justice was] updated by president Biden, right [not Obama]?
1:12.27	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Right.
1:12.28	Amanda Ostuni	Ok—
1:12.29	Darryl Malek-Wiley	<p>Yeah, and at that meeting, Sharon Lavigne from Rise St. James was there, Robert Taylor from Concerned Citizens of St. John, were both at the White House in the—and so having community folks right there, and Sharon was able to go up and shake the president’s hand and talk with him and ask him to come visit Cancer Alley, `cause he has talked about Cancer Alley; In his campaign speeches, he talked about Cancer Alley, so we’re hoping to get him down here for a tour.</p>

¹¹ February 11, 1994: President Clinton issued an executive order to address environmental justice and ensure that low-income citizens and minorities do not suffer a disproportionate burden of industrial pollution (Executive Order 12898).

1:13.03 **Amanda Ostuni** **Is there something that you are most surprised hasn't been achieved yet? One particular issue area that you think—**

1:13.14 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** ...That one, I have to think about it, `cause—the offshore oil drilling is of concern. They still haven't, he talked about, “we're gonna stop offshore oil drilling,” but then they went ahead and continued drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. They stopped in other places, but not the Gulf of Mexico, so that's one disappointment. The whole series of LNG terminals (liquid natural gas terminals) they're proposing to export natural gas overseas has serious environmental damage in the locations where they're putting them. And the government agencies have not held them accountable for their—the ones that are in place—have not held them accountable for the environmental emissions and impact in the community and the wildlife and environment. And the ones proposed are not being held up to a high enough standard. And the rocket launch last week in Texas, that's another—that's an ego project. That's all it is. And it's destroying a very fragile part of the Texas border country—Texas Gulf Coast area. And we have those ego projects all over, it seems like.

1:14.51 **Amanda Ostuni** **I thought it was interesting, you noted that you used to write letters. So being—seeing the movement as technology and as networks have changed, what do you think of what you were capable of then, I guess, versus now? How's it feel to be in a place where you're not writing letters as the means anymore?**

1:15.15 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Yeah, it's definitely much easier...access to communications. I can put together an email and send it out to 20 people and they receive it almost instantaneously, and we can do Tweet alerts and things like that. But the problem is, still, we need one-on-one communication with people to really move them forward. I think too many people, they get an action alert—if they're like my email, I get 20 a day; which one am I gonna respond to and how do I sort? So, I think there needs to be more one-on-one talking to people, and, going *along* with the electronic stuff.

And I know it's one thing I've had arguments with Sierra Club in the past—they want me to track every email I send and who I send it to. But I don't want to give them names of people that I work with and have built trust with for 20 years so they can send mass mailers to them to fundraise for Sierra Club. That's not environmental justice, that's exploitation. So, I've been very against any kind of use of data that I collect being used by Sierra Club or any other group to use those names and peoples' names—it's tough.

And when we put out so many different action alerts... there was an event I went to last Saturday where they had, 80 people was the max amount they could have, and so they had over 80 people registered,

but then the people that showed up was about 50, and there was a waiting list, but there was no way to know that there were gonna be 30 more seats until the event happened, and it's an hour drive from New Orleans. So, I think too many people will say, "yeah I'll go to that," and then life catches up with them and they don't go, but they don't—there's a courtesy factor that gets dropped some places, when it's all electronic and not talking one person to another person.

And you know, when I first started, we would put out newsletters with memory graph machines, and it would take three days for the ink to get off your hands. I don't have that now. I just push a button and it goes to my printer, and it spits out stuff. It's amazing—just like cash machines, it's magic, you put your little card in there, and all of a sudden, money comes out at you.

1:18.09 **Amanda Ostuni** **[INAUDIBLE SOUND- TECHNICAL ISSUE]**

1:18.13 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** You're breaking—

1:18.15 **Amanda Ostuni** **Yeah...let me... [video cut for tech issue]**

1:18.18 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Ok, there we go.

1:18.19 **Amanda Ostuni** **Awesome. Ok, we'll finish up.**

1:18.23 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Technology is wonderful.

1:18.25 **Amanda Ostuni** **Ugh, I know, right? So yeah, I was curious just to know about the whole being "in the system" and "outside of the system." [re-stated from Zoom chat-written question: the Sierra Club is kind of "in the system" with how big it is, and you've always done both "in the system" and "outside" at the same time—why work in the system at all?]**

1:18.35 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Right. Yeah, it has its pluses and benefits for sure. One thing about working within the Sierra Club, I don't have to worry about going out and trying to fundraise to make sure I have income coming in on a regular basis. And that's a real challenge for lots of groups,

to have to fundraise, have to set their programs so it fits a funders' agenda. And since I've been on staff at the [Sierra] Club since 2004—I've been here almost 20 years—they pretty much have gotten used to my style, as an environmental justice organizer, and they don't mess with me. So as opposed to, having to work for myself, I'd have to spend a bunch of my time trying to fundraise, and make money, to support the effort. So...

And in the—at the 1991 First People of Color summit¹², okay, the then-Executive Director of the Sierra Club, Michael Fischer, said to the audience, “okay, you don't like the Sierra Club, you don't like what it's doing, you don't like its policies; Well then, take it over, join in and change the policies.” And not enough people have—not enough people of African American descent have done that in a regular basis. We have more African-American members in the Sierra Club, Hispanic members, Asianic members than we had in the past, but we need more. And the Club [has] made significant strides in the last 7 years, about inclusiveness in hiring and making sure there's pay equity across the board. So, the organization is definitely moving in the right directions. So... does that answer that?

1:20.46 **Amanda Ostuni** **For sure! But is [the work you were doing with Sierra Club like] what you were doing with your own company? I saw on LinkedIn that you had this M-W & Associates—**

1:20.53 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Yeah, that M-W & Associates, my, when I can't get the Sierra Club to sign on [to something], I sign on as M-W & Associates—that's me and my cat.

1:21.03 **Amanda Ostuni** **Oh, so it still exists in some way?**

1:21.05 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Yeah, it's basically—I don't, I haven't gotten any contracts with it for a number of years, but it's there. One thing I learned, when I was doing—after I did the job at the nuclear power plant, my next job was working as an office manager at a construction company. And I would, I'd get all these construction magazines, and I'd fill out things, and one company I filled out, wanted more information, was a company that made nuclear blast doors, and so I got a call from `em and said, “Yes, what kind of—what are you working on?” And I said, “well, the nuclear plant—” And they started working up a bid. They spent hours working on a bid, and I was just a guy on the phone, you know, so...

1:21.56 **Amanda Ostuni** **That's how you started that company?**

¹² First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit

1:21.58	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Yeah, that's what—
1:22.00	Amanda Ostuni	Ok.
1:22.01	Darryl Malek-Wiley	So, yeah, I still have it. And I've signed a number of petitions, documents. The National Sierra Club sometimes won't sign on some letters, so, I sign on as my individual self.
1:22.16	Amanda Ostuni	Ok. So 2004, though, was the first time you were a formal organizer with Sierra Club?
1:22.22	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Yeah, when I was paid—I was hired as an environmental justice organizer for the Sierra Club.
1:22.28	Amanda Ostuni	And you said you had a style—what's your style?
1:22.31	Darryl Malek-Wiley	My style is not worryin' about the paperwork bullshit. They're always sending me a note, "you need to put in your time sheets, you need to do—" And in theory, I work 37 and a half hours a week, that's what my, the contract says. But I've never worked that le—small amount of time. It's, the work is what it needs to do, and what happens. This week, I think I put it in about 60 hours, just `cause I had a big tour Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday with a group from out of town. So, it was 10 hours a day each day, and then Thursday, Friday was catching up on all the stuff I couldn't do so...
1:23.19	Amanda Ostuni	Okay.
1:23.20	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Okay?
1:23.21	Amanda Ostuni	So who do you consider your family that's with you in this—or maybe not with you in this work?
1:23.27	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Yeah, you know. Well, the environmental justice program that was within the Sierra Club, we had at one time, 10 organizers, I think. A number of them are still around, but they're now—Sierra Club doesn't have a real a career path; I'm a senior organizer, there's nothing above me unless I want to go to management. I don't want to be in a management position. That's not me, that's not what I want to do. So, my current manager came out of the environmental justice

program also, so we've known each other for 20 years, and we get along—she understands my style and what I do. A number of other Sierra Club environmental justice team are in management positions. One has gone—she's now on the Board of Directors of Sierra Club. And so that's sorta my family, we used to go to—have meetings on a regular basis, retreats. And we had a retreat in California one time. So, and we figured out how we could—the retreat ended on Friday, and we all scheduled our airline trip back on Monday morning. So, we rented a van, and it was myself and Bill Price, who are both White men, and Rita Harris and Ronda Anderson, who are both Black, African American women. And it was one of those trips—we went from San Francisco up into the wine country—and one of those trips where we had known each other so well and long, and I mean we didn't stop laughing for the whole trip. We had a great time. We went and saw—I didn't know that there was a petrified forest in California, but we, one of our—Rita found that, and we went up and looked at where these trees had been knocked over, sequoias had been knocked over by an earthquake, and then buried by ash. So, and, so it was just—that's my family, along with my wife now, so, and the cats.

1:25.48 **Amanda Ostuni** **And is she into this?**

1:25.51 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** She's been very supportive of my work. She worked—she just retired last April. She worked for 40 years as a librarian at Tulane's main campus library.

1:26.07 **Amanda Ostuni** **Oh, very cool.**

1:26.08 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Yeah. And so, we both get along great. We met at the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament meeting back in the 80s. So that's where I met her.

1:26.19 **Amanda Ostuni** **Oh, very cute. Okay. Well, the last couple of questions, then, are: what do you consider your biggest personal triumph in the movement so far, or your biggest defeat?**

1:26.35 **Darryl Malek-Wiley** Yeah, I think the biggest win was stopping the Freeport [plant] from dumping the stuff in the Mississippi River. That would have been, it would have had, it had—a friend of mine who's [an] Environmental Sociologist, said that she thought that that whole campaign really awoke people in Louisiana as to the impacts of these petrochemical plants on the environment, and how it was a direct link from impact on the environment to their personal health. So that was a big event.

And one of the biggest failures, we were fighting—it was a bittersweet win—Shintech [Inc.], which is a Japanese firm that

		makes [poly]vinyl chloride [PVC]. And they were proposing a major plant in St. James Parish. And we were successful in stopping them from going to St. James Parish, but they turned around and moved across the river to a different parish, and were able to build a plant. So, we protected the community where they were gonna build, but then they moved and impacted another community. And now I'm reading—issues don't go away; it's like whack-a-mole with these companies. I just read last week that that vinyl chloride (PVC) plant is one of the largest emitters of vinyl chloride in the U.S. So, I need to go back and deal with it some more, in my spare time.
1:28.19	Amanda Ostuni	Oh, man! So that—is that the main fight that you have personally [going forward]?
1:28.24	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Well, there's some—one that I'm working right now is this whole carbon-capture, because that seems to be the newest thing that's happening. Air Products wants to put it under Lake Maurepas, and so we're fighting that. But there's at least 20 different proposed carbon-capture proposals in Louisiana.
1:28.47	Amanda Ostuni	Okay. Wow. That's—that's a lot. And what else are you hoping for the future of the movement at large, or if there's anything else that you want to add, just about your work, and how far things have come, anything else? Or anything we didn't talk about specifically that you wanted to bring up?
1:29.15	Darryl Malek-Wiley	We had a successful election last year where we hire—were able to elect [the] first openly gay man to the Louisiana Public Service Commission in Louisiana. And he's already said that—he ran on a platform saying, “we need to really push energy renewables and change the whole way we deal with things into the future.” So, that's the kind of thing we need more articulate young people in office to change the dynamics of both Congress and state legislatures.
1:29.59	Amanda Ostuni	Hmm. Okay. Anything else that you wanted to mention about your work or hopes?
1:30.08	Darryl Malek-Wiley	There's lots of other stuff that—but I think we did good. And if you have any questions in [the] future...
1:30.17	Amanda Ostuni	[Cut out – side chatter] Great, thank you so much!
1:30.18	Darryl Malek-Wiley	Thank you. Take Care!

1:30.19 **Amanda** **Have a great evening.**
Ostuni

1:30.20 **Darryl** You too, goodbye!
Malek-Wiley
