

The University of Southern Mississippi
Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage

Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster–Gulf Coast Fisheries
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

George V. Jackson III

Interviewer: Barbara Hester

Volume 1043
2012

This project was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration through Mississippi State University-Northern Gulf Institute, Grant Number NA06OAR4320264. Louis M. Kyriakouides, Principal Investigator.

©2012

The University of Southern Mississippi

This transcription of an oral history by The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage of The University of Southern Mississippi may not be reproduced or published in any form except that quotation of short excerpts of unrestricted transcripts and the associated tape recordings is permissible providing written consent is obtained from The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. When literary rights have been retained by the interviewee, written permission to use the material must be obtained from both the interviewee and The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage.

This oral history is a transcript of a taped conversation. The transcript was edited and punctuation added for readability and clarity. People who are interviewed may review the transcript before publication and are allowed to delete comments they made and to correct factual errors. Additions to the original text are shown in brackets []. Minor deletions are not noted. Original tapes and transcripts are on deposit in the McCain Library and Archives on the campus of The University of Southern Mississippi.



Louis Kyriakoudes, Director
The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage
118 College Drive #5175
The University of Southern Mississippi
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
601-266-4574

An Oral History with George V. Jackson III, Volume 1043

Interviewer: Barbara Hester

Transcriber: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey

Editors: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey, Linda VanZandt

Biography

George V. Jackson III was born on February 13, 1957, in New Orleans, Louisiana to George Jackson Jr. (born September 28, 1934, in New Orleans) and Odurna Jackson (born December 12, 1937, in New Orleans). His father was a part-time commercial fisherman, concurrently with being a baker and a millwright. In the late 1960s, his father became a full-time commercial fisherman. His father's family worked at Jackson Brewery in New Orleans and fished. His mother was the first woman bus driver in St. Bernard Parish. Her family were carpenters. Jackson has two children, Laura (born July 7, 1985) and Shelby (born August 17, 1992).

Jackson quit school in the eighth grade to become a fisherman. At the time of this interview in 2012, he was still a commercial fisherman, living on his savings, weathering very hard times for the fishing industry of the Louisiana wetlands. He enjoys fishing, hunting, cars, and motorcycles.

Table of Contents

Learning to fish commercially	1
Father, grandfather were fishermen	1
Species in Louisiana wetlands	2, 27
Learning to fish at twelve years old	2
Seafood is “dying industry”	2, 6, 28
Regulations	3, 8, 14, 26, 28
Gulf Coast Conservation Activists.....	3
Overpopulated drum fish, redfish eat too many crabs, shrimp	3
Marketing crab catch.....	3
Wild-oyster-reef leases closed, circa 2012	4
No large, brown shrimp, circa 2012.....	4
Sustainable shrimping.....	4
Redfish regulations	4, 8
Need for regulations.....	5, 8
Inshore and offshore fishing	5
Loss of wetlands	5, 22, 28
Caernarvon Siphon, saltwater/freshwater mixture changes wetland vegetation	5
Importance of barrier islands	6
Unregulated oil companies, dredging of ship channel caused saltwater intrusion and thus a loss of wetlands.....	6
Competition among commercial fishermen.....	7
Prices paid for catch.....	7
Television show <i>Deadliest Catch</i>	7
Finfishing regulations	8
Loss of estuary	8
Sustainable crab fishery	8
Redfish	8
Gillnets.....	8
BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster.....	8, 11
His personal losses in crabbing.....	9
Deformities in crabs, shrimp.....	9, 15
Working for BP after Deepwater Horizon oil disaster.....	10
Exposure to Corexit dispersant followed by illness.....	10
Vessels of Opportunity	10
BP sank oil to sea bottom rather than remove oil from marine habitat	10
Lost-income claim against BP	10
Unfair implementation of BP remunerations to commercial fishermen.....	11
Hurricanes Katrina, Gustav, Ike.....	11
Cost of crabbing, prices paid for catch	12
Cost of shrimping, prices paid for catch	12
Fallback jobs disappeared.....	13
Boats	13
No oysters after BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster	13
Seed license for oystering, regulations	14

Cypress Lafitte skiff with which he began fishing	13
Wild oyster reefs	14
Bonnet Carré Spillway	14
Spillways opened to keep BP's oil out, freshwater intrusion killed oysters	14
Reseeding oyster reefs	14
Good fishing initially after Hurricane Katrina	15
Making his boat safe during Hurricane Katrina	16
Personal losses from Hurricane Katrina	16
Recovering from Hurricane Katrina	17
Hurricane Rita, September 2005	18
Costs of crabbing	18
Importance of estuary	19
Shrimp	19
Assessment of future of commercial fishing	20
Living on his savings	20
Restoring Louisiana's living marine resources depends on putting barrier islands back	20, 22
Tides are stronger, cause more erosion of wetlands	21
Surges from hurricanes are getting worse over time	21
Wall constructed to protect New Orleans from hurricane surges	21
Suggestion to use sand from dredging to rebuild barrier islands	22
Loss of barrier islands means deepwater will erode Louisiana's coast	23
Crabbing with a trot line, circa 1969	24
Disadvantage of crab traps, can kill crabs, fish that go in, forever	25
Changes in fishing equipment	26
Seine net	26
Trawl net	26
Skimmer net, night rig, butterfly net	26
Fishing for speckled trout with rod and reel	26
Meaning of seafood industry to him	27
Chinese Mitten Crab	27
Squalls asea	28
Need for different regulations	28
Inflation	28
Redfish	29

AN ORAL HISTORY

with

GEORGE JACKSON

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with George Jackson and is taking place on May 24, 2012. The interviewer is Barbara Hester.

Hester: So we'll go ahead and get started. I'm Barbara Hester with The University of Southern Mississippi, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. And I am here with Mr. George Jackson III in St. Bernard, Louisiana. We're at the Los Islenos Museum on Bayou Road. The time now is about 10:30, and today is Thursday, May—

Jackson: Twenty-fourth.

Hester: Twenty-fourth—thank you very much—2012. Good morning.

Jackson: Good morning.

Hester: Mr. Jackson, if you would, go ahead and state your full name for the record.

Jackson: George V. Jackson, III. (The address of the interviewee has not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy.)

Hester: And what is your occupation, Mr. Jackson? (0:01:04.5)

Jackson: Commercial fisherman.

Hester: OK. And how long have you been pursuing this occupation?

Jackson: Over forty years.

Hester: Wow. How did you get started in it?

Jackson: My family's been doing it forever. (0:01:14.7) And I just kept doing it.

Hester: How far back does it go in your family? Like is your father still—

Jackson: My grandfather. My grandfather started back in—I don't know what year it was, probably the [19]50s, and my daddy, then me, and just kept going.

Hester: So is your grandfather, was he born in this area?

Jackson: No. My daddy, my grandfather and them's from the Ninth Ward, New Orleans, but they fished out of like Bayou Viavenue(?) in the Lake Pontchartrain area, stuff like that. And in [19]64 we moved out the city to St. Bernard and started more fishing, then.

Hester: And what kind of fishing did you do? (0:01:58.6)

Jackson: Crabbing, shrimping, gillnets, finfish, stuff like that mostly, a little oystering and stuff like that.

Hester: OK. So you pretty much—

Jackson: We did everything, yeah.

Hester: Well, maybe we could take one at a time, and maybe you could just tell us what it was like when you first started, I guess. Were you fishing with your father? (0:02:20.7)

Jackson: Yeah, with my father.

Hester: Were you working on his boat?

Jackson: Working on his boat when I was coming up.

Hester: And so how would you crab when you first started with your father? (0:02:27.2)

Jackson: When I first started crabbing, really, I started crabbing before my daddy did, years ago. They used to all the time shrimp and seine for fish. I got twenty-five crab traps when I was like twelve years old. And in the evening time I'd go run the crab traps after school. And I actually made more money than my daddy did on his job. And he quit his job to come work with me. And he was a millwright for Equitable(?) Equipment Company.

Hester: So he was a millwright as well as a commercial fisherman.

Jackson: As well as a commercial fisherman on a, like his off-months, he'd go work on the job, and the good months we'd go fishing. And that's the way I got into it. I've been doing it forever. That's the same way with us right now. Certain years, certain things is off, but now it's even worse. It's like a dying industry now. (0:03:16.4)

Hester: How's that?

Jackson: First they took the finfish and that away from us. (0:03:22.3) We can't fish no kind of finfish except for mullets. Well, gillnets and stuff like that, they all took away from us.

Hester: Who's they?

Jackson: The Wildlife and Fishery or the GCCA [Gulf Coast Conservation Activists]. (0:03:34.3)

Hester: What does that stand for?

Jackson: It's like for the recreational fishermen, the sport fishermen. They protested that we was killing all the fish and this, that, and the other. And right now, the way it is, it's messed up because the fish that we should be catching, we not. And it's eating the other species up. There's a overpopulation of drum fish and redfish and stuff like that right now. (0:04:02.4)

Hester: And so they're eating—

Jackson: They're eating the crabs and the shrimp and whatever else they can eat to survive. And nobody's taking none. That's been, I think it's been like—I don't know. It was in the [19]90s I think; they took the gillnets from us, (0:04:21.3) twenty years or so. And in the beginning it was supposed to be only five years with the redfish, and then they turned around and made the redfish a game fish on us. So since they made a game fish, there ain't no way we can get it back no more. At least that's what they say. But they ain't nobody trying to do nothing for us no more, and now it's got to where there's so many people, trying to do one or two things, either crab year round, oyster, or shrimp. And the shrimping and the oysters is mostly on a seasonal deal. And the crab's year round, but there's so many people in it, you can't make no money. And the population of the crabs (inaudible) went down (0:05:06.8) so bad that you can't make no money. Right now I'm running like three hundred and fifty traps. I go once a week, and I might catch four or five boxes of crabs, and that don't even really pay the expense. And that's where we at right now. We not making no money.

Hester: So what I'm hearing—and correct me if I'm wrong—is that you think maybe there should be more of a balance rather than everybody going out—

Jackson: —doing one thing, yeah.

Hester: Doing one thing, to spread it out a little bit.

Jackson: To spread it out, yeah.

Hester: I see. So where would you go to market your crabs? (0:05:41.7)

Jackson: We got dealers and that, that's at the dock that we bring our stuff to.

Hester: So you don't have to go very far?

Jackson: No. You pull your boat up there and unload your crabs and stuff like that, but it's just there's so many people in that one industry right now, the crab industry because there's nothing else for nobody to do. Like during the wintertime we used to either go dredge oysters or go fish fish. Now, if you don't have a lease, (0:06:06.3) you can't go dredge them because they have the leases to the wild reef closed. The fish, there's nobody can fish fish unless you fish with a rod and reel, and you can't make no money at that. So everybody's crabbing, and the rest of the people, like shrimp season, we all went this year, and there ain't no shrimp. (0:06:23.4) All day you catch two, three hundred pounds of little, bitty shrimp and maybe a hundred pounds of big shrimp, and with the price of fuel and everything else, you can't make it. (0:06:34.1) You can't survive.

Hester: Why do you think there are no large shrimp?

Jackson: Because of the salinity (0:06:41.2) of the water. It's the brown shrimp season. Brown shrimp usually come in at this time of the year; they grow. But the salinity of the water is too fresh, so it makes them where they don't grow, so everything's small right now. And the Wildlife should come along and check this, and instead of letting them catch eighty/hundreds or seventy/eighty count shrimp, they should have held the season back until the shrimp at least got to fifty/sixties or something like that. But they don't. They just open the season. And if they kill all the little shrimp, there's no big shrimp.

Hester: So what does that do for years to come?

Jackson: That depleishes the population because you catching baby shrimp. If you let them grow bigger, you'd have more volume of shrimp. If you took a pound of hundred count shrimp, and then you took a [pound] of fifty count shrimp, you're gaining 50 percent of what you caught in the beginning, a couple of weeks later. If they'd waited a couple of weeks to fish, the shrimp would have been from a hundred count; they would have been fifty count, so that doubles your quantity of shrimp.

Hester: I understand.

Jackson: But that's what I'm saying. Wildlife, I don't think, is doing their job over here. (0:08:05.9) That's like y'all are allowed to catch redfish in Mississippi; we not. Certain times of the year they come from Mississippi and still fish Louisiana waters for redfish.

Hester: How can that be done?

Jackson: They come across Lake Pontchartrain and go into the north marsh and fish. But I don't understand how come the Wildlife can't stop them.

Hester: So what would your recommendation be to the Wildlife if you had the opportunity to—(0:08:31.5)

Jackson: They need to look into the finfish, and they need to regulate the shrimp season more.

Hester: How so?

Jackson: How so? Test for the shrimp, what they are. If you got sixty/seventy count shrimp or seventy/eighty count shrimp, they're small. They should wait till they get a bigger size before they open it because that's what I'm saying. You're killing small shrimp for nothing.

Hester: Is there a distance from the shore that you can go where the shrimp start getting larger?

Jackson: Yeah, they do. I don't understand that, either, because the Sound—we got an area what they call the Sound, Breton Sound. It's not really the outside, but it's not really the inside, either. Venice, Grand Isle, Houma, all that way, their season ends on the Gulf side. Well, really our Gulf side should be outside of Breton Island, but it's not. Our inside is way up into Breton Sound area, so the big shrimp go to come in. (0:09:44.9) The Breton Sound area is open, so they can drag all that year round. They don't never close it. So it stops the big shrimp from coming in and laying eggs. [If] they catch them before they lay the eggs, we don't have no shrimp no more, instead of waiting, keeping the line out further and letting them repopulate.

Hester: Yeah. You were talking about, before we went on the record, you were talking about the barrier islands. Could you go into that a little bit, too? (0:10:11.1)

Jackson: Yes. They worried about the salinity level of the water changing back to build land. From what I seen, from the siphons and everything they built, it's not going to build land. Behind Caernarvon and that, they opened a siphon up. They really lost land. The freshwater killed the vegetation life, and it took the land with it.

Hester: Could you explain that a little bit? Because I'm really not real clear. What I'm envisioning is that they're siphoning the—

Jackson: —water out the river.

Hester: Water out of the—OK, out of the river.

Jackson: Out the river and turning it loose. But the way they got it set up, it's not carrying sediment. Sediment builds land. What they doing is just pumping water. We got vegetation that lives on saltwater; we got vegetation that lives on freshwater. Well, when they pumped the freshwater in, it killed all the saltwater vegetation. So it

like undermined the grass that grew from the freshwater. So now, when you step on a piece of land, you might fall through it because it's just floating grass. (0:11:24.1) They want to start on the inside and try to build to make the salinity level right, but really if they would put the barrier islands back (0:11:35.3) and stop the flow of saltwater coming in, they wouldn't have to do nothing because that would change the salinity level. The saltwater wouldn't rush in like it does now. Years ago, we used to have a normal tide. Now, you go down the road anywhere, you got a two-foot, three-foot tide every day because there's nothing to stop the saltwater intrusion. It's steady killing the vegetation, coming from the outside. But they keep pushing more freshwater out, and what it's doing is making a boundary line between the salt and the freshwater, and the saltwater stuff's not coming in, and the freshwater, the stuff from the freshwater don't want to go out. So it's a barrier island that's messing the ecosystem up, but they claim they can fix it. But all the years I been fishing, I don't think they can fix it unless they go back and put the barrier islands up.

Hester: Do you think maybe they're looking at the expense of doing the barrier islands versus siphoning?

Jackson: Yeah. Well, really, in my eyes, we just a buffer for New Orleans. That's all we are. We protect New Orleans. (0:12:52.9) They not worried about us. Years ago, the old people told me that. "We a dying breed. We never going to make it. Sooner or later, they going to put us out of business." And that's what's happening now. We can't survive. We can't make no money.

Hester: Can you pinpoint about when the really serious concerns started about this situation?

Jackson: It started way back when they let all the oil companies come in and cut the land up, for the oil.

Hester: Can you put a date on it?

Jackson: It went back probably before me. When they come in and they found oil, (0:13:31.2) and they dug a pipeline here and a pipeline there, and they cut the line up just like when they put the ship channel in. That made a direct route for saltwater intrusion. Now, they got it to where they got it closed off, but it's too late now. When the water comes up, it goes around the land, the bulkhead they got. And then it's just messed up. There's too many people in the commercial fishing industry. Instead of years ago, we had a moratorium (0:14:01.7) on how many fishermen there was. Well, they turned that and opened it all up. Now anybody can do it, and it done overpopulated the industry so bad where nobody makes money. And you can't do nothing about it with the Wildlife. I don't understand how the Wildlife does what they do because they supposed to protect the wildlife, and really, they not protecting. They got a season set. That's like with the shrimp. They send people out every week to test for shrimp. (0:14:36.5) If they test for shrimp, they can see how big they are. Why

open the season when they eighty/hundreds, and they could wait a week or two longer, and they would be bigger shrimp, and you'd make more money?

Hester: Do you have different factions of the fishermen that want the season to start and then maybe other fishermen that say, "No. We need to wait because the shrimp aren't big enough"?

Jackson: In the commercial industry, it seems like everybody's against everybody. I don't know why they can't get together and solve stuff. What it is, is some people needs money, [and] some people don't need money. Some people know how to save money. Some people don't know how to save money. The ones that don't know how to save will go catch anything to make money. The ones that want to save it, has got money, but they can't do nothing about it because say, I won't go fishing for less than a dollar a pound on the shrimp or the crabs. (0:15:36.8) Well, that other guy come along; he ain't making no money. He'll go catch fish and shrimp for twenty-five, thirty cents instead of the dollar. And when you do that, you can't bring nothing together to get the right price on everything. You lose money.

Hester: It affects the entire industry.

Jackson: Yes. And the fishing industry's like that, but once it leaves the dealer and goes to the consumer, the price don't change. Like our prices drop and raise, but it never gets to where the consumer's paying the price. We might get a dollar or two dollars a pound for the shrimp. By the time it gets to where the consumer buys the shrimp, they worth four or five dollars. And it's the middleman that's making the money. We not.

Hester: So the middleman would be?

Jackson: They buyers and the dealers. Yeah.

Hester: What's the difference between a buyer and a dealer?

Jackson: Well, one guy buys the stuff, and he'll sell it to a dealer. Then the dealer'll distribute it to the market. There's always like two middlemen, but the way it is, you can't get the people together. It would be like *Deadliest Catch*. Up there they wait for a certain price before they go fish. They know what they going to get before they leave the wharf. We don't know that.

Hester: Say the name again. *Deadliest Catch*?

Jackson: The *Deadliest Catch*, like they go catch the Alaskan king crab and stuff. Well, they got a price set before they leave the wharf. They know what they're going to get. We know what we're going to get, but it's not the price that we should be getting. It's a lower price. But they's too many people in the commercial industry right now to do—like I'm saying: there's too much pressure on one thing, either

shrimp or crabs. Oyster fishermen, they own their own leases and stuff like that. It's different. But as far as like, we don't have no more finfish. Can't fish. The only way you can fish finfish (0:17:44.0) if you're fishing with a hook and line or a trotline. There's no more nets. Crab fishermen, everybody that you could think of owns a crab license now. And that's the same way with the shrimp; they own shrimp license. And it's too much pressure on them [the shrimp] because we don't have the estuary that we did years ago. (0:18:06.5) The land's steady disappearing, and they don't have nowhere to breed. That's like we need a estuary to stop people, like Bagetta(?) Island and Caernarvon and all that. There's a big spot of land that's bayous and lagoons and stuff like that. Well, now, them bayous and lagoons, everybody's got a crab trap, so they catching crabs four or five inches long, and they selling them. It don't give the crab enough time to grow, (0:18:37.2) to move to the outside where you catch good crabs, where you make good money. They fish factory for forty, fifty cents, and if the crabs would get out further, they worth a dollar and more. But it's, "We want to make this money now. We're going to go catch, no matter what size crabs they are." And it messes up everything. It messes up the whole ecosystem. That's not counting all the redfish. Redfish, drums, sheepshead and any other kind of fish around here that feeds on crabs and shrimp and stuff like that, it's taking from the fish industry, too, but we can't get a finfish industry open down here anymore because of Wildlife and Fisheries. I was in the deal with the redfish deal. I think it was in the [19]90s. We went up there, and we had a bad freeze—I think in [19]88, somewhere around there, [19]88 or [19]90, somewhere around there; it depleted the redfish because it froze everything. It killed everything. Well, we agreed to close the season for five years. (0:19:43.5) And within the five years, let it repopulate. Well, within the five years, the GCCA come in there and lobbyists and everything else, and made a game fish out of the redfish, so we couldn't fish redfish no more or finfish sheepshead, drum, or any other because they took our nets away from us. They wouldn't let us have a trammel net or a seine. They were worried about the gillnets (0:20:13.1) because certain people put gillnets out and left them out. They didn't tend to their nets like they was supposed to, and the recreational fishermen seen dead fish, floating, and wound up a big humbug. But the real fishermen that fish with trammel nets or seines and stuff like that, they was hurt, too, because of the guys that was fishing with the gillnets. So it took the whole finfish away from everybody. And that's what I'm saying. It's been since the [19]90s, and there ain't no way we can get back in to bring the finfish back to us, where we can separate a little bit, and everybody make a dollar here or there.

Hester: And probably maintain a balance.

Jackson: Balance better because like I'm saying, the crabs right now? I been fishing for forty years, and I ain't never seen it as worse as it is right now. (0:21:03.2)

Hester: And that started, the crab—

Jackson: It's been going on way back, but BP (0:21:10.8) killed it. I think we lost a few crops of crabs because after BP, we didn't see no more little crabs. Now, we finally—it's what? Two years, almost three years, we starting to finally see a couple

of little crabs come back. So I figured it wiped out the reproductive system of the crabs there for a while. But you don't know how long it still going to [take] to [come] back, to replace what was lost because the beginning of 2010 there, within January, February, March, and April, to April 20, I caught like forty-thousand-dollars-worth of [crabs] in four months. Now, last year, I fished from April to December; I ain't caught twenty-thousand-dollars-worth of [crabs]. And the shrimp is the—last year I went to go shrimping. The few times I went, I caught enough for the house; didn't pay expense. So you can't go and spend money and not make nothing.

Hester: How was the shrimping before BP?

Jackson: It was like the crabs; you caught shrimp.

Hester: Good-sized shrimp?

Jackson: Good-sized shrimp, everything. That's what I'm saying. Now we got deformed shrimp. (0:22:36.5) We got deformed crabs. There's pieces missing off of them. There's holes in them. There's fish with tumors, and it's all kind of stuff.

Hester: Can you describe what it looks like? What kind of deformities?

Jackson: There's rot holes and stuff on them. I got pictures of some crabs that's got—see if I can find them. I got one here that's got a stick growing in him, that it must have had a bad spot or whatever, and a stick punctured it, and now the crab has a stick in him. And there's blisters and different things that we ain't ever seen before. We seen deformities before, like a crab'll have a little, extra piece on a claw or something like that, but it's never been deformities or blisters in the shell and stuff like that. Come on. Get bigger. But like if you can see.

Hester: Oh, yeah.

Jackson: There's a blister on one. There's a rot spot on that one that's got a stick growing out of it.

Hester: Do you think maybe you could e-mail these to me, and then I'll print them up?

Jackson: Um-hm. Yeah. I can do that.

Hester: Great. That'll be perfect. I'll make a note of that here so we don't forget. That'll be great. So you did something with BP.

Jackson: Yes.

Hester: You told me about.

Jackson: Yes.

Hester: Could you talk about that a bit?

Jackson: I worked for BP (0:24:21.5) laying boom and running around and checking for oil here, there and stuff like that. I had run into the dispersant, and I got sick from it. (0:24:35.3) I got dizzy, nauseous, headaches for months and stuff like that. I still think it still bothers me because I get headaches now for no reason, out of the blue. I wake up some mornings and spitting blood and stuff like that from my sinuses and stuff. And it's just a bunch of knickknacks that's caused from the chemicals or whatever they sprayed around here. That's the same way with the crabs. The crabs have got bad spots on them. We tried to put it on the news and stuff. It seems like nobody checks into what we doing, or what's going on with us. Like I'm saying, we like a dying breed. This is fisherman's paradise for recreational fishermen, not commercial no more. They all worried about recreation, the fishing paradise, but our main deal's the seafood. If you don't have seafood, this is not Louisiana. This is supposed to be the capitol of seafood, and we just—it's a dying breed. It's going downhill.

Hester: So the program that you're talking about, you participated in with BP, that was the Vessels of Opportunity?

Jackson: Vessels of Opportunity, yeah, (0:25:45.7) laying boom and laying stuff to try to stop the oil from coming in. But we seen oil a few times, and then we'd report it. The following day we'd go back out; it was gone. Come to find out—they say no, but the dispersant that we found, stuff like that—they came during the night and sprayed everything and sunk it where nobody could see what was going on. (0:26:14.8)

Hester: So where is it now?

Jackson: Laying on the bottom somewhere. That's like I heard a shrimp boat offshore there, found oil for twenty-seven miles. He drug a trawl through it for twenty-seven miles till he got out of it. But you only hear that from people that's seen it. They don't put it on public; nobody knows about it. They hide it. That's like they'd have did better if they wouldn't have sprayed the dispersant and let the oil come up, and picked it up. But it was so much oil, they had to sink it so nobody could see what was going on.

Hester: Have you filed a claim? (0:26:49.6)

Jackson: Um-hm, yeah, still waiting.

Hester: Could you explain the process?

Jackson: Every time you turn around they want more paperwork and this, that, and the other, trip tickets and taxes and all kind of stuff. There's more people around here got money that wasn't a commercial fisherman than the commercial fishermen got. If you own—I heard a hairdresser, up the street there, got seventy or eighty thousand dollars from BP, or somebody who worked for Wal-Mart got twenty or thirty thousand dollars. I don't see how their industry was hurt because at the time they brought more people here to do the job so that should have put more people in the area, that they made money on, not the fishing industry. The fishing industry was hurt the most. But everybody and their brother got money off of it because they said it hurt their business. And I just can't see how it hurt their business. I could see certain companies, like certain restaurants lost money because they wasn't serving seafood, or whatever. How can a haircutter lose money? Or somebody that working for Wal-Mart, how did they lose money? That's what I say. I don't know how they did it, but they still doing it. And the way they got us, we going to be out of business, and we still not getting none. They still holding us up.

Hester: Is there a place where—I don't know how the claims process works. Is there a place here that you went to?

Jackson: It was here. It was right here in this building. Then they moved it to up the road. Now they moved it to Chef Highway. Now this new deal took over. They're about to shut that down over there, and they supposed to have some kind of formula of what they going to pay you, but like with me, I got hit in [Hurricane Katrina]. (0:28:47.0) I lost all my equipment and everything else. I mean, for Katrina; I lost all my equipment in Katrina. Then I'm finally working my way back. Gustav come along; I lost all equipment again. Well, that's from [20]05 to [20]09. I never had all my equipment to show, but they want to go by my [20]08 and my [20]09 taxes, when both years I didn't work but a half a year or so. So they trying to figure out how to pay people, but like I showed them. The first two months of [20]10, I had forty thousand dollars, and that was my slowest time of the year. From then on, it should've picked up. I should've made two or three hundred thousand dollars in the beginning of the year, that year, for 2010, but I didn't because I went to work for BP. I made money with BP, but BP's over with. Now I don't have no income, and I could bring them trip tickets and whatever. I could show them where I worked almost a whole year and never made no money.

Hester: So this has been a long process for you.

Jackson: Yes, since [Hurricane] Katrina has been long. Like right after Katrina, the seafood was abundant. (0:30:02.7) It was thick, stuff like you never—well, I seen it years ago because, that's what I'm saying. Forty years ago it was like right after Katrina. You only needed so many crab traps, and you caught seafood. And it lasted. It was doing good. We was steady making money after Katrina, and then that's what I'm saying. Gustav came, and then Ike; we lost our equipment. Then BP followed right behind it. But from the whole time after Katrina, we were steady catching seafood. Once BP came, it like, everything stopped and disappeared. I don't know

where it went, or it died or whatever. So that's what I'm saying. Right now I got a crab boat; I got a shrimp boat. I got crab traps out. I go once a week to run crab traps, and that one week, for crabbing I'm losing more money, really, than I'm making. But I need to show that I'm trying to work because BP says that if I don't show something, I don't need the money. How they say that? If I'm not working, I must not need money. But if I go to work and lose money, why go to work? That's what I was trying to explain to them, but I got crab traps out. I go once a week. If I catch five boxes, time I take my expenses—before I leave in the morning, I got a three-hundred-dollar-expense bill, before I leave the wharf.

Hester: And that's for?

Jackson: Bait, ice, fuel, whatever I need. If I don't go out and catch at least three boxes of crabs, I'm in the hole. Anything after three boxes is when I start making money, the boat starts making money, and the deckhand makes money. The other day I went out. The traps sat for four days. I went out. I caught two and a half or three boxes of crabs. I wound up making twenty-five dollars for four days worth of work, sitting there. That's why this time I'm not going back until Friday or Saturday. I'm going to let them sit five days, and I might make a hundred and fifty dollars. But as far as like years ago, (0:32:15.9) we used to go every day, every day. Before Katrina we went every other day, during the wintertime. It's like every other day. By the time, this time of the year, come spring and stuff like that, we usually working every day. Right now you can't work every day. You'll go broke working every day.

Hester: I understand. Are you doing anything else to help you meet your bills?

Jackson: I got the shrimp boat. We not making no money with shrimp, either, (0:32:44.6) because the shrimp are small, or they big. The big shrimp is gone, really, until August. The brownies in there right now, they too small. You getting—I think it's sixty cents a pound. If you push all night, you burn a hundred gallons of fuel. You might catch a thousand pounds of shrimp. So you make six hundred dollars. By the time you pay for your fuel, your fuel comes up to be three or four hundred dollars. Then you got to figure your food and your deckhands and stuff like that, so you're not really making no money. You working all night for a hundred dollars or so, if you make that. You're not paying the wear and tear on your boat and your equipment. It's getting to where we need to find something else to do. And like me, I quit school when I was fifteen years old. My daddy had a heart attack, so (0:33:42.2) I had to go to work. I had seven brothers and sisters. So I had to support the family. Now I don't have the education to go get any other kind of job. So I'm stuck still fishing and can't make no money.

Hester: Did you tell me that you were doing something between seasons or something that you were doing when we were talking before we went on the record? Maybe I misunderstood.

Jackson: Certain times of the year if things'll slow down where—like crabbing, you crab all year, but certain times of the year the price drops on the crabs so low that you can't fish them for what they want to pay you for them. So that time of the year we used to go get a job doing survey work or seismograph or something with the oil company. I go run a boat and do this and do that on a boat. Now it got to where we don't have no seismograph work. We don't have no kind of oil company work or nothing like that, so we don't have nothing to do. There's no, "I'm going to go get a job and do this," because we don't have no jobs right now at all, no kind of businesses to go do nothing for. Everything's on hold.

Hester: Could you describe your boats? It sounds like you have one that you use for—

Jackson: I got a crab boat. (0:34:58.0) I got a shrimp boat, and I got a small oyster boat. The oyster boat, they never did open the wild reef. I don't own no leases, so when the wild reef opens, I'll go fish the wild reef. Well, since BP, they opened the wild reef there for a month or so, (0:35:15.0) and then they shut it down because there was no oysters to catch. So we can't dredge oysters; that's out. The crabs, there's so many people in it, you can't make no money. And the shrimp season, there's not enough shrimp to survive for everybody. So we stuck doing nothing, sitting around, waiting.

Hester: I guess you still have the maintenance and everything on your boats.

Jackson: Oh, yeah. Oil change, filters. You got to keep the bottom clean, paint the boat. It don't never end. But that's what I'm saying. You got so much upkeep to keep the boats up because if you don't keep the boats up and you let them get depleted, then they cost you twice as much money to put them back in shape again.

Hester: If we could go back and talk with you about your beginnings, the type boat that your father had when you first started out, did he also have more than one boat?

Jackson: No. We had one boat back then. (0:36:14.1) We had a Lafitte skiff, a twenty-eight-foot Lafitte skiff, wooden cypress boat, and we'd crab with it. Then when shrimp season came, we shrimped with it. Now, fishing fish and stuff, we had a small outboard motor in there we used to work with. But now (0:36:28.1) it's where like I might go crabbing in the morning, and then I might jump on the shrimp boat and go night-rigging at night. You have to have two boats because you can't keep rerigging to do one job, so I got two boats. And that's like with the oysters. I'll be still crabbing. One day I might go crabbing, and then the next day I might go catch oysters. Now, that's what I'm saying, with the wild reef closing, we only got two—you either got the option of shrimp, or you got the option of crab. And then when the shrimp season closed, the only thing you can do is crab.

Hester: I'm curious about the wild-lease area. I guess it's an open area that anybody can go in and dredge the oysters.

Jackson: Yes. Long as you have—see, now they made it where you had to have a seed license. (0:37:19.5) You had to dredge oysters in so many years. Well, I have a boat that I dredged with back then, so I got a seed license; I can go dredge the wild reef. Some people don't have a seed license.

Hester: Is that like the letter C?

Jackson: No. It's a license saying that you have a seed permit. See, the wild reef, they got it to where it's a seed bedding ground. (0:37:41.3) You can go take oysters from there and put on your leases to repopulate your ground. And then you can go certain areas; there's a sack area where you can take sacks from to sell. Well, right now they got all that closed down. You can't do nothing on the wild reef. Everything is shut down.

Hester: How big is the wild reef?

Jackson: Oh, there's big areas. There's like a big spot in Lake Borgne. There's another big spot like out along the edge of the Sound. There's a spot in Black Bay and Lake Michoud(?) and stuff. There's different big spots that's wild reef; there's not a lease on them, that they don't own. But if you don't have a lease right now, you don't dredge. It's got to be on a lease.

Hester: How are the guys doing, the ones that have leases? How are they doing?

Jackson: Some of them are doing good. Some of them are mostly planting rocks right now to try to repopulate their oyster beds (0:38:40.3) because everything died from BP.

Hester: What about from the Bonnet Carré Spillway? Was that a—

Jackson: Well, that's according to what happens—they opened up all the spillways (0:38:50.2) around here to try to keep the oil out, and then when they opened the spillway up, it added more freshwater to it, so it killed more oysters because a oyster can't live in too-fresh water. It's got to be a brackish type water for them to live in. So that messed up plenty leases for everybody. Everybody right now's hurting, but some people that had leases like on the boundary line that the freshwater didn't get to, they still got some oysters. But plenty of people that I know of, they lost almost everything. They steady bedding rocks right now to regroup, try to get their stock. It'll be two years or three years before they have any oysters to dredge.

Hester: Does it look like they're meeting with success?

Jackson: Yeah. It's getting to where the spat is sticking to the rocks and stuff like that, but that's what I'm saying. You start out with a spat; it'll take three to four years for that oyster (0:39:46.1) to get big enough to harvest. Now, BP says they're going to

pay the oyster fishermen for their leases and stuff. But that's like me; I don't have leases, so I'm waiting on the wild reef to open back up.

Hester: When's the last time you've been out oystering?

Jackson: Oystering?

Hester: Yeah.

Jackson: It was a couple of months back there. I went to the wild—when they had the wild reef open, I went for a couple of days, and it didn't work out.

Hester: Are you seeing anything like what you showed me with the crabs? Are you seeing that with the oysters?

Jackson: No. You don't really see it. The shrimp, that's what I'm saying. I got a friend of mine, buys shrimp. He got shrimp that comes in there that's got—they deformed in the eyes and look like cancers on them, (0:40:29.9) just like the crabs. There's stuff—and then we talked to some of the fishermen that fish out further. They're fishing stuff like the mackerel that's got tumors and stuff on them. And according to them, it's not from BP.

Hester: And you'd never seen it before?

Jackson: No, mm-mm. No. That's what I'm saying. We seen deformities of like you'll have a crab that'll have two points coming out the claws and stuff like that, but not holes in them and not legs missing and parts falling off. I got more pictures in there I could show you that's got like—a while back we had, when the (inaudible) come down, we had a box of crabs to show them where it looked like you dipped the crab in a acid, and it ate parts of the crab off of it, like the bottom pad and the shell and stuff. They got holes in them and stuff, but ain't nobody contacted nobody yet about what they going to do about it.

Hester: Let's talk a little bit about the hurricane, if we can. You were saying that after Katrina was really a good—

Jackson: It was good.

Hester: —time, sort of like when you first started out with your dad.

Jackson: When I first started because where we went, we went September. It was October, November, December, around in December, the crabs—nobody fished nothing for like two months. And I guess [Hurricane Katrina] (0:42:07.1) pushed in the seafood from the outside. That's what I'm saying, like it act like when I was ten, twelve years old. You could put out a hundred traps and catch twenty baskets of crabs. It was good. It ain't like it is now. We got four or five hundred traps out, and

we can't catch four or five boxes. The shrimp was like that, just that they left it alone for a couple of months or the weather pushed the shrimp in from the outside. I don't know what it was, but you had plentiful shrimp, and you had plentiful crabs. And then it stayed like that. More people, more people got into it. It dropped down a little bit, but everybody was still making a living. And then once BP came, they shut us down; told us, "Don't take no more seafood." And then right after that, we all tried to go back to work after they shut the VOO [Vessels of Opportunity] system down and everything. And it's just like there was none. For a little while they had people that stayed fishing. They caught crabs and that for a while, and then it just like depleted. It disappeared.

Hester: How many months was it between August 29, when Katrina hit, 2005, and when you were able to go back to work?

Jackson: December.

Hester: In December.

Jackson: December.

Hester: So what did you do between that?

Jackson: I was in Tennessee. I went to Tennessee for Katrina. I [stayed] up in Tennessee for about six weeks, seven weeks. Then I come to Mississippi, and I [stayed] in Mississippi for a week. And then from there I come back to the house, and I lived in a camper trailer with a generator, hauling water and getting my equipment back together to go back to work.

Hester: Where'd you keep your boat?

Jackson: My boat was right up here when Katrina came?

Hester: And it did OK?

Jackson: Um-hm. It was on a trailer, sitting here in the yard. They had about six foot of water here, and the little boy right on the other side of the school, there, I parked in his yard, and he [stayed] in the schoolhouse over here. He told me, said, "I seen your boat, floating." He said, "I figured when it come down, it was going to be sitting in the yard somewhere. And then when the water went down, it was still sitting on the trailer." I said, "Yeah. I tied the boat to the trailer." I said, "If it floated, it was going to take the trailer with it." (laughter)

Hester: But you had three boats, so—

Jackson: Well, back—no. Back then I didn't have three boats. I had one boat. I had more boats, but I was repairing this one and that one, and they [stayed] by the house,

and I lost all that in Katrina. I lost my house. I lost all my equipment. Everything I had was gone. (0:44:47.9)

Hester: What was your equipment? What equipment did you have that you lost?

Jackson: I lost dredges. I lost crab traps. I lost gillnets that I fished—well, the only thing we can fish is mullets. I had ten or twelve gillnets. I had trawls and seines and all kind of equipment in the yard that I lost. So I had to start all over to rebuild all my equipment again. And really, ain't too many people helped us do anything. Well, just lately now they starting to give you a grant for this and a grant for that. Back then I didn't qualify for the grants because I went right back to work to try to make money. The ones that didn't go right back to work, they knew when the grant was coming up, and they went and applied for it. It's who you talk to or who was there first that got the grants.

Hester: Well, how did you handle that, though, with fishing and really good fishing, what you're telling me. And then having lost your house and—

Jackson: It was hard. That's what I'm saying, like with the fishing, we started out; we was doing good. We was catching crabs; sometimes three, four thousand pounds a day we was catching. And the crab buyers back then, they what you call it? Like I had two or three different people that lost their stuff. I had took them with me on the boat because they needed to make money, too. I took them as deckhands and stuff, and we split it up to where I didn't really take nothing for the boat. It was just between us where we could make money and rebuild our property and our land and stuff and get our equipment back. But the buyers, we was catching big number ones and stuff like that, and they was giving us forty cents a pound for it, and there was no way you could bring it anywhere else because we didn't have nobody. And I seen, me and a partner of mine, Johnny Snyder(?), we caught crabs there for a week. We might've had ten thousand pounds that one week. At the end of the week, the buyer—we come back. He give us a ticket saying three thousand of it died. "Oh, three thousand pounds died." "Oh!" "I can show you pictures of them." "Well, that ain't showing nothing. Once we brought them to the wharf here, they should have been yours. We shouldn't have had it taken away from us because when we gave them to you, they were alive." But that's what I'm saying. We bought trucks and everything else for the price they were getting. Then it got to where we would take off and haul crabs. We'd leave at four o'clock in the morning and go crabbing, put them on a trailer or on a truck and run all the way to Slidell and sell them to a guy in Slidell. By the time we did all this, time we get back, be eight, nine o'clock at night and then get back up the next morning and go back crabbing again. And we did that for months until finally local people down here—we got to buy ice, and they had ice and fuel and stuff like that. And then it got kind of back to normal.

Hester: How long did it take [infrastructure for commercial fishing to rebuild]?

Jackson: Oh, probably six months or so.

Hester: So you were really into fishing, heavy, and they were still not back yet. (0:47:54.5)

Jackson: Back yet, no. No. We'd haul stuff all the way from here to Slidell, or even we'd go to Slidell to get fuel or whatever. In the beginning we couldn't get hardly no fuel around here or nothing, nowhere. We had to run to Slidell to get fuel.

Hester: So how did you manage getting your house back? Did you build your house back? (0:48:14.8)

Jackson: No. At first I went; we made money. Then I bought a trailer and had them bring a trailer in and hook up. Moved into a trailer. And then Gustav came, and I got wet again. So I got put out again.

Hester: And then you had [Hurricane] Rita in between those two.

Jackson: All that, yeah.

Hester: And were you back for when Rita hit?

Jackson: No, no. I wasn't back yet for Rita. Rita happened around September; I think it was a month or so after Katrina. It still put water in everybody, and after that I came. That's what I'm saying; I came back the first of November. The schools was just starting to open in Chalmette and stuff like that. I came back in November, and I started fishing—I guess—November or end of December, somewhere, I started fishing. And it was good there for months, and then that's what I'm saying. After everybody started coming back, so many people got into it, it depleted some, but it didn't deplete like it is now. Right now there's so many people fishing, they go out—well, me, I don't really care to fish the inside waters. I fish outside where good crabs catch. You got a line where your fish factory and small crabs, and you got a line that you fish good crabs and number ones and stuff like that.

Hester: How far out do you have to go to get good crabs?

Jackson: A few miles from the dock.

Hester: Is it really expensive with high fuel costs?

Jackson: Well, that's what I'm saying. I'll burn thirty-five, forty gallons a day. It costs me a hundred and forty, a hundred and fifty dollars a day to leave the wharf. (0:49:52.4) And bait, I use like eight, ten flats of bait. That's twenty dollars a flat for bait. And then time you get—like plenty of deckhands, now, they like, "Well, would you give me fifty dollars a day instead of a share?" Because they're making just fifty dollars a day; he makes more money than if I would pay him a share. If I would pay him fifty dollars every day, he'd make more money than I do by the time I'm finished.

That's what I'm saying. It's hard to do anything right now. Everybody says, "Well, why you don't"—I'm going to go out there and burn three hundred gallons of fuel and maybe fifty dollars of groceries. I got four hundred and something dollars; I'm going to go out there, and I'm going to catch two hundred pounds of shrimp that are worth a hundred and eighty dollars and maybe a hundred big ones that's worth two hundred or three hundred dollars? I ain't making no money for the time I'm putting in because the time you put in—like I'm saying. The last few times I talked to a couple of boys down the road, they went out. All night they worked for like two hundred pounds of small shrimp and a hundred pounds of big shrimp. That ain't four hundred dollars, even. You don't pay your expense. You're in a hole. That's what I'm saying. I started to go, and then everybody tells me, "Stay home. Ain't no sense in going. You're going to lose money. Wait a while. Let the shrimp get bigger." So that's what I'm doing right now. I'm just waiting around.

Hester: How many people are waiting on that? Enough to let the shrimp get big?

Jackson: There's a bunch of them waiting around. There's plenty of them's out there, dragging away, see if they can find them, but most of the ones that come in, they not finding none.

Hester: You were talking about the estuary and the crabs. Can you talk about the estuary and the shrimp? How does it affect the shrimp? (0:51:42.8)

Jackson: It's all the same, but if they would make a estuary—see, most of the people don't want to shrimp estuaries because most of the people, like the night-riggers and stuff, they fish inside. That's the shrimp, right now, are, on the inside. They're running seventy/eighty count. But certain times of the year, when it's right, the shrimp in that area run forty/fifties. So you really don't want to make a shrimp estuary because if you make a shrimp estuary, you kill a bunch of people that had these bayous that they fish in and stuff like that, for years and year. Now, the crabs, I think that's a different situation altogether because the crabs, they catching crabs that's four or five inches, and they selling them. There's the same thing with the shrimp. They catching smaller shrimp. So it's all basically the same, but the shrimp season, they should have waited till the shrimp got bigger. The crab estuary is any lagoon or duck pond or ditch or whatever, there's a crab trap in it. With shrimp you don't do that way. They work main bayous, big bayous where a volume of shrimp come out the lagoons and stuff like that. But they don't go in the ponds and the duck ponds and stuff like that. Right now, there's crab traps everywhere. (0:53:07.5) You can go anywhere in this area and find a crab trap in a lagoon or a duck pond, stuff like that. The crab don't have a chance to hide nowhere. That's why I figure we need a estuary to where they can grow and move out and repopulate. But the problem is, is getting Wildlife and Fishery to do this. Either limit the licenses, make a estuary, or give us our finfish or some kind of other deal we can do. Right now we don't have nothing.

Hester: I'm hearing that you've had the difficulties of dealing with the changes in the environment in the area around here because of the pipelines and the saltwater, freshwater—

Jackson: —intrusion.

Hester: Intrusions and all these siphoning and everything else. So you've got that. You've got some storms, a series of hurricanes. You had Katrina, Rita, Gustav, and Ike. Then you've got the BP oil spill, Bonnet Carré Spillway and other spillway openings.

Jackson: Yes.

Hester: What do you see as the future of commercial fishing in this area? (0:54:20.4) Do you think you're going to be able to come back from all these things? How will you come back?

Jackson: The way it is right now, you're not coming back. We're a dying breed. Like any kid coming up now? I tell them right now, "Go to school. You're not going to make it in this industry. Years ago? Yeah. *Now*, they ain't no way you could make it." That's what I'm saying. There's too many people in it. And I've been doing it for forty years. I can't make my living right now. As much as experience as I got to do it, I can't make a living at it right now. You know what I'm saying? If I had any amount of bills, I couldn't make it. Right now I own everything. I don't have no bills, no rent, no nothing. The only bills I got is lights, water, and gas, and insurance and stuff like that. And I can get buy with it. I'm taking money out of savings to pay the bills, and somebody young, trying to get into it, there ain't no way they can do it. They can't make it.

Hester: If there's any one thing that you think that could be done that would get the process of repairing it started, what would that be? (0:55:31.9)

Jackson: Put the barrier islands back. That would be the main thing. See, after Katrina and stuff like that, they had so many rumors running around, this, that, and the other, that they had like seven hundred ships that they was going to drop of the shelf, the Atlantic shelf or whatever, and destroy, make a reef or whatever. If they had've took them ships and lined them up along the barrier islands and pumped them with sand, everything would have been fine. They'd have had a barrier. Because we had a dope boat that [stayed] out there, a ship that sunk; I don't know when it was. It was probably in the [19]50s. Probably the last five years it finally disintegrated from where it was. It was sitting—

Hester: What did you call it?

Jackson: The dope boat. The dope boat they called it, but it sat along the ship channel for years and years. Finally it done rotted away to where it's nothing. But if

they'd have put ships along the barrier islands and pumped them with sand and made a break, they wouldn't let the water come in like it does now. We got too much saltwater intrusion. (0:56:35.1) It's like the tide, years ago the tide used to come in slow. And then when it went out, it went out slow. And the water stayed kind of brackish. Now, the water comes in so hard, that's like for the last little hurricane we had down there, I [stayed] up until like twelve o'clock that night. The water was fine. It was high, but it wasn't on the road or nothing. Between one and five, we got four foot of water, that quick. It just rushed in and flooded everything. Years ago it didn't take that. But that's like they get there with these, what they call? Scale deals about the wave and everything. They build a scale, and they say, "Well, if the water comes from the outside at a tidal surge, and it's twenty foot high, and it's hits the island, and it goes over the island, it's got enough time to re—

Hester: (inaudible)

Jackson: Yeah. It'll replenish to come back up. But I don't know what they looking at because on the outside, you got fifty and a hundred foot of water. When you get to the barrier islands, from there in, there's no more than twenty foot of water from there in. And it's really like twenty foot of a channel along the inside the barrier islands that got twenty foot of water. From there on in, there ain't no more than twelve foot of water, ten, twelve foot of water, and as you come in, it gets shallower. If they would put something there, where they'd break that first wave, the water wouldn't reproduce into a tidal surge. It would break it down. And if they put the barrier islands back, and they made them high enough, the surge that the storm would put it, it would take, instead of three hours like I said for the last hurricane, it might take two or three days to raise that surge inside. By that time the hurricane might be over with. But I don't know what they looking at. I don't know how they figure, start from the inside out. Like I said, we the barrier. The only thing they using us is for a buffer. Since they put up the great wall around us, I figure the next time we have a major hurricane, they won't let us move back to our village down there no more.

Hester: Can you talk about the wall a bit? What's the idea behind the wall? What does it look like? Where does it go? (0:59:10.3)

Jackson: It covers New Orleans. It covers New Orleans mainly. That's the main barrier. They got it; it goes up to the industrial canal. It runs down the ship channel, cuts over by Barrette (?), goes up around Caernarvon, back to the river levee. That covers the Ninth Ward and the oil port. Now if the Lake Pontchartrain fills in, by the Seventeenth Canal and all that stuff, I don't know how they built all that up, too. But that's mainly—we the breaker to stop the waves, and then we outside the protection levee.

Hester: And is the construction of the wall affecting you now? I mean, outside of storms coming, whatever you're supposed to do when a storm comes, but just day to day, is the wall affecting—

Jackson: No, not really. The only way it affects us when we get tide surge and that because the water used to go in further, and it kind of (inaudible) some of the water. Now, they don't (inaudible) as much water as it used to do, so we get flooded some. It makes a bulkhead where the water can't go nowhere. Once it gets there, that's it. Before it used to go on the land, and the land would siphon up some of it, or it'd go into different areas. Now it don't go to them areas no more. They cut all that off.

Hester: What is it? Does it speed up the process of erosion, or does it slow it down?

Jackson: No. It don't speed it up or nothing, but it does in a way because the water saturates the land quicker. It don't go nowhere. The wall stops it. But that's what I'm saying. They trying to pump freshwater in to change the salinity level to where the ecosystem's going to be right, but with them pumping this much freshwater in, it's messing up the ecosystem because you got saltwater and freshwater fighting each other. That's what I'm saying. If they would put the barrier islands back, they wouldn't have to pump so much freshwater. That would make it come back, and we wouldn't have the saltwater intrusion coming in like it does. It's just too much. There ain't no land there to stop it no more.

Hester: You've been fishing for forty plus years. Can you describe—I guess when you started the barrier—

Jackson: They had land. The barrier islands was a mile or two wide when I was a kid. They had all different other islands out there. When I was a kid, they had all kind of islands. You could go, jump from island to island to island, all Black Bay, all Point Chicot, all the way out. Then you went out toward Mitchell Key; they had islands. You went from Grand Gauche(?) all the way around to Breton Island; it was all a big island that the water come in. Eventually it come through the gaps in it, and it come up. (1:02:08.4) Now, there's no islands. It's just wide open.

Hester: Did it happen all of a sudden, or was it gradual?

Jackson: Gradually, over the years, the water steady beat on the islands, and the islands disappeared and stuff like that. That's like what they trying to do with the freshwater. They can't do it. They got to go there and pump the sand. They can't say, "Well, we're going to cut this here through here and let it run, and it's going to build land." It'll take a hundred years for it to build land. They need to set up a—that's what I don't understand. They pumped in behind Judge Perez, from the river. They run pipes out; within a week they pumped in. They hauled sand every day out the river. They got big ships that scoop it up, run out, and drop it off the continental shelf, (1:02:53.3) destroy it. Why not set a dredge boat up there and steady just pump the sand into the barrier islands and build it up? Because they got them ships running around. What's the difference between the price of the ship cost to go run out there and dump it, and if they set a dredge boat up there, pumping it in a different area?

Hester: Just the thought occurs to me that perhaps it has—make the oil and gas mines or something—I don't know.

Jackson: Don't know what it is, but that's what I'm saying. What they pay for the ships to keep the river open, why can't they put a dredge boat there and pump it and do something with it instead of dropping off the continental shelf and just wasting the sand or whatever, the sediment that comes down the river? And that would help everything out. That's like Plaquemines there; Plaquemines, they rebuilding, but their shore's not like ours. They got a boundary line, and then the Gulf. Well, the barrier islands is our boundary line. That's where they should build up at. The way it is now, there's no more barrier islands. You getting to where, right on the outside the barrier islands, there's fifty foot, sixty foot of water. When you get to the barrier islands, it comes up, and then once you get on the other side of the barrier islands, you back down to twenty foot, ten foot, twelve foot, and like that is the outside line. If they let the barrier islands disappear, (1:04:22.1) slowly the deepwater's going to move in. And once it moves in, then you're finished. It's over with. But the professors and these people that think they know what they doing, really don't know what they doing.

Hester: Well, it seems to me that somebody who goes out there and fishes day in and day out would know—

Jackson: Yeah. Well, that's all the fishermen. If you get all the fishermen that been doing this forever, every one of them will tell you, "We need the barrier islands back. That will save us from hurricanes, from erosion, from saltwater intrusion, everything." These people that reads books and professors and all this other that ain't never been out there, they assume what they can do to help, and it's not right. It don't work. If they would get with this fishermen—that's what I'm saying. Put the barrier islands back; it would help everybody. It would help Mississippi out even. But I don't know. I don't understand. That's what I'm saying. I'm old enough now where I ain't going to be doing this but maybe another ten, twenty years. It's the younger generation that's suffering from what they doing there.

Hester: Do you mind if I ask you how old you are?

Jackson: I'm fifty-five years old. That's what I'm saying. I've been fishing [for] forty years. I quit school at fifteen and went to work.

Hester: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Jackson: Seven brothers and sisters.

Hester: How many brothers—well—

Jackson: Four and four.

Hester: Four and four.

Jackson: And I lost a sister right after Katrina to cancer. And all the rest of them are living (inaudible).

Hester: Are they all in the fishing industry?

Jackson: My two brothers, I got two brothers that's in the fishing industry, too, but my sisters and all, well, I got a brother-in-law; he fishes. But most all of them, they don't fool with the seafood like we do.

Hester: Do you have Islenos in your family?

Jackson: No, not that I know of. I'm a fifty-seven variety. I don't know if I got Islenos or not in it.

Hester: I understand. (laughter)

Jackson: I know I got Indian, and German, Irish, and French and Spanish, and I just don't know if I got from the [Canary] Islands in me.

Hester: I need to pull my camera out. I forgot to take a picture when we started. So I'm looking to do that, but maybe in the meantime, if you could just talk a bit about some of the changes that you witnessed? I have a whole slew of questions that usually we start out with. (laughter) I mean, everything you said was so interesting, so I'm glad we went straight to, and I wanted to talk about these things, too. And so I'm glad we went straight to that because we were able to spend a lot of time with it. But if you could, talk a little bit about when you started fishing, and where you are now, the changes. (1:07:20.8) And you mentioned something about the restrictions, so we know about the gillnets and the—

Jackson: We lost all the gillnets, yeah.

Hester: —taking all that from you. But like for example, if there was a change in the equipment, the change in the boats, a change in technique, a change in species, if at some point you included something or decided, "We're not going to work on that anymore. We won't harvest this." I'm going to pull the camera out.

Jackson: Well, we harvest, like when I first started crabbing and fishing, we harvest crabs; we harvest shrimp. Now, when we first started fishing crabs, years ago, we used to use what they call a palango(?) line.

Hester: Palango?

Jackson: A palango line, it was a piece of like number twenty twine. We'd buy five or six pounds of it, and you sit down, and you have cow lip. And you'd chop cow lip

into little strips, and you'd sit down, and you bait this line. Every ten foot you put a piece of cow lip on it.

Hester: Is that like a trotline?

Jackson: It's like a trotline. That's the way we first, crabs, was fishing, or with nets. Then we went from that to the crab traps. And then since then we been fishing with crab traps. Nobody hardly uses nets or palango. Me, really, I wish they'd go back to the palango or the crab nets because you go out; you put your line out, or you put your nets out, and you catch crabs. With the crab trap, it works twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It don't never come out the water. You lose a trap; it kills crabs. And now they talking about putting a piece in the trap (1:09:07.2) to stop the trap from killing crabs. It's supposed to disintegrate in so much time and leave it open. But still you're leaving wire on the bottom for the trawl boats to catch, so I really think they should outlaw the crab trap. Start back again with either crab nets or palango lines. Probably it'd bring back the price of the crabs, and you wouldn't take the crabs that you take now. It would be less harvest, but it wouldn't be like right now, we got (inaudible) net work one day, crab one day, or work two days, crab days, or somebody that only works every other day that's got crab traps out. It would take a bunch of people out of the system where you have to work for what you going to make. See, it wasn't bad when we used to fish crab nets or crab lines, but you went every day. You put your line out, and you picked your line up and took it home, or went with your nets. That's what I'm saying. With the crab traps, they work twenty-four hours a day. They don't never quit. If you lose them, it's still killing crabs. (1:10:15.2) Plus it's what you (inaudible) the water. It's making it to where it's like—inside specially—hard time for boats running through because there's so many. You catch them in the wheel. You're dirtying the bottom of the lakes and stuff like that because it's bogus traps that you lose. Now, if they made of line somewhere, like outside, that you could fish crab traps out here, and then you only could fish palango line or nets on the inside, it would help out. It wouldn't put a bind on so much stuff. That's like the lagoons and stuff I was talking about. If you would outlaw the crab traps on the inside waters where you only could fish with a line or nets, that would take all the traps out the lagoon. That would give time for the crabs to grow and move out to where you could fish them with crab traps. That's what I'm saying. It's either a sanctuary or estuary or outlaw the crab traps to a certain area would help the system out. Now, the rest of the stuff is mostly biologists, Wildlife and Fishery of their control over it with the shrimp and the stuff like that and with the fish and stuff since they took it all away from us. But that's what I'm saying. Like right now with the shrimp, shouldn't never opened the season. They should have waited another couple of weeks for the shrimp to get bigger. But far as anything else, it ain't really changed much, the fishing industry. Ain't no major nothing. You went from trawls to skimmers, double-riggers and stuff like that, but it's basically all the same. (1:11:56.6) It ain't too much changed.

Hester: Boats pretty much the same, too?

Jackson: Boats still the same, just different equipment. That's what I'm saying. We went from trawling. Well, years ago it went from seining. They used to seine shrimp instead of trawl. And then they went to the trawls. Then they went to the night rigs. Now, they went to the skimmers.

Hester: Could you describe each one of those? Just for anybody who's listening. (1:12:20.6)

Jackson: The seine is like seining fish. You put out so many feet of net, and you haul it down, and you pocket everything into it, and scoop it out. Then they went to the trawls; you drag it behind the boat. It catches shrimp. Then they went to the skimmers that are night rigs; went off each side the boat, like small nets. Butterflies they call them. And then they improved it and went to a skimmer. Skimmer works like a double-rigger. Instead of pulling two trawls, well, you pulling like two trawls, but you're pulling two smaller trawls on each side the boat, and it's not behind the boat. It's on the side the boat. It's supposed to be where it should pull less pressure on the shrimp. The shrimp don't know you're there until you get there. It catches them before the boat does. But that's basically mostly the changes we been having. As I was saying, like the seine was for the fish. Trammel net used to be for the fish. Now you got a trotline, and you hardly catch anything, or a rod and reel. They want you to go catch speckled trout on a rod and reel. (1:13:24.5) You can't catch enough speckled trout to catch on a rod and reel, especially on one person. Then they don't want you to fish from sunlight—well, they want you to start at sunrise and end at sunset. Most of the time when you catching fish—like we used to run to the platforms on the outside and fish at night by the lights and that. You caught more fish at night than you caught during the day. (1:13:49.9) But Wildlife don't want you to do that. They want you to fish during the daytime. Recreational fishermen can fish twenty-four hours a day. They don't never tell them nothing. That's what I'm saying. It's all messed up with the Wildlife and different things.

Hester: Well, I think I've pretty much covered everything.

Jackson: Everything? (laughter)

Hester: I'm just going to take a quick look through here and see if anything comes—

Jackson: If anything else comes up, call me. As I was saying, the beginning I missed your phone call, and then I was so busy doing this and doing that—

Hester: Oh, that's (inaudible).

Jackson: And I had your number in there, and I said, "When can I make time?" And then right now it's where I ain't doing nothing. I don't know what to go do right now.

Hester: Well, I'm glad this worked out for you because it's been a wonderful interview. Thank you so much for it. I do see a question here that I would like to ask

you. It's kind of a wide open question. What does the seafood industry mean to you personally? (1:14:50.3)

Jackson: It means a lot. That's my livelihood. Once you take the livelihood from us, I don't have nothing to do. I love to fish. I love to hunt. I love all wildlife, doing stuff in the wild. It ain't like going on a job and being stuck in a office, looking at the walls. Every day is a adventure. When you leave the dock, you never know what you might see. It's something that you got to experience and know what it's about. And if you ain't never did it, you don't know what you're missing because there's things I seen that probably people'll never see. And it's just, that's my living. Jobs, mainly bosses, people that going to tell you what to do and stuff like that, I can't handle. But as far as working with anybody? I can work with anybody. It's just that I like to fish. I'm my own boss. I ain't got to listen to what people tell me to do and stuff like that, and I enjoy doing it and seeing different things that I catch, like you'll catch rock crabs. I got a crab at LSU [Louisiana State University] that I caught out of California Bay, [Louisiana,] that's from China, that LSU has. I caught a crab they call a Chinese Mitten Crab, (1:16:12.1) that came from China, and I caught it in a crab trap in Bay (inaudible), and I brought it. LSU come down to get it, and it took them months and months to find out what was wrong because when I first found the crab, I thought it was like a rock crab. But the end of his claws, it had fur on them, like a fur. I thought it was a algae. I took my knife out, and I started scraping, and then when I looked, it's a fur. And finally LSU come back, and they told me it was a Chinese Mitten Crab that come from China. That it probably came over on a ship and got off the ship, and I caught it in a crab trap. We catch different species of stuff that you don't see nowhere else. And anytime I see something, I try to turn it into LSU where other people can see what I found.

Hester: That's great. Now, where did you say you found that crab? What's the name of that place?

Jackson: California Point.

Hester: California Point.

Jackson: Um-hm, yeah. I caught it right off of there, California Bay, California Point, [Louisiana]. But the river ain't but two or three miles from there, so they figured it passed through river, come in with a ship, and passed through, and I caught it. But that's what I'm saying. Different things we see, and you don't never see. Like you'll be watching, and you'll come up on a big school of fish, and you can watch them feed and flip and do things, and porpoises, (1:17:34.0) and like otters, and nutrias, and it's just being in the wildlife. Now, we starting to see where we got eagles down here, now, bald eagles that we see in (inaudible). I don't know why they started. Years ago we never did see them. I guess the population's coming back to where they finally—we can see them. People's, I guess, not killing them and stuff like that. But I like being in wildlife. I can't be cooped up in a place. I like to be out in the open in the elements.

Hester: Any other interesting stories that you can think about to share?

Jackson: Except when you out in a squall, when you're out there working, trying to work, and a squall (1:18:19.5) comes up, and you got waterspouts around you, all kind. You got to be able to be there to know. Like sometime we'll go out; it'll be a perfect day. Later on that evening a big squall might come; you might see a big waterspout here, or you might have to pull on the bank in the rain, the lightning beats you. You don't know if you going to make it in sometime. It's an adventure every time you leave the wharf.

Hester: That's interesting. Well, I think what I'll do is just open it up to you because I'm sure there are quite a number of questions I could have asked, but I didn't think about. So this record will be with the Center [for Oral History] long after I'm around, and everyone can listen to it. Is there anything that you would like to say and put on the record?

Jackson: I think the state or somebody needs to step in and do something with the industry. The crab industry's overpopulated. We need to do something about it. Well, at least this side of the river have a estuary or something like that to where we keep it; we don't lose it. The way the marsh systems and the land and everything is going, we're going to wind up losing everything. It's going to get to where it's all going to be Gulf. It's going to be all the way to the wall, and it's going to be Gulf. There ain't going to be nothing there for nobody to catch no more. It's going to be all Gulf. That's what I'm saying. Right now we got still estuary. If they keep going like they going, we won't have it. It's going to disappear. And that'll be the end of the seafood industry. It's messed up. The younger generation ain't going to see what I seen all these years. (1:20:07.8) That's the worst part about it. I seen things coming up; my kids will never see what I seen. And you can't do nothing about it. Not a thing. It's just like the old people told me. "It's a dying industry. Sooner or later you going to have to find something else to do." And I'm lucky I made it through it in my lifetime. People after me ain't going to see what I've seen.

Hester: Do you have any children?

Jackson: Um-hm. I got two daughters. I told both of them, "Go to school." They love to come on the boat with me. They been coming on the boat with me since they kids, but like I told them, "You can't make no money at this. Go get a education. Do something else." And like with my one daughter, she'll be going to school forever. She still ain't got no degrees or nothing like that, and she's twenty-seven now. But at least she ain't made no loans with the federal government or nothing. She's been trying to go through community college to get a good education. But it's still hard on them. Like me, I still help them as much as I can, but it's just hard to get that education where you can survive in this world, now. It ain't like when we was coming up; everything was cheap. Now, everything's outrageous. Back in my time, you could take fifteen cents to the store, you could buy you a drink, a candy, and a bag of

chips for fifteen cents. Now, you can't buy a candy bar for a dollar and a half. It makes a big deal.

Hester: Look at the price of gas.

Jackson: Let's see. Let me think back. I can remember when it was back around twenty cents in the early [19]60s. It was like twenty-three cents, something like that, and they gave you six glasses, or this with it. And you didn't have to pump your own gas and everything else. Now, they charge you three dollars and something, and you got to get out and do your own. They don't give you nothing. Um-hm.

Hester: That's true.

Jackson: Yeah.

Hester: Well, the Center is going to give you a copy of this, and you can pass them on to your daughters.

Jackson: I will.

Hester: And they will probably pass it on to their children.

Jackson: Um-hm.

Hester: So unless you can think of something else you'd like to put on the record?

Jackson: Not really. That's about it. I think I done covered about everything.

Hester: OK. I think you've done a great job, and I'm going to go ahead and turn the tape recorder off. I think I've kept you almost two hours. (laughter)

Jackson: I get into this, and it just, it upsets me.

Hester: Yeah, yeah. Well, I can understand why. I mean, it's a whole industry that's just really been hit so hard in so many different ways.

Jackson: And like back in the [19]80s I went and fought for the redfish. We went out there, and we lobbied, this, that, and the other, but like the commercial fishing industry never had the money to pay for the lawyers and this, that, and the other. The recreational fishermen had big money, big lobbyists and everything else, and they—

(abrupt end of interview)