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### Derryle Peace, Oral History Index

Derryle Peace

Shannon Carter

James Conrad

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Interviewee: Derryle Peace  
Interviewer: Jim Conrad and Shannon Carter  
Location: Alumni Building Texas A&M University- Commerce, Commerce, TX  
Date Recorded: January 6, 2010  
Duration: 1:22:54  
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Indexed by: Daniel Skinner  
Date Indexed: September 16, 2017

Summary:

In this interview, Derryle Peace discusses his time growing up in North Dallas. He discusses his neighborhood and educational experiences in the 1960's. He discusses how his school had done an excellent job of preparing the students for desegregation in the school system. He discusses the community being a huge part of everyday life and being raised in a village type environment. He then begins briefly discussing his time at ETSU

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- 0:00-01:27 CONRAD: We usually like to start where and when were you born?
- 01:28-03:22 He grew up in Dallas TX. There were two different names for the community one being North Park and the other being Ellum Thicket. It was near Dallas Love Field and he recalls planes flying over the house. The neighborhood was all black until the 1960's.
- 03:23-03:25 CONRAD: Tell us a little about your father
- 03:26-05:00 He did not grow up with his father and his mother died when he was very young so his grandparents raised him and his brother. Both of his grandparents had only elementary school educations. His grandfather was born on an Indian reservation (Chickasaw Nation). He does not look at the story of being raised by his grandparents as a negative one but instead looks at it as a positive experience. He was raised in a stable environment and the community helped raise everyone as they were involved in things such as church and boy scouts.
- 05:01-05:14 PEACE: I grew up in a home that was always firm, fair, and consistent so that is my upbringing. The friends that I grew up with are still some of my best friends because we went to elementary junior high and high school together
- 05:15-05:17 CARTER: What was your home church?

- 05:18-07:47 Betheny Baptist Church in Dallas TX. He grew up only four houses down from the church and attended every Sunday at least. He went to evening service on Sunday nights. He tells a story about never seeing the Wizard of Oz until he was an adult. As a child the movie would always begin on television on Sunday afternoon but he would have to miss the ending every time to go to church. His grandparents had a strict moral upbringing and in many ways he believes it sheltered him about the world until he was an adult.
- 07:48-07:50 CONRAD: What did your grandfather do for a living
- 07:51-08:43 He was a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none. He worked all kind of construction and was a foreman at one time. He recalls his grandfather being handy around the house and able to fix anything
- 08:44-08:46 CARTER: What brought them to Dallas?
- 08:47-10:54 He relays a story about his grandparents being sharecroppers in Grand Prairie. The owner of the farm made a pass at his grandmother and his grandfather hit him so they fled to Dallas. After that the church became the center of their lives. He says that the church served as a community center for sports boy scouts etc.
- 10:55 -11:06 CARTER: When I guess black activism started sweeping into Dallas did it serve as a center for that as well, voting drives and such?
- 11:07-17:50 The church was not that place due to a variety of reasons. One being the minister that taught there probably would not have allowed it. He readily admits that he was young at the time and those type of meetings could have been taking place without his knowledge. His community just did not have that much activism. He goes on to name several different prominent African American business owners who lived in his neighborhood. His community was largely insulated from the outside world as there was a laundromat, barbershop, cobbler, drugstore etc. so there was little need to go anywhere else. The community was largely self sufficient
- 17:51-17:53 CARTER: What kind of disruptions and I don't know if I should use that word but I don't know what else to say might integration have caused.
- 17:54-22:19 The teachers that he grew up with were a tremendous influence in his life. In elementary school they were advanced. Their teachers stressed the fact that the school system would be integrated and they must be prepared so he always felt prepared academically for integration. The first year he ever

had to leave his neighborhood to go to school was in the eighth grade. He had to take the bus to Booker T Washington. It was the first time being exposed to turf and he and his friends had to take precautions not to get robbed. In his one year of doing this he would pass two schools on the bus ride that he could not attend.

22:20-22:22 CARTER: Did you think how stupid? Was there anger?

22:23-32:26 Slightly but it was short lived. He was a young man and it was only for a year as the next year he was able to attend the school he wanted T.J. Rusk. Booker T. Washington had hand me down books, science equipment etc. He talks about how he and his friends had different experiences than others due to their neighborhood and had already been exposed to integration through such things as the boy scouts so they were more prepared. Rusk was an excellent school but he did challenge authority and question things which got him in trouble occasionally. For instance his senior year in English he complained so much about the class being assigned books by white European authors that he worked out a deal with his teacher where he could write on the authors that he wanted to.

32:27-32:30 CONRAD: So you were basically establishing African American literary cannon at this time in this school did other people black students follow your way? Were they reading these authors? Had they heard of them?

32:31-33:45 PEACE: Yeah we had to read the same thing. I grew up, this is interesting. The Same group of kids I started with in the first grade I went to that same, I was with that same group of kids through the seventh grade and so what I knew they knew. We all, we tell this story our seventh grade English teacher, we all diagrammed the sentence the same way Mrs. Robinson, some one went to the board she said "that's not right someone else go up" the other person the next person did it the same way and she said "how many of you did it that way?" Every single person did it. What it did, what it confirmed was we all knew the same thing. We all read the same stuff, now to varying degrees we read the same kind of things. We had the same teachers. Some of us were more driven than others but I started the first grade with nine boys I finished the seventh grade with the same nine boys.

33:46-34:06 CARTER: So you graduate from high school and you decide, to come to a rural area of east Texas kind of well we've been known for some racism in fact that sign in Greenville is still up when you come in isn't it or no is it down Blackest Soil Whitest People? So you come anyway?

34:07-44:04 His personal philosophy was that he was not going to live in an all-black world so he was not afraid of racists. His personal philosophy on racism was to be opposed to individuals who were racists not to hold it against everyone else. His basketball

coach in high school was an ETSU alum and persuaded him to give the school a chance. He also was able to read the East Texan at the public library. He had respect for his coach so came to Commerce to try out for basketball team. He was not offered a scholarship but still decided to attend because it felt like home even though it was in a rural area and he knew nothing about the city of Commerce and had only stayed on campus for the weekend. School was the only option for him as he was opposed to the Vietnam War.

44:05-44:15 CONRAD: So what impact did the civil rights movement have on you that was going on in the sixties?

44:16- 49:54 He again relays that his personal philosophy was to hate the individual racists not all anglos. Some within the movement were angry at everyone and he did not want to be that. He wanted to reserve his anger for individuals that would disrespect him. While he was not radical, he more closely identified with Malcom X than MLK in that he would not turn the other cheek but an individual had to wrong him first to draw his anger

49:55- 50::02 CONRAD: Was there a sense among the blacks that things were getting better? or worse during the sixties and seventies?

50:03- 50::19 PEACE: Other than the schools desegregating the black community went Backward

50:20- 52::58 Peace talks about some of the problems within the African American Was caused by the loss of the village or loss of community and how kids today have grown up in a whole different world and know nothing but desegregation he even brings up that you have members of fraternities that used to be all white with members like Kappa Alpha in particular here on campus with African American members now

52:59-53:13 CARTER: There was an incident we heard about in the early seventies between the Kappa Alphas and the black fraternities were you aware of this or do you remember anything about this?

50:20- 55::03 Peace says that he was not there during that time as he was in 1975 and He does not recall the incident they are talking about they then break

55:04- 55:15 CONRAD: I'm interested in this disintegration of the village what were some of factors that contributed to the decline?

55:16- 58:46 He refers to how it is all about mobility and how you used to know all of neighbors and everyone shared the same values but people moved away to give what they thought was a better life to their children, black flight, and they younger people were not tied to the community

58:47- 59:01 PEACE: People's desire to live in a desegregated environment is what pretty much, not really disintegrated but the village moved away.

59:02-59:16 CARTER: When you come to Commerce, East Texas State when did you become aware of the Norse community?

59:17- 1:04:14 He talks about being assigned to the dorms with all other black kids which angered him because the administration assumed they would be alike when they were not but he did ask where the church was so he did end up going to church in the Norse community. He did see that the roads were unpaved and there was not plumbing but he did not think of it as a race issue. He was from the city and just thought they were rural. Everyone used to call it the hole but eventually they stopped because it was degrading and everyone referred to it as Norse Community. Eventually there was a movement in the community to get the money to pay for roads and fix the community but he was not involved in any of that and concentrated on being a student on campus.

1:04:15- 1:04:25 CARTER: There was somethings happening I understand Talbot had a program putting white students with black students in the dorms I think?

1:04:26-1:07:10 He talks about being a part of the program and him doing for the experience and something to do but not getting a great deal out of it. He doesn't recall the white student he was paired with and there was not really follow up. He said it could have benefitted others but in some classes he was the only black person so he was used to being the only minority anyway.

1:07:11-1:07:14 CONRAD: What about Dr. Talbot what kind of impression did you have?

1:07:15-1:11:52 He was a great man he was a mentor and father figure to all, not just black students. He was the only one except for Dr. Brewer as well. He took classes under both of them. It is because of the role they played he tries to do the same for students today always available and encouraging them

1:11:53-1:11:55 CONRAD: What kind of interaction did you have with Ivory Moore?

1:11:56-1:12:43 He begins to talk about Moore and then talks about how there was a racial Incident in Commerce with a man they later found out was a constable

1:12:44-1:13:23 PEACE: Slapped my roommate slapped me threatened us with his gun we after collecting ourselves went to the police found out this guy was a very good friend of the police chief if we did not apologize for what he claimed disrespected him in front of his wife that we were going to jail the guy was in an unmarked car we didn't know who he was he was a guy

1:13:24-1:18:26 He talks about how they wrote letters to the NAACP, the school newspaper and local papers one reporter interviewed them but the story never ran. Mr.

Moore brought them in the office and let them know he had word from the community that the constable was upset and that we were safe on campus but would be in trouble if we left. Moore was younger and more radical than Brewer and Talbot but he encouraged them to stay on campus for a while which was fine with them because they rarely left campus anyway the constable was never outed or reprimanded he terrorized all students

1:18:27-1:18:29 CARTER: Did you hear back from NAACP?

1:18:30-1:22:54 The NAACP essentially told them to ignore it and to get their education and leave. Another time he had something like that was when he was in high school and school was closed he was on his way to basketball game and the cops harassed him about a string of burglaries in the area He then cut the interview off because he had to leave.