

TRANSCRIPT- KAREN LYNN PARKER
(Compiled April 19, 2007)

Interviewee: KAREN LYNN PARKER
Interviewer: Nicete N. Moodie
Interview Date: April 16, 2007
Length: 2CDs; 82minutes and 20 seconds

Start of CD 1

Nicete Moodie: OK we are here at the home of Ms. Karen Lynn Parker located in Greensboro, North Carolina. This is the second interview that we did before. This interview is taking place April 16 and the time is approximately ten minutes to one. We are going to pick up some issues that we talked about before hand on the first interview and also bring up some other different topics that were not mentioned before hand. So we are going to go ahead and start with some gender and sexual relations that happened on campus during your two years there Ms. Parker. If you could just kind of generally give me some more specific, if you can, if you can recall, some gender relations that you dealt with at Chapel Hill.

CD 1; 3min and 8 seconds

Karen Parker: When you think about it, to chose being gay is about as sensible as choosing to be black. You would have to be out of your ever-loving mind. You know, why would you choose it? Your discriminated against, your life is even in jeopardy even in a lot of places. So why would anyone chose that, you would have to be insane? You

would either have to be wired that way or—well that would be it, you would have to be wired that way because that is the only reason.

CD 1; 6min and 3 seconds

NM: Before you go there, you mentioned earlier that you had a guy that you liked on campus and the guy—a friend of yours said Oh no he is gay, Interestingly enough, was that man white or...

KP: Yes he was white,

NM: Ok, so not trying to change topics, kind of keeping along with sexuality but how was that in relation to interracial dating? Was that very common there or?

KP: Well it wasn't that very common because it wasn't that many of us down there for one thing. And number two, if any of the guys, the black men had dated white women openly they would have been probably lynched at that time. That was not tolerated.

CD 1; 8min and 40 seconds

NM: So, it was easy for you to date interracially without giving it a second thought as like this doesn't look right on my part or what are people going to think?

KP: I really didn't care what people thought? I mean if I cared what people thought, I would not have been on that campus period. They don't want me there at all. So I can't care what people think. If I cared what people thought, I would have fallen into the stereotype and played dumb like they assumed that I was. I can't care what people think in that type of environment, are you crazy. If I cared what people thought I never would have demonstrated or gone to jail or any of that stuff because they didn't like that either.

And they didn't like anything. So--. I mean nothing bothered me. I dated—I dated some southerners. I dated some northerners. I dated foreign students. When I say dated—you know a lot of people say date very loosely, the assumption is that every dating has to do with a sexual relationship. No, ever dating did not have to do with a sexual relationship. You went to the movies with them, you pal'ed around with them and stuff, everything did not culminate into a sexual relationships. After all Carolina Co-eds, we are supposed to be chaste. Oh, the way they did it back then, so I was told by the Carolina co-eds if you did it any where but in a bed you were still a virgin.

NM: Really?!

KP: That was the big pretence. If you didn't do it in a bed you were still a virgin. And that's what they went around pretending they were.

NM: Interesting. How did you hear that? Do you remember- -was it like a rumor from the girls in the hall, or...

KP: I think I heard it from the guys first.

NM: [Laughing] that makes sense.

KP: And yet at that time, there were girls having abortions on my dorm. There would be at least one a semester. And of course--

NM: Was that very hush-hush?

KP: It was kept hush hush. I mean people probably in the immediate vicinity knew it because they all went to the same abortionist. This was well known on campus.

NM: Oh wow!

KP: The abortionist was a black woman.

NM: This was an abortionist on campus?

KP: She was in Durham or Chapel Hill or somewhere around there. All the students knew who she was. And she made a lot of money off Chapel Hill students at that time because there was no birth control. The birth control pill just came in my senior year. And there was no birth control that was readily available and people were taking a lot of chances and girls were getting pregnant. And we had at least one- -this was just on my hall in this one dorm- -we had one a semester. And they would come back and what they would do is they would induce a miscarriage. That was the technique. And send the back home to the dorm room for everything to shake out, which is to expel the fetus. So she is going through labor- - when she gets back to the dorm she is going through labor. And she is bleeding. Sometimes they would go wrong. And I do remember one case where we all started wringing our hands. We were watching a friend of mine and we did not know whether or not she was going to make it. And we had the big debate- at one point do we call, take her to the hospital? And if we take her to the hospital she is expelled from school. And how long do we tough this out- - how much of a chance do we take with her life before we holler for help. Fortunately, she got through it fine, but it was a really dicing thing for the people who cared about her. Because you were penalized for that, she would have absolutely been kicked out of school. Those were the times.

CD 1; 13minutes and 10 seconds

KP: On the homosexual thing, that is all I know. I remember one little rumor about John and Quinton.

NM: Yes, John Dunn and Quinton Baker

KP: Yeah. Well yeah maybe, maybe not. And pretty much dismissed it and did not pay any attention to it.

NM: How were- - did you ever hear any discussions about homosexuality either like between the girls or around guys? Was it very - - well today its more open...

KP: It is very open today, they didn't talk about it. It was everybody- - this is the way it was in the South then. Just about everybody had some relative- - the term they used was "funny." Everybody had some "funny" relative: it was "funny" uncle or "funny" cousin or "funny" somebody. I had my "funny" cousin too. And they accepted it and everybody new that that person was gay. The church new it, everybody new it. And they all sort of walked around it. And they didn't talk about. And they did not question what that person did in their private life or who they hung out with. They just kind of stayed out of it. And they accepted, the women in particular, would accept a gay man.

CD 1; 26 minutes and 8 seconds

KP: I know there were a lot of student who were sympathetic but were afraid to be ostracized by their peers and some people sort of ran in between the two. A lot of the campus leaders, they would come over and talk to us over at Harry's Bar and Grill which was the hang out. There were two desegregated restaurants already, just the two though

NM: When you got there in '63?

KP: Yeah. The Carolina Coffee shop and Harry's Bar and Grill and Harry's was kind of the hang out for the Civil Rights folks right next door to the post office there on Franklin. And they would come over there and they would hob-nob with us but they wouldn't get out and demonstrate or anything like that. They were clearly sympathetic

but they had to protect their roles there on campus. And other people just kind of joined in with it and they were others who probably had some kind of feeling about it all but they weren't gonna rock the boat or what ever social situation.

NM: Did you find that this was even among males and females?

KP: Oh yeah, absolutely; males and females. And I think females probably, which is the same thing today, were less likely to be outspoken about this things. Because we were raised and discouraged from being out spoken. That was, you know, people still talk about that today. A lot of women's progress has to do with just getting out and doing things and encouraging them to get out and do things. You don't say women don't study math because that's not what they do or you can't go into this profession or you can't do that because that's not what women do. And of course there was a lot of role things that women do this and they behave this way and men behave another way.

NM: Was that apparent within civil rights organization? Like women only did these things and men only did these tasks?

KP: No, that is where everything changed, because these were people who were different anyways

NM: These were like the radicals..

KP: Yeah some people like to call us radicals or rebels or whatever. We were between the beatniks and the hippies and we didn't quite fit in with either group so nobody was sure what to call us. But it was very equal, very equal, all the civil rights people. The same people that were for blacks' rights were for equal rights for women too. And they were much aware of that long before it ever became an issue in the national consciousness.

NM: Interesting.

KP: And of course we were all- - everybody was on the same footing.

NM: Did you find that is was more males than females within this group of rebels that you call yourself.

KP: Yeah, mainly because it's the same thing, it was just more males there period, twelve to one. And ya know

CD 1; 29 minutes and 55 seconds

NM: I know there was only a handful of black males on this campus, but did most of them fit into this group as well.

KP: No. First of all, most of them, by my memory, were not all that involved with civil rights. Some of them were.

NM: Really!?

KP: Two of them come to mind, only two of them come to my mind right of the top. But I think most of them were not. Now that I understand, because they had two things on them. It was tough enough being black on the campus anyway. To be a black rebel on that campus is really tough. You had enough trying to go to class, make your grades and survive. And I think black men at that time were brought up with a lot of protective mechanisms and rightly so. Because they were threatened more than any black women was. Black women were considered to be pretty non threatening, but black males wasn't. So they had a lot to deal with. I don't blame or fault anyone of them for that. I don't fault some of the whites or a couple of my friends who I knew where there sympathies were. I mean they were absolutely with me. They didn't go to jail. Everybody is not cut out for

that. You got to have a certain mind set for that and say 'I will voluntarily go and sit in a jail cell when I could be doing something else.

CD 1; 32 minutes and 53 seconds

NM: Can you give me examples of, specific civil rights groups that you were involved with?

KP: No. I wasn't affiliated with one particular group. There were, at the time, groups that were functioning around there. There was CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), ADA (Americans for Democratic Action), and SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee) that was Stokely Carmichael's group. There were couple other groups, I can't remember all the initials that were sort of messing around in the civil rights thing at the time. There were several that were functioning. And some of them had chapters of representatives down on campus or sat people down to absorb the Chapel Hill civil rights thing.

CD: 1 42 minutes and 08 seconds

KP: I was talking to Quinton Baker about we had been asked the same questions so many times your kind of sick of it. And yet you realize how important it is to answer the questions. Because how else would anybody else know anything about it if you don't tell them.

NM: Do you feel like your answers change?

KP: No. Same answers. I think I have been asked about it so much this year that I have probably gotten more articulate about it in terms of expressing it. I said it yesterday,

that I stumbled in a particular time in history. I just happened to be there when something happened.

CD: 1 50 minutes and 19 seconds

KP: Since I last saw you something interesting happened to me. I went down to the library to see that exhibit. I had not seen it before.

NM: Oh in Wilson library?

KP: Yeah And I am standing there and everything is cool. I get past my diary and stuff and finally I get to these letters from some rabbit segregation, ignorant, hate-spewing jerks to be polite. [pause] And I went through the same emotional stuff that i was going through that day. It just brought it all out of me.

NM: Can you explain?

KP: Yeah, one of them said, one of the benign ones said that it was nothing, basically with the contention that all of these negroes were happy until all of these outside agitators came it and started stirring them up. And one letter said that they read all of these people were paid three hundred dollars a piece to go out and demonstrate. Yeah right! If we had three hundred dollars a piece we would be all out spending it instead of demonstrating. I mean I lived on twenty bucks a month back then. And then another was, and one that really got me was something like 'don't give these people any rights, they are just going to go and rape our women,' something to that effect. And oh boy, blood is boiling by this point. And then I moved over and there were the lyrics to the freedom songs that we use to sing that were based on spirituals. By that time, I was crying. And I was really surprise that it had brought up that kind of emotion. And I realize I am crying in the

library and I really wanted to sit down and ball, I wanted to just let it all hang out. And I decided it's not nice in the library. And I really had to just wipe off those tears and just keep going but that just shook me to the core. I was surprised; it brought back forty two years ago just like yesterday.

NM: Oh wow.

KP: And I had been suppressing that. And I had suppressed it on purpose. That was just to be able to get along with society. You can't stay angry and function well. Angry takes up too much energy. See you got remove your self from that. You can't play victim; that is not going to get you anywhere. And you realize that most of the rest of the world doesn't give a damn about you in Chapel Hill.

CD 1; one hour and 20 minutes

NM: Do you consider this time in your life painful?

KP: Of course, Jim Crow, segregation—hell yes! I hate to go back to those emotions. See, I am cracking up a little bit now, [crying slowly] I hate to go back to those emotions. It still hurt and it still makes me angry.

CD 2; one hour and 21 minutes, 30 seconds

NM: There were so many great topics Ms. Parker, I am sure we could, well I mean I know I could stay here and talk forever and be completely interested at everything you have to say. But just of course keeping with topics that we brought up with gender, homosexuality, activism and so forth, is there anything else that you would like to say that you forgot to mention?

KP: No. I just tell kids today- - I made a statement yesterday that people, young black people that segregate themselves and limit themselves—people got killed, they got beating up so you can go anywhere you want to go, anywhere you had the means and the money to get there. And when you limit yourself, your doing them a real disservice. Final statement.