

Marshall University

Marshall Digital Scholar

0064: Marshall University Oral History
Collection

Digitized Manuscript Collections

1997

Oral History Interview: Stimey (Thomas) Carter

Stimey Thomas Carter

Follow this and additional works at: https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history

Recommended Citation

Marshall University Special Collections, OH64-566, Huntington, WV.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Digitized Manuscript Collections at Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in 0064: Marshall University Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact zhangj@marshall.edu.

RELEASE FORM

Deed of Gift to the Public Domain

I, Stimey (Thomas) Carter, do hereby give to the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University the tape recordings and transcripts of my interview(s) on 7-5-97.

I authorize the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University to use the tapes and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their Oral History Program.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain.

Michelle R. Meadows
(Agent of the Oral History of Appalachia Program)

Stimey (Thomas) Carter
(Donor)

7-5-97
(Date)

Camp Carter

AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH: STIMEY CARTER

CONDUCTED BY: MICHELLE MEADOWS

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JULY 5, 1997

SUBJECT: CAMP WASHINGTON CARVER

INTERVIEW WITH STIMEY CARTER BY: MICHELLE MEADOWS

MM: . . . ask you was when were you born?

SC: December 18, 1933.

MM: Okay. Where did you grow up?

SC: In Montgomery, West Virginia.

MM: Okay.

SC: That's where I was born, also.

MM: Okay. Where do you reside now?

SC: El Paso, Texas.

MM: Okay. And you were a colonel, am I correct?

SC: Right. I was a colonel in the Army. And I was medically retired in 1973. And then I went back to school and completed my masters at the University of Texas, El Paso. And then I moved to New Mexico State University, in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and completed my doctorate in counseling and educational psychology.

MM: That's wonderful. Okay. So, I heard you have children. You have four boys?

SC: Three sons.

MM: Three sons.

SC: One set of twins.

MM: Okay, okay. Do you remember uhm, like the years that you went to Camp

Washington Carver?

SC: Well, I've been thinking about that. And it would have had to have been in 1947. I was about 13 years old.

MM: Okay, okay. Did you go more than once, or did you?

SC: Well....or...Boy State, which was sponsored by the American Legion, at, at uh...we called it the 4-H camp then. (MM: Okay) Okay. It probably was George Washington Carver, but we always referred to it as the 4-H camp. I went there one time for that particular event, which was a week. But we would go often during the summer just to uh, for recreational outing, such as swimming. Because it was the only swimming pool available to uh, blacks--then we were Negroes--the '40's. I've been colored, I've been Negro, black, and now the term's African American. [chuckling] So, I always have to see which era I've gone through. [laughter]

MM: Yes, I know, I know.

SC: So, anyway. But that was the only recreational swimming pool that was really available to our African Americans. And so, we would make the trip up there. For instance, if there was a church picnic or some type of outing, we would drive up there. And it was almost a two-hour drive from Montgomery to get there. But uh, for that specific event, which was Boy's State. That was in 1947 when we stayed up there for a week. It was sponsored by the American Legion. And that was segregated. They had two Boy's States. They had one for blacks, and the white kids had a boy's state. I don't know where they conducted theirs.

MM: So, this was just basically, it was all boys, no girls? You didn't have any activities

for girls?

SC: No co-ed. (MM: No co-ed) Yeah. That was in, that was for the Boy's State. (MM: Okay) And they didn't, and they didn't have an event like that for the females. Okay? And of course, the purpose of the Boy's State, I think it still exists. And I'm sure they have girls there now. [inaudible]...something else. But it was to learn about government. And uh, the time during that week you were organized into various uh, governmental entities all the way from state, you have governor, and then we had county offices and local offices. And uh, we filled those and we organized that way. And we had an election. And uh, it was to teach, you know, about the governing process in the duties of various key-, key governmental entities in the state of West Virginia.

MM: That sounds interesting. It was like civics class, except with hands-on experience. [laughter]

SC: [inaudible]....

MM: And did you uh, did the people that basically went with you, with Boy's State, were they from your area, were they from Montgomery, or were they from all over?

SC: They were from all over the state. It was a state event. Uh, because they're running African Americans just in Montgomery, or any one place to uh, you know, conduct an event like that. And most of the uh, events athletics and so forth, we were sort of a state wide thing. Because that's where the African American schools were. For instance, in Fayette County, we only had two high schools for African Americans. So we had to play[inaudible].... I can remember when I was in high school, we

traveled as far as Fairmont to play, Dunbar High School up there. And we traveled as far as Welch, to play And we went over to Logan to play, and Huntington, Charleston. Because that's where the various African American schools were located. So, that's how we competed. Then we had one state-wide tournament.

MM: Do you-, what was Boy's State? I mean, was it like uh, was there any besides that, was there another sponsor, on how you got to the camp, or was it just Boy's State, or was there a company behind it?

SC: Uh...it was, it was sponsored totally by the American Legion. Okay? (MM:Okay) And so, the lo-, each local American Legion chapter sponsored you know, boys to go. So, because they had chapters at various places. And the only thing that, you know, you took your own toilette articles, and clothing and things like that. But uh, the bedding and the food, [inaudible]....all of that was provided.

MM: Okay. Are there any kind of certain activities at camp you remember, besides learning about the government, and the sports. Is there

SC: Well, the recreational activities again, you know, the big feature was the swimming pool. And it was interesting, it was always in June, and you know in June in West Virginia up in the mountains, it's not always that warm. But we went swimming anyway. [laughing] And uh, of course, softball and some things like. And then we used to do singing, group singing. That was always a thing to various entities. And you know you had a specific table you were assigned to. And and I recall, you know, we always had a little contest like that, people would sing various camp songs, you know. Camp was always about singing songs. [laughing]

MM: Okay. Do you remember...were there anybody that you met at camp, that you stayed friends with, that you kept in contact with over the times, or....?

SC: Uh...yeah, there was, I was rather on the young side for the because we had, even guys who were like seniors, who were graduating, you know, well, they had just graduated, for example. And I did run into some of them when I went to West Virginia State College who [inaudible]....somewhere between being upper classman to seniors. And I ran into them in, at various places. But I didn't form any like life-long friendships that I still continue. But I'll run into somebody and we'll say, "Oh, yeah, we were at Boy's State together." We remember each other. Because it did bring all of the males from the various parts of the state together. So....it formed sort of a social unit.

MM: Which that's what you need. (SC: Mmm-hmm) Okay. Were there anything where there was from the camp, if you can remember, where there were just things for the adults and the kids did not participate in? Do you remember anything like that? Or just the adults and the kids were together all the time?

SC: As far as I knew, as far as I knew. You know, after they put us to bed, lights out, I don't know what happened. [chuckling] (MM: Yeah, you didn't want to know) But there were all males there. There were...the females were, cooks or that type of staff. But all of the counselors were males. And our instructors. I'm sure they were volunteers out of the various [inaudible].... In fact, one of the main people, uh, helped sponsor me to go, a Mr. Barnett, who was at that time, principal of Washington High School in London, West Virginia in Kanawha County. And he was involved in the American Legion, of

course. He also was involved in that local American Legion chapter that sponsored...in those days you didn't have Little League baseball, but you had soccer. And so, it was sort of an on-going thing. It didn't just end at the camp. (MM: Oh, okay) There was another gentleman by the name of Madison [inaudible]...that I'm sure that you're gonna interview. And uh, he was one of the camp counselors, sponsors. And uh, I maintained contact with him throughout the years, because his relationship with West Virginia State College. And I think that he had some relationship with that camp on-going from West Virginia State, because of the agricultural agriculture department of West Virginia State College. But when you interview him, you'll really get some in-depth uh...concepts and uh, views about, you know, that camp, and what it did over the years.

MM: Uhm...let's see.... So basically, you went...when you did go to the camp, it was still segregated. (SC: Oh, yeah) So you didn't go any time when there was a mixture at all.

SC: The only integrated experience I had in the state of West Virginia growing up was when uh, I was a senior at West Virginia State College, my senior year, which was 1954, -55. And they passed the supreme court decision requiring schools to be integrated...in the spring of '54. Well, that fall we had two white students come to West Virginia State College, first two, a boy and a girl. And uh, of course, the rest is history. It's the majority now are white students. But that was the first official integrated experience that I had. The only other integrated experience that I had for various work settings. As a kid, a teenager, I used to get work the county maintenance, school

maintenance, teams that would go around and refurbish the, all the various little one-room schools in the county. And those were always integrated with mostly school kids, and even some teachers. Because in those days, teachers generally had to have a summer job to make it, because they didn't pay 'em year round. So, other than those work experiences, there were no really official integrated experiences like school or social. Not even athletic.

MM: Did, if you didn't go to the camp when it was, before it was not segregated, in your personal opinion, do you think that African American kids, they're missing something by being sent to a camp that's integrated? Or do you think....do you think they're missing anything? Or do you think experiences (SC: You mean now?) yeah, yeah, just like a personal opinion or...just....

SC: Well, I think everything has it's, it's uh, the reality then with segregation, and the reality now integration. So, in that setting, since it was a segregated, since reality was segregated, uh, it was really important that you uh, be able to come in contact with potential role models. And to even understand that even the segregated system, there were African Americans who were achieving and uh, it was kind of interesting. We were pretending to be governor, local sheriff's, judges, and etc.

Although none of these people existed. I tell you, there... And I heard a speech one time about a person that made a comparison. You know in places like in England where they have like parliamentary systems, there's a government in power. Okay, different party in power. But then, the opposition, which is what they called the loyal opposition, they have a shadow government. In other words, they have people in place

to build all of the governmental positions, in case there's a sudden change. They have people ready. In other words, you know, you, parliamentary government you can have an election any time. And uh, if your party wins, you gotta have a prime minister and etc, and etc. and etc. ready to go in. So, he compared the blacks experience is being one like a shadow government, just waiting for the opportunity to step in and do the job. And so, that wasn't what you asked me, but..... (MM: That's okay) But uh, that's kind of where this led me to. So, uh, the reality then was that we weren't gonna, that wasn't available to us at the moment. But we were preparing ourself when the day would come, that we would be able to fill these positions. And I think that's why uh, many African Americans when integration did occur, well, people just stepped right into that. Because we had prepared for it...just where the reality of integration was reality. Now, today, uh, I think that it's important for young black kids to compete against white kids. And you know, that could be the reality in the work place. Some of the things that they may be missing in this, is that I don't know what [inaudible]....

available there who would be specifically interested in them achieving. For example, back in, when I was going to segregated schools, they tended to be very paternalistic. You could, if you appeared you weren't doing your best, somebody would come in and say, "Hey, that's" you know, "let's change this path or call your parents and tell them." It wasn't as easy to goof off. And uh, whereas in the integrated schools, I don't know if since most of the uh, teachers, instructors and etc., tend to be white. Because my kids went through school for years before they ever had a black teacher. And there was not that, all the time there's not that personal interest [inaudible]....sometimes white

teachers making those kind of interventions with black students. So, maybe they lost something there. But that's where your parents had to step in. I don't know that they even do that that well. But they're, with white kids, to tell the truth, they would see you sitting in the back, not really doing much, just kind of getting by enough. If you have a dedicated teacher that [inaudible]...I don't know that that exists. So if you want to say that's a disadvantage. Uh, I guess....another thing. We were pretty-, we were aware of what the challenge was. And uh, you know, we knew, I mean, racism existed officially. It was the law, it was written subtle. We were not shocked if we didn't get a beer. Whereas today's you know, young people sometimes they're shocked [inaudible]...race influenced a negative type situation for them. And the more devastated by it. Instead of you know, okay, that's what it is. Now, I've got to get on with it. So, I think that's part of the realities today.

MM: Okay. Let me see here..... Can you describe the importance of the camp to you?

SC: To me? As an individual at that time, it allowed me to come back to my school. It was sort of an affirmation of maybe I was doing the right thing by trying to study and learn things. Because this whole camp was an affirming kind of situation. You were, you know, everyone there who was selected to come is basically an achiever. Whereas, if you, you know, if you go back just to your own local community, you may be just a few of you struggling to try to do the right thing. And they're more people not doing the right thing and you're [inaudible]..... So, it was affirming, from that standpoint. And I don't know if it had a direct influence just in retrospect now. I know I became a class president when I went to college. I was president of the student

council. I was always involved in activities in schools and situations that I was in, as opposed to this being a follower and whatever. Or a passive.....

MM: I'm gonna ask you this question, but if you, if you can't answer it, that's fine. (SC: Okay) They're wondering about, do you know about maybe the perception of the camp by the outsiders, uh, did it have like a negative uh...let me see how I can phrase this.... Was it looked at upon negatively since it was like...

SC: Oh, you mean when we went there?

MM: Yeah, it was more like, what was the environment like who lived in the community outside the camp? Was it predominantly like uh....

SC: It was total isolation. Because camp was totally isolated. There was no community here. We knew it was so far back....if you wanted to run away, you would probably get lost. [laughing] So, there was a local community surrounding the camp. Now, they're...the way the camp was located, that didn't exist. If it had been like in town, here in Charleston, like they have the job corps, you know, people in the community look at that. No, that didn't exist with that particular situation. Because it was just totally isolated. Because there was not community for you to interact with or quote "disturb" or cause some misperceptions about what was going on. Then it was all male, too. Every-, things [inaudible]...educational at that stage.

MM: Okay. The last thing I wanted to ask you is, is there anything, an event, that kind of sticks out in your mind, like some sort of story that you'd like to share....

SC: When I was there?

MM: Yeah. Just maybe, I don't know....uh...just something that kind of struck you...

SC: I think the, well, one of the funny events is the, I was one of the youngest. But I was elected to sheriff. And this was sort of the joke, okay. But you know, here I am, you know, and if some kid did something, didn't get up on time, or make his bed, you know, we had certain things we had to do. The sheriff was the one that was supposed to enforce the rules. And so....and my being so young, it was always a little chuckle about me being sheriff. But other than that, I think I was pretty much in awe of the older guys, you know. I'm trying to do what they did and learn from that. So, I might have benefitted more than other people, by getting to go that young.

MM: Do you think because you went up and you got your masters and doctorate and everything, do you think that the camp maybe influenced the way you looked at education, and....?

SC: Well, in retrospect, I think that uh, that the camp was, it was part of the system that helped produce me along with the environment in my hometown. Which pushed me and others. But I can remember a lot of people pushing me to, to be an achiever. And I got a lot of reinforcements on that. The same thing in, when I went to high school. And the high school and church were side by side. And so, we had a rather close-knit black community in Montgomery, although we also had a lot of kids who were bussed, bussed into Simmons High School. Of course, that's why I'm here now, for that reunion. But uh, I went to the same building first grade through the twelve grade. So, when you were in the first grade, twelve grade is And everybody....you know, everybody sort of reached back to the pull the person out. So, I had a lot of reinforcement from the community and just getting, being able to be selected to go

there, okay, than somebody thought I was going to this Boy's State. Because it was, sort of a...a selection process, [inaudible]...what they call "the good kids do." So, to be able to go to that and.... And yeah, I'm sure it was part of the Mosaic that uh, helped me to deal with things, college, going into the military. Because when I went into the military, in '55, and the Army was officially integrated by an executive order in 1948, President Truman. But a lot had happened, until the Korean War broke out. And the replacements coming in, there was such a great need [phone ringing in background]

MM: This was an interview conducted by Michelle Meadows with Stimey Carter, at the Simmons High School Reunion on July 5, 1997, at the Marriott in Charleston, West Virginia.

END OF INTERVIEW