

Mini-Series Tells History of African Americans and the Auto Industry

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PLANO, Texas, (Feb. 26, 2018)—A three-part mini-documentary released today by Toyota recounts the history of African Americans in the automobile industry. It highlights how African Americans helped shape the auto industry, the industry’s positive socioeconomic impact on black families, and the continuing need to promote diversity within the industry.

The series includes interviews with Wil James, former president of Toyota’s Georgetown assembly plant, Frank Washington, an automotive and civil rights journalist who has covered the industry for over twenty years, and Damon Lester, president of the National Association of Minority Automobile Dealers.

Excerpts:

Wil James: *“I had a passion, and that was around diversity and inclusion...how can you expect women and people of color to feel truly, fully engaged in an environment where they are not in the places where the discussions and decisions are being made...Now, diversity and inclusion is a pretty significant part of what Toyota is. Our entire company is a far, far better place because we have been able to have those kinds of discussions.”*

Frank Washington: *[When African Americans left the south as part of The Great Migration] “the auto industry is what they were coming to...Ten different states passed anti-discrimination laws in the 1940s. So, the glass ceiling was being raised – maybe not much, but a little bit.... They weren’t necessarily living from paycheck to paycheck, they had money to spend, they could participate fully in the American economy. Now a lot of that was fueled by the industry... It sounds corny, but there was an air of freedom that they had never known before.”*

Damon Lester: *“Black dealers have faced discrimination back then and even today. There are a lot of black dealers today that can’t advertise that they own their stores... The role that black dealers play today is as pillars of the community... you look at all the direct and indirect support that a dealership provides within that community... it plays an intricate role creating a circle of life of how cash circulates through the community.”*