

SOHP Series: Listening for a Change
Davidson College Interviews - Lincolnton

NOTES - RUDOLPH YOUNG

Interviewee: Rudolph Young

Interviewers: Mark Jones, Reid McGlamery

Date: 15 March 1999

Location: Lincolnton, N.C.

Tape No.: (cassette 1 of 1)
(90 minutes)

Notes: Mr. Young is a local historian who grew up in Lincoln County.

He was a standout football player and track athlete at the black high school in Lincolnton, Newbold High School. After graduating from Newbold, Mr. Young attended Johnson C. Smith University for a year before entering the military. Mr. Young is African American.

Lincolnton is the county seat for Lincoln County, North Carolina. Lincoln County is primarily a rural area.

The interview took place at 3:00 PM at the Lincolnton Library in Lincolnton. My partner, Reid, and I drove over together and discussed the interview. Our previous meeting with Mr. Young had been very encouraging. I had prepared the questions and hoped to discuss a number of topics including the prevalence of informal athletic competitions between whites and blacks, the amount of press coverage given to white and black athletes by the local paper, and the response of the white community to Mr. Young's athletic success.

I met Mr. Young in the front of the library. I addressed him initially as Rudolph. I regret doing this for I think now a more formal approach would have been more appropriate. Mr. Young accompanied Reid and me into the library's history room and we began to set up the recorder while making small talk. Mr. Young asked us where we were from, originally. When Reid said Dallas, Texas, Mr. Young said, 'Oh, I hate people from Dallas,' and then

proceeded to tell how he had reached this opinion while serving in the military in Texas. This caught Reid and myself off guard.

When we were ready to start Mr. Young asked what direction the interview was going to go. I offered to show him my questions. He took the sheet and studied it intently for three or four minutes. Afterwards we started the interview. From the beginning, it did not appear that Mr. Young wanted to open up very much. Often, his answers were very short. This, combined with our strange discussion during the pre-interview made me feel uneasy and made me a bit hesitant to push too hard. We talked for about forty five minutes and then I turned the recorder off as I had extinguished my questions and he said that he didn't have anything else to say. He then told us how he was working on a book about black soldiers in the Confederate army during the Civil War. I asked whether these soldiers were forced into military service for the Confederacy. This question set off further discussion. Mr. Young was very critical of my question, perhaps rightly so. His response made me feel very uncomfortable. Eventually, I directed him back to the subject of his school experiences and then we turned the recorder back on. His comments thereafter centered primarily around the ills of school athletics in today's society.

Despite the difficulties of the interview, Mr. Young offered a number of interesting insights into sports and race relations.

NOTES

[Cassette 1 of 1, Side A]

Question about where parents are from. Says that his father was from Catawba County and his mother was from Cleveland County. They were married during the depression and moved to western Lincoln County shortly thereafter. This was a farming area. After a few years in the western part of the county, they moved to the Poplar Springs community in the center of Lincoln County. Then, the family moved to the Iron Station community where they purchased a farm.

Question about number of siblings. Says that there were originally eleven siblings, including two sets of twins. He was a twin himself. Six of the children are still alive today.

Question about when the family decided to move north (based on a previous discussion). Says that mother and father never moved north but his older sisters did after high school: "Because of the job situation, as my sisters that were nearer to me graduated from high school, they went north to find work. . . because they weren't really any jobs for black students leaving school. So, a lot of them went north to find work. Those who remained here ended up working in agriculture or domestic." Says that his older brother also had gone to Connecticut. His parents sent him with the older siblings because they felt that there were better educational opportunities in the North.

Question about where he lived up north and whether he attended a public or private school. He lived in Middletown, Conn. and attended a public school.

Question about relations between whites and blacks in Middletown, CT. Says that there was not too much friction between the races but there was a lot of "subtle racism." He cites segregated communities and separate clubs as examples.

Question about whether schools were segregated. Says that schools were integrated.

Question about whether all facets of the school were integrated, including sports. Says that the whole school was integrated. He played football and participated in track.

Question about whether white and black athletes interacted in a social context. Says that there was no interaction.

"No, I went to practice, I played on the team but there was no interaction between the students and the athletes, or between the athletes and the team members other than on the practice field or football field. When practice was over, I went back to the black community and I stayed there until I went to school the next day. There was no interaction."

Question about race of the coaches. The coaches were white. Very few blacks attended Middletown High School. Many of those who did came from the rural South, especially, eastern North Carolina.

Question about discrimination on athletic teams. Says that he did not notice any discrimination and that participation in sports was usually based on ability.

Question about description of Newbold High School. Newbold had the most modern physical plant in the county (built 1952). There were about 500 students in the school- grades 1-12. Mr. Young's graduating class had 39 students.

Question about whether Newbold received fair funding and supplies in comparison to white schools.

"Absolutely not, and there was some discrimination as far as equal facilities. Our science lab was not up to date. . . did not have most of the equipment. The books. . . we did not receive new books. Our books were books that were discarded or discontinued at the white high school. We did not have an activity bus. The black students and the parents purchased their own activity bus. There were a lot of things - we did not have weight rooms. We had a gym. But, as I said, it was a modern physical plant but it was a shell as far as equipment and facilities inside the school."

Question about uniforms for athletic teams. Said that most of the uniforms were hand-me-down uniforms or used uniforms and did not have the school colors on them.

Question about what sports he played. Football and track.

Question about whether there was equal press coverage given to whites and blacks. Says, "Of course not." He noticed that sports at the white high schools were covered by a sportswriter while sports at Newbold were usually covered by a student reporter.

Question about whether there was any movement for more equal coverage in the press. "No. It was the attitude of the black people of that time that to be included in the newspaper at all was a privilege and they did not pursue that."

Question about whether he had contact with whites in high school. Very little.

Question about what community he lived in after moving back. Says Iron Station, in Mount Vernon.

Question about whether there was informal athletic competition between whites and blacks. "There was no contact with whites with regard to sports. Our community every now and then would pick up a football game between communities. But I don't ever remember that happening but once or twice."

Question about how those informal games which did occur were organized. Says that they were very informal - people just showed up and played. "It showed the disparity. I remember we played a white team from my community of Mount Vernon and we played a white team also from Iron Station. These were kids from school. We played football. They showed up in their uniforms from high school, high school and elementary school, and we didn't have any."

Question about the environment of such games - out to prove anything, racial tension, etc. Says that the black athletes were not out to prove anything. "They were better coached and better equipment. We were just out classed. And I don't think the equipment made the difference. . . We didn't get hurt or anything like that. They were just a better team. There's no other way to look at it. We got beat." Says that the games were just something organized amongst kids. There were no adults involved.

Question about whether the difference in the game was coaching. Says no. Attributes it more to the fact that the white kids were better organized and had played organized sports growing up in school. Blacks did not have the opportunity to play sports in school at a young age.

Question about site of the game. In a field in the white community.

Question about whether the game was a big event. Says no. There were no spectators. "Black kids and white kids occasionally came together and played together. But I don't think it was any big event. It's something that I remember happening when I was in school."

Question about athletic career at Newbold High School. Played football for two years, starring as an offensive fullback and defensive tackle. Participated in track and field for three years.

Question about response of white community to his athletic success. Says that there was no response.

Question about response of black community to his athletic success. Says that he received general support from parents and community.

Question about whether white athletes' achievements were used as measuring sticks for blacks. Says, "Most people want to know how good they are. . ." Continues, "Track and field reported times and distances in the newspaper and you could compare your time and distance with those. And, overall, it showed that even though we were a much smaller school, we had better times and distances even though we were disadvantaged as far as equipment and this sort of thing. And the distance that I related was that this guy had thrown the shot put and he had set the school record at his school- Lincolnton High School, and I could throw at least five feet further."

Question about what coach did (based on previous discussion). "He [the coach] had seen the distance in the paper and then when I went to practice he had a flag on the field and he said, 'That's how far John Dellinger can throw it,' and my reaction was, 'Who is the hell in John Dellinger?' I thought, you know, maybe he was an Olympic athlete or something. Then, I find out how was a student at Lincolnton High School whom I'd never met and didn't know and never heard of until that point."

Question about whether he wanted to compete against whites. Says, "No, I did not. That's something that never entered my [mind]."

Question about whether there were any other cases of when achievements of whites were used as measuring sticks. Says no.

"Based on the records that I saw, I was the best in the state, black or white."

Question about whether he paid attention to achievements of white athletes. "I don't remember anybody being really interested in what was going on in athletics at Lincolnton High School."

Question about whether there were any white spectators at Newbold games. Says that there were a few but that he didn't know who they were.

Question about race of the referees. Says that they were black.

Question about college recruiters. Says that at that time, blacks were not going to the big schools and that the only recruiters at the black school's games were from black colleges. Remarks how this is very different from today.

Question whether he has any other specific stories. Says that there was no interaction between white and black communities/schools. Says that he went to Johnson C. Smith University for one year and then into the military.

Question about whether segregated society was reflected in the military. Says that it was not a problem. "I met white people in the military from Lincolnton that I met in the military but we had no opportunity to meet while we were in Lincolnton."

Question about prevalence of interracial friendships in the military. Says that these normally did not develop. Describes the relationship between whites and blacks as being a close association but not a friendship.

Question about whether he has any children of his own. One son, 25 years old.

Question about how racial relations changed between his time in high school and integration. Says that he saw a great contrast between the environment that he grew up in and the environment that he came back to after eleven years in the military.

"Particularly in the day-to-day contact. I noticed the day-to-day contact with white people. For example. Going to a store and someone saying, 'Sir, may I help you?' or, 'M'am, may I help you?' Does not seem to be very much. I mean, if you were working in a store, you would be polite to customers but, before it was never. Never relate to a black person as sir or mister. That was one."

He makes other reflections on the period. He talks about discriminatory laws and customs regarding sale of clothes, homes and food (in restaurants).

"Teacher said, 'you have to pay to be insulted.' . . . Even today I don't frequent those places (restaurants who used to make blacks eat in the back)."

Question about members of KKK or other similar groups in positions of power. Says, "Those groups have always been in Lincoln County."

Question going back to informal football game discussed earlier. Says that he doesn't know who organized it. There was great variation of age on both teams. He did not notice any racial tensions.

"I knew some of the people that were on the other team, but we went to other schools. Other than seeing them and knowing where they lived and that."

Question any thing else he wanted to say. No.

Question anyone else that we could talk to. Mentions Leroy Magness.

[End Tape 1, Side A. Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Question about lessons taught by black teachers (not on tape- resulted from discussion after recorder was turned off before).

"Black teachers and our parents were not occupied everyday with telling us or complaining about the segregated system or what white people were doing to them. The primary thing about black teachers at that particular time was education. Educating us. And one thing about our parents - since we were small, we were taught how to get along with each other and how to get along in the society at large. And how do you get to where you want to be."

Says that after integration, whites in charge of the schools fired the blacks and hired whites. Then, they went back and filled in the holes with blacks.

"I was led to believe when I was in school that we were behind as far as education. But when I went into the military where I was competing directly with other whites, I found that was not the case."

Says that something was lost in integration. Black students lost black teachers and administrators who lived in the community and knew students and parents. Black teachers had high expectations for black students. Mentions that blacks also lost the opportunity to participate in some activities- cites cheerleading.

Says that standards have been lowered over the years (to the present) for students and especially black student athletes.

Talks about the ills of big time athletics, saying that too many colleges are in the market of producing athletes rather than educated persons.

Mentions sports system in England. Club teams rather than school teams.

End of Interview.