

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Wesley Montgomery

COLLECTION: 4700.2571

IDENTIFICATION: Duson, Louisiana native; Conoco worker; Mossville resident

INTERVIEWER: Jamie Digilormo

SERIES: Mossville History Project – Field Interviews

INTERVIEW DATES: August 28, 2015; September 4, 2015

FOCUS DATES: 1940s-1960s

ABSTRACT:

Session I
Tape 4513

Born Duson, Louisiana, October 4, 1934; moved to Mossville with older brother at age fourteen in about 1948; came from family with sixteen children; father was faith healer, treater; summoned by father to Los Angeles, where father promised to pass his healing gift to Wesley; Wesley very much wanted to be a treater; father died without passing his gift; brother Walter said Wesley didn't receive gift because he had too many women; Wesley describes his positive physical attributes, especially his hair; racial mixture of family; women desired Wesley since he was very young; impregnated girl when he was fifteen, avoided marriage by relocating to California; when friend in California fell sick, they visited a female faith healer together; she urged Wesley to bring friend back to Louisiana for his father to treat; healer told him he had sired a baby boy; Wesley took his friend home for treatment; impregnated another girl, who bore a female baby; had one year of school, is illiterate; quit school to work in sweet potato field in Scott, Louisiana; cut sugar cane in New Iberia with much older men; woman related to his mother who took him in to live in her house; worked with brother peeling telephone poles in Mossville; only about 25 people in Mossville when he moved there around 1948; Wesley's wife blamed for causing traffic accident because she was black; seeking justice for wife, he met assistant district attorney Frank Salter, who became important political connection; Wesley's political influence; urged Edwin Edwards to run for governor; admires that Edwards procreated in his old age; sperm never die, while eggs expire at age forty-five; Verna Day, nurse at Conoco who had a baby with much younger man when she was in her forties; Day had breast cancer; story of Day climbing a ladder in a dress; grocery store in Mossville; love story with young girl; girl lovesick when Wesley returned to Duson to pick cotton; "them girls was coming from every angle and I couldn't run"; opened a nightclub in Mossville when he was seventeen; girls fought over him; man who asked him to please stop exciting the girl he hoped to marry; first black person hired by Conoco on permanent status in ten years; worked at Conoco for twenty-four

years; negotiating with Sasol during buyout.

Session II

Tape 4514

Faith healing gift of father and grandfather; father made three annual visits to Los Angeles to treat people; father treated people in Houston; story of being summoned by father and offered his healing gift; father died while in Los Angeles, Wesley wasn't there; description of grandparents who were farmers; limited employment options of black people in those days; enormous wake for father; whole family was Catholic; learning to speak French so he could answer questions of father's patients; Wesley didn't get gift of healing because he had too many women; girls flew from across country to make love with him; his fondness for negligees; depletion of trying to satisfy wife and two girlfriends every day for a month; women and liquor stunted his potential; had five children by wife, five by five other women; white coworker at Conoco who desired him; during Vietnam War, draft board said he had the highest IQ they'd ever seen, but he was illiterate so they didn't need his services; Conoco was desperate to hire him; job duties at Conoco; reluctance to get physical from Conoco doctor; integration of Conoco plant due to John F. and Bobby Kennedy; reluctant union response to integration; manager and other white people helped Wesley cheat on literacy test so he could get promotion at plant; black workers envious of his promotion; due to Kennedy's influence, literacy tutors hired for black workers at Conoco; Wesley avoided tutoring and maintained his illiteracy; retired from Conoco at age forty-four to go into business; contaminated water in Mossville's shallow wells led to at least four child fatalities in 1960s; Governor Edwin Edwards helped them raise money for water program; Wesley and his brother had deep wells, shared their water with neighbors; a man's sperm lives forever, but women's eggs expire at forty-five; water contaminated by dead snakes and frogs; President Johnson helped them raise money for water program; Wesley worked closely with Governor Edwards on water program; people of Mossville raised \$100,000 for project; Republicans don't care about poor people, black or white; opinion of Donald Trump; Barack Obama's success in voter registration; opinion of Hillary and Bill Clinton.

TAPES: 2 (T4513, T4514)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 20 minutes

Tape 4513 (Session I) 57 minutes

Tape 4514 (Session II) 1 hour, 23 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 122 pages

Tape 4513 (Session I) 51 pages

Tape 4514 (Session II) 71 pages

PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER: Three photographs taken during interview with Montgomery at his home in Lake Charles. Photographer Chelsea Arseneault.

OTHER MATERIALS: Biographical data form; Interview questions (2 pgs); Correspondence

RESTRICTIONS: none