

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Lillian Washington

COLLECTION: 4700.2597

IDENTIFICATION: A centenarian, Washington grew up in Carencro, Louisiana, and later moved to Westlake with her husband. Her children attended Mossville schools.

INTERVIEWER: Chelsea Arseneault

SERIES: Mossville History Project - Field Interviews

INTERVIEW DATES: December 2, 2015

FOCUS DATES: 1920s-1960s; present

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4549

Lillian Marie Comeaux Washington was born in Carencro, Louisiana on January 6, 1914 to parents Julian and Cora Comeaux; third of thirteen children, she lists the names and some biographical details of her siblings; grew up in a large house, on property owned by another family; had fruit trees, livestock, fowl; chores included caring for horses, milking cows, picking cotton; punished with a buggy whip by her father's cousin when she refused to follow his orders; getting up at four o'clock and riding the horse into the pasture; planted corn, sugarcane, cotton, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes; had most of what they needed, only went to the store for certain things; mother traded a chicken for whatever they needed; ate "fresh food every day"; dishes like maque choux, made from corn; father made corn syrup; mother would bring breakfast to the field where they were working; the local store was owned by a French man where they would trade for sugar and coffee; attended Saint Peter and Paul Catholic church in Carencro, and the store owner's wife taught them catechism; girls would play dolls and jacks, brothers would play marbles and jacks; would steal tassels from corn plants as hair for dolls; playing ball with white neighbors; cousin sold ice-cream cones for a nickel; nanny for the [Beche?] family, who owned the land they lived on; experienced racism while working for the Conque family; clerk at Maison Blanche refused to let her sit with the family while they ate ice-cream; boys she took care of refused to eat their ice-cream without her; was never mistreated; stayed with them until she married; didn't want to get married until she saw her future husband, Adam, at a dance; the two girls she was with asked her, "how come you pick the blackest one?"; she married him soon after, even though she didn't know him; spent their first two years together working on a dairy farm; had her first two girls when they decided to move to Westlake; she held several different jobs, caring for an older woman, washing clothes for white people, waitressing; total, she had four girls and two boys; all her children attended Mossville schools from the beginning; several children attended college at McNeese; children's accomplishments and memories of them growing up; son Joseph only knew his nickname, which caused some comedic confusion when

he was drafted for Vietnam; grandparents were Pierre Comeaux and Maria Arceneaux Comeaux from Lafayette; mother's side were Matthews and [Senegal?]; went to school when they made a school for black and Indian [sic] children; home remedies like castor oil and herbal teas; father made teas and whiskey; she never drank, but remembers her younger sister getting drunk; father died alone at ninety-seven, and when they found him he was so decayed they couldn't get near the house because of the odor; he liked horses, and would race them in Jennings; she treated neighborhood children like her own; nephew Johnny Comeaux was misbehaving and she told him to go home, so he threw a baseball through the window; he became a top basketball player for Grambling; her work for Saint John Bosco in Westlake earned her title of "mother" for that church; churches used to be segregated, with a white side and a black side; her schooling; she enjoyed spelling classes; remembers two young teachers, Mouton and [Dequire?]; her doctor questions her about her lifestyle; when her brothers went dancing at a club called the Carmouche, she hid their liquor from them; her eldest son doesn't talk about his time in the service; they say her youngest son, Gerald, committed suicide, but she doesn't believe that; he visited her before he died; phone call about the "three-seven"; after being elected as mayor of Westlake, they found his body in the Mossville High School parking lot; he would help anyone, and had a good job working for Conoco; volunteered to go into the service to be with his brother; Washington discusses photographs her children are showing her; cried when she found out she was pregnant for Cathy, because her mom had just died; she had never seen her mother pregnant; they were told babies came from the cabbage patch; daughter Mary Louise became a teacher, and faced some challenges during integration; her husband was given away when his father remarried; ended up staying with the Montgomery family; she liked him because he was a quiet boy; her wedding dress cost ten dollars, and she used some of the fabric to make her first child's baptism dress; she felt God was punishing her when she became pregnant again; her husband worked for Olin Chemical, and was good to her and her children; he took sick suddenly and passed away in 1991; other girls teased her about being an old maid, since she was twenty-seven and still unmarried; she had to dance with one stocking removed, and that's when she decided she would marry; pitiful to see Mossville now, "looks like it's the end of the world"; remembers Mossville as a nice city full of family.

TAPES: 1 (T4549)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 56 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 83 pages

PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER: One photograph taken during interview with Washington at her home in Westlake, Louisiana. Photographer Kyle Tanglao.

OTHER MATERIALS: Interview questions (4 pgs); Correspondence

RESTRICTIONS: none