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## Clarence Irving and the Rediscovery of Black America

Robert D. Parmet

Clarence L. Irving, Sr.'s dream came true. He was a retired machinist and electrician, and resided in Addisleigh Park, a middle-class, suburban neighborhood in Southeast Queens, New York City, known for the many African American music giants who also lived there. Clarence envisioned an archive to honor and preserve the achievements of those artists. On May 2, 1994, at York College of the City University of New York, just north of Addisleigh Park, such a repository opened for that very purpose. Sponsored by the school and the Black American Heritage Foundation, which he headed, the YC-BAHF Music History Archive held its initial exhibition. The title was "Inner City Odyssey," and it displayed such things as posters, photographs, and items pertaining to individual artists, including formal attire worn by singer Brook Benton, and a saxophone played by musician Al Sears.<sup>1</sup> Thus an archive appeared, thanks mainly to a native Virginian who made it his mission to rediscover and preserve the history of African Americans.

Clarence Linwood Irving was born August 21, 1924 in Prince George County, Virginia.<sup>2</sup> His father, Paul Rufus Irving, was a "direct descendant" of the first Africans in the English Colonies, who arrived in Jamestown in 1619. Paul's parents, Margaret Brown, and Limerick Irving, both of whom were former slaves, were married in 1878. On November 25, 1903, Paul Rufus (usually known as Rufus) married Elizabeth Clairborne, with whom he had six children, Paul, Lillian, Fannye, Benjamin, Pearl, and Clarence. On land that they bought, Rufus built an eight-room house, in which Clarence would be born. Though Rufus lacked a formal education, his wife and children provided instruction. With his brother and partner, George, he successfully operated a "total farm," mainly growing peanuts and raising pigs. Elizabeth Irving was a

homemaker, performing chores around the house, picking and canning fruits and vegetables, smoking meats, and baking pies on the weekend. Rufus died in 1933 at age 55, and Elizabeth in 1967 at age 67.

The Irvings were successful, independent farmers who owned about two hundred acres of property, and also an automobile, a Model T Ford. Clarence's sister, Fannye Irving-Gibbs, would recall that they also had a strong sense of public service, and were "pillars of the community." As black children had to walk nine miles to reach the nearest school in Prince George County, Rufus Irving donated the land and logs to build one for them, which would later be named for him. He also helped pay their teacher, who resided free of charge in the Irving house. Rufus also served as Senior Deacon of the Lebanon Baptist Church and head of the deacon board.

The Irving family thrived under Rufus's leadership. It owned "a tractor, a steam engine, and a thrashing machine,' and was "among the first in . . . [Prince George] County to get gas lights." Moreover, it educated its six children without financial assistance, and featured a father who wore custom-made clothes, including shoes crafted by [the] Reverend Edward Tucker, a descendant of the first African child born in Virginia, William Tucker."

Rufus Irving suffered from dropsy's disease, or coronary insufficiency. On July 20, 1933, he died of a heart attack at age fifty-five in full view of Clarence and his brother Ben as they entered his bedroom. Clarence would later write, "*I shall never forget what a wonderful Dad he was. Many of the things that he told me at a very young age I try to live by each day.*"<sup>3</sup>

Elizabeth Clairborne [often cited as "Claiborne"] Irving survived her husband by thirty-four years, dying at age sixty-seven in Washington, D.C. on January 13, 1950. Clarence traced

her ancestry as well as Rufus's to Jamestown. In a note entitled, "One Black Boy," Clarence recalled that on September 4, 1626 the surveyor of "the Colony" [now known as "Virginia"] "chose him as an assistant." Descended from that person, Elizabeth's background also included intermarriage with the Powhatan tribe of Native Americans, making Clarence of mixed ancestry, Very proud of this heritage, it no doubt significantly contributed to his intense sense of patriotism.<sup>4</sup>

The death of Paul Rufus Irving significantly upset him. Apparently hoping that a change of scenery would provide relief, Elizabeth Irving arranged for her son to reside in Norfolk with his older sister Lillian and her husband. There he went to the John T. West Elementary School. As he had previously attended the Irving School in Prince George, it was not his introduction to formal instruction. However, a year later the Irving family moved to Washington, D.C., and for Clarence yet another school and what he came to regard as "the turning point of his life."<sup>5</sup>

Opened in 1868, the Thaddeus Stevens Elementary School was a public school for African American children in North West Washington, in the District of Columbia. Named for an abolitionist Pennsylvania congressman who subsequently became a leading Radical Republican during the Era of Reconstruction in the South, it was a notable institution in the history of American education. The school left an indelible mark on Clarence Irving.

There he met several individuals whose influence on him was instrumental in shaping his character. Dr. Carter G. Woodson, principal of Washington's Paul Louis Dunbar High School, was one of those persons. Assigned to escort Dr. Woodson, annually toured the school, Clarence became acquainted with him. According to Clarence, the historian "espoused the belief that a person who has a knowledge of his or her history ... is a person who radiates self- respect." As the school lacked a library, and "there was no public library for African-American students in

our community, Dr. Woodson encouraged students from Stevens to use his bookstore and office as his library.” “He was the first Ph. D” Clarence had “ever met,” and “carried himself in such a way as to command respect, but not fear.” Clarence also used Dr. Woodson’s library when he afterward attended Randall Junior High School, and was privileged to meet scientist Dr. Charles Drew and attorney Charles Houston. “These men would remind us that we were privileged to get an education . . . something our grandparents were denied, as slaves.”

At Stevens, Clarence was likewise fortunate to meet three women who profoundly influenced his “character development.” They were principal Lillian Malone and teachers Geraldine Tate and Josephine Hamilton Pettie. “Through the years” the three women would tell him of Dr. Goodson’s “influence . . . on the education of African Americans at all levels, particularly in the Washington, D.C. area.”<sup>6</sup>

Clarence was graduated from Stevens at the end of sixth grade, but left Randall at the end of the eighth, when he joined the Great Black Migration northward, which had begun in 1916. In 1939 Van Dyke Walker, a shop teacher at Randall Junior High School, asked Clarence about his career aspirations. When Clarence replied that he was interested in becoming a machinist, the teacher suggested he attempt to pass the Navy Yard Apprentice exam, but prepare for it in New York because Washington lacked schools where black children could prepare for it. When the school year ended sisters Lillian and Fannye took him to Brooklyn, where he would spend his summer vacation with brother Paul Rufus, who was residing there. Paul agreed that machinist training was a good idea, and Clarence stayed with him while he attended the East New York Vocational High School and also took and passed the test for admission to the Navy Department Apprentice Program at the U.S. Naval Ship Yard, commonly known as the Brooklyn Navy Yard. In the fall of 1940 surgery for appendicitis and peritonitis necessitated a return to Washington

and a recovery period of several months, but in June 1942 the War Department hired him as a clerk-checker in its Quartermaster Division in Virginia. Finally, in July 1944 he received a surprise, a letter asking him to serve in the U.S. Naval Shipyard, located in Brooklyn, New York. He then left the War Department, returned to New York, and in 1946 was graduated as a Third Class Machinist. Afterward, in Brooklyn, he applied his machinist's skills at Roman and Hampshire Silversmiths, where he was employed making machine parts, and then joined his wartime friend from Washington in buying a record store venture, Melody Disc, on Ralph Avenue in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section. Within three years Clarence bought out his partner, but the store was not very successful, and in 1954 he moved on and became a maintainer's helper for the New York City Transit Authority. In 1958, the Consolidated Edison Company took over the Transit Authority's power generating station where he was employed, and, finally, in 1986 he retired from that firm.<sup>7</sup>

While in East New York Vocational High School Clarence was a baseball player with two positions, catcher and outfielder, which he played for the school and a semi-professional sandlot team in Brownsville, the Brooklyn Black Sox. However, his playing days ended when at age 16 he underwent his appendectomy. His illness may have also kept him from the Black Sox and a career as a baseball player, but it did not end his interest in the game. In 1946, a walk through the streets of Bedford-Stuyvesant turned him in the direction of coaching. As that occurred, he entered a world of experiences that would profoundly alter his life. He witnessed a group of policemen who broke up a neighborhood stickball game by confiscating and destroying the "sticks," which were broom handles with the broom ends detached. Angered by what he had witnessed, Clarence complained about it at the Orange Blossom Inn, a local restaurant that he frequently patronized. Challenged by one of his friends there to change things, Clarence took

action. He enlisted his brother Paul, who was a welder and building renovator with trucks that could be used to carry bats and balls. With Paul's help Clarence" rounded up a group of kids, . . . got some bats at balls, and went out to "teach these kids baseball."8

The venture began with the benefit of an established league, but Clarence maintained a firm grip on his players. Called the Rockets, they were prohibited from gambling. Two years later, Clarence accepted an offer to run a team whose manager was relocating to California. The team was the Redtop Pirates, as per the Redtop Bar and Grill in Brooklyn, but under Clarence it became the Falcons, and secured a place in the Betsy Head League. Undefeated, in 1949 it won the league championship, but the next year it narrowly lost.<sup>9</sup>

As Clarence would relate, in 1951 baseball players Ray Epstein and Dominick Tenerelli, who were displeased with the quality of the Jammers, a Brooklyn Kiwanis League team they were on, persuaded him to organize yet another team. On a distinctly higher level of competition, this group, named the Bisons, for Howard University's team, would play its home games on Brooklyn's famous Parade Ground adjacent to Prospect Park.

Begun with an advertisement in the *Brooklyn Eagle* that brought "150 applicants," the Bisons was an ethnically diverse group. Its headquarters was Clarence's record shop. Bison Walter Edge would recall that the team included "youth[s] 14 to 19 years old from Coney Island, Bensonhurst, Flatbush, Williamsburg, East New York, Bay Ridge, and Bedford-Stuyvesant." Moreover, the operation was year round, with "winter classrooms" at the Parade Ground. Clarence recruited the players, assisted by several individual who would all serve as managers during the 1952 to 1960 period of the team's existence, "Gus Harris, Kenny Bell, Tommy Hicks, and Johnny Velasquez."

Though the Bisons players paid weekly dues, Clarence intentionally avoided outside sponsorship, and personally covered many if not most of the costs of uniforms, league fees, and equipment. Ultimately the effort was a great success. The Bisons competed in Junior and Senior Kiwanis divisions, with the Seniors becoming Borough champions in 1953, 1954, and 1955. On September 5, 1955, the team won the New York State championship with a 7 to 4 victory over Watertown's Johnnie's Fruit team at Abner Doubleday Field in Cooperstown, the home of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Clarence became "the first Kiwanis league Black manager to win a Kiwanis championship."<sup>10</sup> He regarded the occasion as "the first time that a team organized and managed by an African American had played on that field."<sup>11</sup>

Yet what eventually proved to be most amazing about the Bisons is the extraordinary group of distinguished individuals that advanced beyond the sandlot baseball fields of Brooklyn. They included Tommy Davis, who would twice win the National League batting championship, Fred Wilpon, the future principal owner of the New York Mets, Judge Alton R. Waldon, Jr., dentist Dr. Ray Epstein, engineer Dr. Dominick Tenerelli, and many others. In 1964 the Bisons became a chartered athletic club, and went on to establish numerous community service programs to benefit young people in New York City. On September 17, 2005, Fred Wilpon hosted a Fiftieth Anniversary reunion of the Bisons at Shea Stadium in Flushing, New York, the home of the New York Mets. Wilpon served what Clarence called an "absolutely scrumptious" lunch.<sup>12</sup>

With Clarence's goal of a statewide Kiwanis championship realized, he continued to refine his skills as a machinist by attending several evening schools. In 1963, following the breakup of his marriage to Verneal Irving, he married the former Joan Christmas Regales and moved with her to Addisleigh Park. As a suburban home owner, he witnessed a civil rights

revolution that was occurring in New York City and the nation. Sparked by the 1954 United States Supreme Court's *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision that outlawed racial segregation in America's public schools, Black Americans hoped that the inequality that had pervaded society since the Civil War would end. Progress came painfully, often interrupted by violence, including the assassination of civil rights leaders Medgar Evers and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. On August 28, 1963 the latter told a crowd of 200,000 marchers that congregated around the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. that he had "a dream" of racial harmony. Yet the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas in November threw the nation into deep despair that justice was imminent.

Kennedy's successor as president, Lyndon B. Johnson, raised the civil rights banner that had fallen with the assassination, and from 1964 to 1968 Congress passed legislation in such areas as public accommodations, voting and housing to make American society more just. Nevertheless, many Americans rejected this progress, and resisted it. Additionally, a disastrous war in Viet Nam in which African American youth were sent to Southeast Asia to do a disproportionate amount of the fighting, added additional despair to those who hoped for change. Dr. King, who denounced the injustice of this situation, and had preached passive resistance to achieve a color blind society found himself challenged by many African Americans who despaired that such would come about. In 1965, he was assassinated in Memphis, but even before that date critics challenged his leadership. There were Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X, who led a movement of Black Muslims, Stokely Carmichael, who demanded "Black Power" over Black communities, and Huey Newton and Bobby Seale who organized a Black Panther Party with revolutionary overtones. More militant than Dr. King, these figures generally

disparaged cooperation with whites in achieving civil rights, and often stressed Black Nationalism, pride in their African background, and “Afro-American History.”

While equally indignant over racial injustice, Clarence never wavered in noting that his personal roots were in America, tracing back to Jamestown and the free Africans and the indigenous Powhatans who resided in early Virginia. He vehemently described himself as a Black American who would, accordingly, strive to preserve that heritage in the spirit of Dr. Carter G. Woodson. In addition, he was determined to improve the lives of young Black Americans.

With community improvement as their goal, he and the Bisons organized numerous activities. In 1962 several former Bisons organized an alumni club to hold baseball training programs and clinics for ten to nineteen year-olds and counsel and refer young people. It was headed by baseball star Tommy Davis, educator Walter Edge, orthopedist Dr. Phil Taylor, and other Bisons. Beginning in 1967, under Edge, Bisons participated in Operation Elevation at P.S. 118 and C, W. Post College. Inner city children spent in this program spent four weekday nights and Saturdays studying academic subjects. The next year saw a Tommy Davis Instructional Baseball League that folded following Dr. King’s assassination in April. To keep New York City calm in the aftermath of that tragedy, Mayor John Lindsay called Clarence to City Hall. That meeting led to an idea by a Housing Authority official and former Bison Melvin Barnwell to institute a baseball tournament under his agency’s auspices. In 1969 and 1970, aided by the New York Yankees and New York Mets, 5,000 young people participated in the program. Recognizing Clarence’s “exceptional service to others, in the finest American tradition,” President Richard Nixon commended him in May 1970.<sup>13</sup>

With the Bicentennial of the American Revolution on the horizon, the early 1970s were anything but celebratory. The years beginning in 1973 saw an Arab oil boycott of the United States that sent petroleum prices skyrocketing, President Nixon resign from office following his impeachment by Congress, and the United States finally leave Vietnam, in defeat. Locally, both the City and State of New York were close to fiscal bankruptcy.

Clarence could not brighten the nation, but he relished commemorating the nation's two hundredth birthday. Mrs. Josephine Pettie, his former fifth grade at the Thaddeus Stevens Elementary School in Washington, urged him to participate in celebrating the event.. Following Clarence's move to New York, he had kept in touch with her. She had likewise gone northward, to Queens, where he regularly visited with her. Interested as ever in African American history, she became a founder of the Langston Hughes Community Library in Queens, which specialized in that area. Mrs. Pettie invited Clarence to participate in the library venture, but he declined and accepted another "request," that he "become involved in the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration." After first contacting Community Planning Board No. 2, which covered Southeast Queens, where he resided, he attended meetings to plan the borough's participation in the Bicentennial. As the representative of York College, located nearby, this writer met Clarence at a meeting on December 1, 1975, and heard him propose several projects, most notably a "pathway and heritage trail, with brochure, of Southeast Queens, highlighting [the] history of famous blacks" in the area. The project would be "initiated by the Bisons Athletic Club, Inc., with the aid of York College in brochure preparation." In November 1976 that brochure, entitled, *Black American Heritage Trail of Landmarks in Southeast Queens Jamaica, New York* appeared. It contained descriptions and photographs of ten historic sites," and was proudly identified on its cover as a "Project of the New York City Bicentennial Corporation."<sup>14</sup>

Another Bicentennial project related to United States postage stamps. In 1935, when Clarence would recall, “everybody . . . was talking about President Franklin Roosevelt being a Stamp Collector,” . . . which started a craze with my fellow students.”<sup>15</sup> When his sister afterward gave him a gift of a 1940 stamp with the image of Booker T. Washington, the first African American to be so honored, he thought of stamp collecting. Regarded by the Irvings as heroic, Washington had been a family acquaintance. As a hobby, at mid-century, Clarence and daughter Carole collected United Nations stamps. Possibly recalling that experience, in 1975 he proposed that the Bisons Bicentennial Committee make a “contribution of national significance” to the Bicentennial. Initially he thought of either educator Mary McLeod Bethune or women’s and civil rights activist Mary Church Terrell, and those were the names proposed December 1, 1975 to Community Board No. 12.

Approved by the board, the names were sent by its chairman Natalie P. Katz to Claire Shulman, who directed the Queens Community Boards, who then passed it on to the local Queens congressman, Representative Joseph P. Addabbo. He welcomed the idea, but encountered opposition to Bethune from a congressman from South Carolina. However, from a Maryland congressman came a recommendation of its native, Harriet Tubman. Addabbo then asked for Clarence’s preference, Tubman or a New Yorker, Sojourner Truth. Inclined to favor someone from the “Chesapeake Society,” people who resided along Chesapeake Bay, as his own family had, Clarence chose Tubman. In 1978, Harriet Tubman, the Underground Railway “conductor” whose rescue efforts saved more than 300 slaves before the Civil War, became the first African American woman to appear on a United State postage stamp and the first honoree in the *Black Heritage Series*, of which Clarence was the “father,” as Representative Gregory W. Meeks would later describe him.<sup>16</sup>

Amazingly, the various projects of this operating mechanic A at Con Edison's East River station received multiple awards, from the New York City Bicentennial Corporation and his employer. An exhibit that he compiled over two years, "Two Hundred Years of Black American Progress," was in popular demand at city schools and community centers.<sup>17</sup> In 1984 Clarence transformed the Bisons Athletic Club into the Black American Heritage Foundation (BAHF) in recognition of the organization's increased activities. Two years later, the foundation and the York College history and philosophy department publicly thanked Representative Addabbo for his role in putting Black American women on U.S. postage stamps.<sup>18</sup>

As a resident of Addisleigh Park in the 1980s, Clarence had a highly distinguished next door neighbor on 113<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the bassist Milt Hinton. The presence of Hinton was not unusual, because at least since the 1940s Addisleigh Park had attracted many African American notables, mainly in the music and sports worlds, who discovered they could purchase homes there without encountering the racial exclusion common in similar suburban settings. Such figures as Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, William "Count" Basie, Mercer Ellington, and Roy Campanella all made this neighborhood, "the pinnacle of southeastern Queens suburbia," their home.<sup>19</sup>

Located just north of Addisleigh Park, York College was also unconventional. The school had been founded in 1966 and opened its doors the next year in temporary facilities in Bayside, Queens. However, in 1968 strong pressure from the residential community, as well as business and clerical leaders, led Mayor John V. Lindsay to select Jamaica as the site of its permanent campus. The African American occupants of the area had demanded a liberal arts college that would admit their children without racial discrimination, which they alleged was not the case elsewhere in the City University.<sup>20</sup>

Greatly influenced by his Addisleigh Park environs, Clarence Irving, the former Brooklyn record store owner, sought to preserve the music legacy of African Americans especially those who had resided or were still residing in the area. In 1973, requested by the Jamaica Arts Center, he prepared a “series of programs” on them.<sup>21</sup>

Clarence wanted African American youngsters in particular to be aware of their cultural past. Moreover, he was insistent that they know that the African American contribution to music was broad, and included several genres, including symphonic, operatic, and spiritual music, as well as jazz. In 1987, he decided to establish a music history archive to promote that message.

The next year he brought his idea to nearby York College, where he had an able emissary, Ms. Claire Paisner, York’s public information director, who had previously done volunteer work for him. On his behalf, she “proposed” to President Milton G. Bassin that an archive be established at the school. Bassin accepted the idea, and at a meeting in July Clarence and several college representatives recommended moving forward with it. Thus the process began, and on March 30, 1989, Milton G. Bassin and Clarence L. Irving, Sr. signed a formal agreement to make it legal. In July, another meeting produced a governance structure. Clarence Irving and this author would co-chair of a thirteen-member committee to advise the college president on administering what would be known as the York College-Black American Heritage Foundation Music History Archive.<sup>22</sup>

The committee included several distinguished members of the music profession. Among them were trumpeter Wilbur “Buck” Clayton, singer and pianist Estella Williams, saxophonist Hoover Burroughs, and the “Jazz Minister to the World,” Reverend John G. Gensel of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Manhattan. Clayton made the initial donation to the archive, five music manuscripts.<sup>23</sup> Clarence regarded the archive as a home for many things, including “original

scores, early recordings, instruments, costumes, photographs and other artifacts related to ... [Southeast Queens's] musicians, past and present.”<sup>24</sup> It was also a place to remember pianist and composer Edward “Duke” Ellington, who had passed away in 1974. An avid admirer of Ellington, Clarence produced two decades of annual concerts at the college to commemorate his birthday in April. Admission was always free of charge, and performances were by singers and musicians who usually performed for minimal compensation. In 1993 the New York host committee for the Grammy Awards honored the archive by designating York College as a site along a New York City Music Trail.

Clarence Irving’s road from Prince George County to Queens County was a boulevard of public service that led him to helping inner city youths on the baseball field and in the classroom. With his health failing, in November 2013 he dissolved the Black American Heritage Foundation.<sup>25</sup> On March 23, 2014 he passed away at age 89.<sup>26</sup>

Nearly three decades after its founding, the York College-Black American Heritage Foundation Music History Archive is housed in the college library, awaiting its permanent home in a future Academic Village and Conference Center on the school’s campus. When relocated it will better serve students, scholars, tourists, and anyone else interested in discovering the amazing contributions of the African American musical artists of Southeast Queens.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *YC/BAHF Music History Archive Opening Ceremony May 2, 1994*, Audio cassette, Clarence L. Irving, Sr. Collection, York College Library, Jamaica, New York.

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Virginia, Certificate of Birth No. 41157, for Clarence Linwood Irving, Issued 28 August 1924. Reproduction Issued 28 May 1987, CLI Collection, YCL.

<sup>3</sup> Clarence Irving's firm belief, which he often expressed to this author, was that his ancestry derived from the Africans who arrived at Jamestown in 1619, and, and that they were indentured servants rather than slaves. Clarence Irving, "Proposal and concept for a production and series documenting 'The Chesapeake Society,'" Attached Internet page dated March 1, 2006, Scrapbook; Irving, "The Paul Rufus Irving Story: A Memoir," Typed, ms., Augustus W. Harris to Clarence Irving, 15 February 2003, 1; "Clarence L. Irving, Sr. As told to Shirley A. Wendler," Typed ms., 1-3; Scrapbook; "The Irving legacy," Typed ms., n.d., CLI Collection; Fannye Irving-Gibbs, "A Tribute to My Father: A Father's Day," *The Perspective*, III (June 2001), 42.

<sup>4</sup> Dedication Page in Celebration of the Courtship and Marriage of Paul Rufus Irving and Elizabeth Clairborne Irving; [Clarence Irving], "One Black Boy," ms., Scrapbook, CLI Collection.

<sup>5</sup> Wendler, "Clarence L. Irving, Sr.," 1-2; "Certificate of Scholarship Awarded to Clarence Irving for Scholarship and Good Conduct In the Fifth Grade of the Norfolk Public Schools During the Term Ending June 11, 1936;" Doris H. Sanders to Clarence L. Irving, 2 1988, verification of attendance of Clarence L. Irving in Washington, D.C. Public Schools, September 1936," Thaddeus Stevens School, Certificate "In Recognition of an Outstanding Alumnus . . . Clarence L. Irving, Sr., November 13, 1994," Scrapbook, CLI Collection.

<sup>6</sup> As a youth Paul Rufus Irving had been employed at the Newport News, Virginia Naval shipyard as "riveter's helper." Irving, "The Paul Rufus King Story," 1. [Clarence L. Irving, Sr.], "Dr. Carter G. Woodson: The Father of African American History," typed ms., n.d., Scrapbook, CLI Collection. Ms. Pettie would later help found the Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center in Corona, Queens, New York City.

<sup>7</sup> Jessica Weglein, Interview with Clarence Irving, Sr., 25 March 2003, 6-8; [Clarence L. Irving, Sr.], "Inner City Odyssey Outline," [1994], 5-8, typed ms.; Clarence L. Irving, Sr., Resume, 1-2, n.d., typed ms.; Clarence L. Irving, Sr., "Fair Employment Practice in Defense Industries: A Personal Retrospective," n.d. [2003], typed ms., Scrapbook; Employment application resume, n.d., CLI Collection.

<sup>8</sup> Jimmy Murphy, "Bisons, Big And Little, Aim at Title," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 18 August 1955; Weglein, Interview with Clarence Irving, Sr., 9-10; Andrew Mele, "In '55, B'klyn Sandlot Baseball Was Color-Blind, But Cooperstown Wasn't," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 16 June 2008, [http://www.brooklyneagle.com/categories/category.php?category\\_id=27&id=21237](http://www.brooklyneagle.com/categories/category.php?category_id=27&id=21237), Clarence Irving Collection; At the Orange Blossom Inn Clarence befriended baseball star Jackie Robinson, when he became the first Black American to play in the Major League, in 1947. Jonathan Eig, *Opening Day: The Story of Jackie Robinson's First Season* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 157-158.

<sup>9</sup> Weglein, Interview with Clarence Irving, Sr., 11-13; Mele, "In '55, B'klyn Sandlot Baseball Was Color-Blind, But Cooperstown Wasn't," Walter Edge, "The Bisons," typed ms., CLI Collection.

<sup>10</sup> Edge, "The Bisons;" John G. Case, "The Sport Trail," and "Johnnie's Fruit Nine Loses," *Watertown Daily Times*, 6 September 1955," photocopies appended to Lisa M. Carr to Clarence L. Irving, Sr., n.d., CLI Collection.

<sup>11</sup> [Clarence L. Irving, Sr.], "Clarence L. Irving, Sr., Chairman/Founder Black American Foundation," 1, n.d., typed ms., CLI Collection.

<sup>12</sup> Edge, "The Bisons," 2-4; Clarence L. Irving, Sr. to Fred Wilpon, 30 September 1955, CLI Collection; *Bisons Baseball Club 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary September 17<sup>th</sup> 2005 Shea Stadium*, digital video discs, CLI Collection.

<sup>13</sup> Edge, "The Bisons," 1-3; Irving, Resume, 1-2; Kathleen Thomas, "Bisons Coaching Sports and Books," *Queens Voice*, 14 March 1969; Presidential Commendation to Clarence L. Irving, Sr. 11 May 1970 (copy), Scrapbook, CLI Collection.

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<sup>14</sup> The idea of a trail originated with Flora Jones, a member of the Bisons Bicentennial Committee. Clarence L. Irving, Sr., "Bisons Bicentennial Committee – (1974-1976), typed ms., n.d., 1-2; Natalie P. Katz, "Status Report – Bicentennial Program – Community Planning Board No. 12," on Meetings December 1, 9, and 17, 1975," mimeographed ms., attached to Heritage Project, "Pathway and Landmark Trail of Blacks in Southeast Queens, and 'Heritage '76 Project, Bicentennial Community Application, Community Board No. 12 Queens, N.Y.," attached to Natalie P. Katz to New York City Bicentennial Corp. Queens County Bicentennial Committee," Clarence L. Irving, Sr., *Black American Heritage Trail of Landmarks in Southeast Queens Jamaica, New York: An Approved Heritage and Festival Project of the New York City Bicentennial Corporation* (New York: York College, CUNY, 1976), CLI Collection.

<sup>15</sup> [Clarence I. Irving, Sr.], "Five decades of Commemorating African American Women on U.S. Postage Stamps," ms., n.d., CLI Collection.

<sup>16</sup> Irving, "Bisons Bicentennial Committee," 2-3; Margaret Ann Chalk, "I Have a Dream: A View of Black Heritage Through Postage Stamps," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Auckland, 2007), 13-14. Many thanks to Dr. Chalk for sharing her scholarship with the author; Personal Interview with Lillie B. Crowder, 28 March 2017; Claire Paisner to Clarence Irving, 10 December 1985, CLI Collection; *Congressional Record*, 26 May 2006, E986, courtesy Margaret Chalk.

<sup>17</sup> "Gallery," *Around the System*, May 1976, 20; "'Black American Progress' Exhibit in Consolidate Fraternal Showcase," *Around the System*, April 1979, 18-19.

<sup>18</sup> "Congressman Addabbo Honored," *York College News*, May 1986, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Beth Betts (ed.), *Addisleigh Park Historic District Designation Report February 1, 2011* (New York: NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2011), 26-30; Clarence L. Irving, Sr., "Addisleigh Park – The Glory Years 1945-1970: The African American's Greatest Quarter Century In Southeast Queens," 1, CLI Collection; Curt Simmons, "Jazz is King in Queens," *Newsday*, 17 October 1993; Claudai Gryvatz Copquin, *The Neighborhoods of Queens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 193-195; Michael Cogswell, "The Jazz Greats: They All Lived in Queens," Ellen Freudenheim, *Queens: What to Do, Where to Go (and How Not to Get Lost) in new York's Undiscovered Borough* New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2006, 84, 197.

<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Parmet, *Town and Gown: The Fight for Social Justice, Urban Rebirth, and Higher Education* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), 19-25, 33-62.

<sup>21</sup> Wendler, "Clarence L. Irving, Sr.," 4.

<sup>22</sup> Wendler, "Clarence L. Irving, Sr.," 5. Personal Interview with Milton G. Bassin, 16 January 2007; Minutes, Meeting of 19 July 1988, at York College; "Library to House Black American Music Archive," *York College News*, November-December 1988, 1; Milton G. Bassin to Clarence Irving, 30 March 1989; Milton G. Bassin to Robert D. Parmet, 25 July 1989, and Membership List of York College, 3 October 1989; CLI Collection

<sup>23</sup> *York News Release*, 18 October 1989; Esther Iversen, "His Eye Is on Posterity," *Newsday*, 22 October 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Bisky, "Music History Archive Is Retiree's Dream Come True," *Con Edison People*, September 1994, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Clarence L. Irving, Sr. to the Author, 6 February 201, in possession of the Author.

<sup>26</sup> Obituary Notice, *New York Times*, 27 March 2014; *Memorial Tribute to Clarence L. Irving, Sr., Monday, June 2, 2014*, in possession of the Author.