

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Reverend Mary Edith Moody

COLLECTION: 4700.1016

IDENTIFICATION: Baton Rouge minister

INTERVIEWER: Catherine Martin

SERIES: McKinley High School Oral History Project - Baton Rouge Bus Boycott

INTERVIEW DATE: June 26, 1998

FOCUS DATES: 1950s-1960s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1499, Side A

Moody born July 29, 1926, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; is one of nine siblings; father from Belize, mother from Mississippi; father came to US seeking education; father took banana boat to California before coming to Louisiana; mother was at boarding school in New Orleans, where the two met; parents married in White Castle, Louisiana; details about grandparents; siblings who died; mother pledged to stay home with all her children who were younger than six; she and her siblings greatly valued having a mother at home; father taught in Hammond, Louisiana, where he was warned by a neighbor about racist feelings toward him; they left Hammond fearing for their lives; in 1920, father became supervisor of schools in West Baton Rouge Parish; father never had a car; lived near Baton Rouge High School; father walked and took ferries to all the schools in West Baton Rouge Parish; Moody bought the first car in her household, a 1952 Desoto; parents were very religious; siblings' education; Moody got two bachelor's degrees at Southern University, in business education and secondary education; brother George was a musician who played with Otis Redding; mother died in 1969, father in 1973; parents' birthdates; parents both taught; parents' high education level threatened whites; four oldest brothers served in World War Two; her sister, Martha Moody Boone, taught in Baton Rouge area schools; Moody gave one ride during Baton Rouge bus boycott; gave her a feeling of joy and pride to participate; attended McKinley but didn't graduate from there; pairing of four older siblings with four younger; article her sister wrote about their family relationships; not much money in family; Moody never married because she wanted to be available to care for parents; experience of riding bus and not being allowed to sit in unoccupied seats; her father thought there should be no uneducated white people because they had so much opportunity; her mother had a maternal feeling toward both President Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Junior; Moody met Dr. King while she was at an education meeting in Alexandria, Louisiana; King wanted to meet the people who cleaned the Bentley Hotel, where they were staying; Moody was impressed by this Jesus-like desire; King credited Baton Rouge Bus Boycott in forming his plans for

Montgomery; Baton Rouge boycott was a success; mentions Rosa Parks; influence of Baton Rouge boycott on Montgomery.

Tape 1499, Side B

Cousin who was the first woman to vote in West Feliciana Parish; a murdered man who worked for Congress of Racial Equality; cousin put her life on the line for advancement of blacks; Moody knows Reverend T.J. Jemison and thinks he feels good about his accomplishments; impressed by how many armed officers on hand when Dr. King spoke in Alexandria; King was resigned to his own death by the time he got to Memphis to help sanitation workers; feeling of awe to be in King's presence; humbled by King being a servant of God; Moody's involvement in the statue of King being placed at the Baton Rouge Centroplex; she led a prayer at the statue's unveiling; one of King's sons thanked her for the prayer; King's daughter now a minister; meeting King's biology teacher in Atlanta; riot on North Boulevard in Baton Rouge; the boycott shows that touching another person's life makes a difference, even if it's just giving them a ride; Southern students who got overpass built over train tracks so students wouldn't be late to class; thinks young people need to hold strong values, not just value things; her values protect her from intimidation; Southern University students involved in sit-ins at S.H. Kress; student housing at Southern; Moody's mother wanted her daughters to experience dormitory living; not all local students could live on-campus because priority went to out-of-town students; Moody had to live off-campus; student transportation at Southern; private black-owned buses; at one time, city buses didn't travel all the way to Scotlandville; buses didn't used to go past Nineteenth Street to area Moody called Boulevard Bottom; growth of Baton Rouge; Plan Baton Rouge to revitalize downtown; boycotts of stores; boycotts spread by word of mouth; also got information from WXOK radio station and some newspapers; media focuses too much on negative; Ordinances 222 and 251; some whites left YWCA because it included blacks; dialogue groups between black and white women; progress her father noticed in his lifetime; children came from everywhere to attend McKinley High School; Cohn High School was first for blacks in West Baton Rouge Parish; brother's aspiration to go to Baton Rouge High; Bishop Ott's weekend retreat for undoing racism; close relationship between Reverend Moody and Bishop Ott; first got to know Bishop Ott when he gave her a ride home from a Louisiana in the Church Conference Retreat.

Tape 1500, Side A

Private, black-owned taxicabs in Baton Rouge; taxis limited in their ability to help in the boycott; Horatio Thompson, local entrepreneur and respected citizen; other black business owners in the 1950s; most black people owned their homes in the 1950s, even if they had little money; pride in ownership; nowadays, many more renters; lack of commitment to community; people used to help each other; Moody's attempts to restore community feeling by founding the North Boulevard Community Action Organization; dispersal of blacks throughout city weakened the black community; black businesses disappeared; gains and losses of desegregation; saddened by lost unity; "I can't go to heaven any more hating whites than they can go heaven hating me, so I don't hate"; she still holds on to hope; worries about children who aren't valued for their academic prowess; speaking to a white church about black lives; children need to feel their own worth or they won't value life; reminds white people how it used to be, that in earlier days she could only go to Baton Rouge's Garden District on a mission of servitude; acknowledges difference between black and white cultures.

TAPES: 2 (T1499, 1500)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 48 minutes

T1499 - 1 hour, 26 minutes

T1500 - 22 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 47 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Correspondence, Interview Index, Interviewer's Notes

RESTRICTIONS: Interviewee stated at time of interview, "None presently, however, restrictions will be provided later," but never outlined any restrictions beyond that statement.