

**Out of the Shadows: Informal Segregation in Warren, Ohio, 1954-1964.**

Kenneth J. Bindas

*Kent State University – Trumbull*

&

Molly Merryman

*Kent State University – Trumbull*

Former educator and long-time Warren-area resident Cliff Johnson looked relaxed and comfortable sitting for his interview. When asked what he remembered best about the 1950s and early 1960s in the small northeast Ohio city of Warren, he talked about the separateness that permeated his world and his discomfort with this invisibility: “I personally would rather have someone call me a bunch of dirty names and at least acknowledge me as a person than to act as if I wasn’t even there.” Being invisible for Johnson was “probably the worst thing to ever do to a human being.”<sup>1</sup>

Historians studying the United States after 1945 have begun to investigate the effect and pervasiveness of the Civil Rights movement on a local, less visible level. How did ordinary Americans, particularly outside the South, act and react to the social and legal revolutions that swept the country through 1965? The people from Warren, Ohio, offer an interesting case study through which we can begin to provide insight into the complexities of this question. While many of the area’s white residents would

agree with their neighbor Delores Capan that “there was no problem here,” the recollected experiences of many African Americans assembled as part of this oral history project suggest otherwise. Not only do these reminiscences reveal a division over how Warren residents recalled their collective past, they also point toward how these perceptions affected everyday life and policing of this community. Perhaps most significantly, the fact that the white majority believed the racial situation was not problematic suggests the very temper of the invisibility African Americans faced and suggests a larger collective meaning of the Civil Rights era on the city level.<sup>2</sup>

In order to better understand this era and its effects on this local population, in the fall of 2003 we co-taught a course at Kent State University, Trumbull, entitled “Documenting Justice: Civil Rights in Warren, Ohio.” The foundation of the course involved teaching the students the theory and methodology of oral history and then, working with them, interviewing local white and African American residents who were young adults during the period 1954-1964.<sup>3</sup> We chose the period after 1945 because it corresponds with the emergence of the modern Civil Rights movement, many of those who lived through the era were still alive and cogent, and enough time had passed to allow for ‘honest’ responses. Using methodologies outlined by Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, Joan Sanger, Ronald Grele, Michael Frisch, and Paul Thompson, Bindas compiled a list of questions\* in the form of life narrative, supplemented with policing questions developed by Merryman.<sup>4</sup> The responses were added to traditional textual evidence gleaned from the local newspaper, *The Warren Tribune Chronicle*, NAACP and Urban League reports, census data, and appropriate secondary literature. Taken together,

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\* See appendix for life narrative questions

these sources paint a picture of a small northeast Ohio town in the midst of a social transformation. While rarely spoken, the ideals of the Civil Rights Movement – that all people have the inherent right to equality – encouraged both races to examine their community and attempt to reconcile the way things had always operated with the apparent way things were going to operate. Warren residents' recollections and how they frame them provide valuable light into this era and help provide the necessary backlight to understanding the impact of the larger national movement.

A 1947 Urban League/Community League study of African Americans in Warren documented the pervasiveness of *de facto* segregation in the community. The study revealed that blacks lived in the worst sections of the community (the largest was an area called the "flats" near the dump), few owned their homes, and eight of ten of the housing units were deemed substandard. Their children attended neighborhood schools and scored well below the norm in reading and arithmetic. There were few playgrounds and there was a disproportionate arrest percentage both for adult and juvenile crime. Contrary to widely held beliefs, there were few black-owned businesses and few non-entertainment-based businesses in the neighborhood. The black community – much of which was forced to live in areas where authorities allowed brothels to flourish – also suffered from higher rates of infant mortality and unemployment. Those that could find work faced union discrimination and disproportionate representation in the domestic trades in a city with few black city employees, no black firemen, and no black teachers (or even teacher's aides). The report painted a portrait of a small northeast Ohio city mired in *de facto* segregation and a black population made invisible and marginal by the dominant white system. Even the local public swimming pool in Warren tried to prevent black entrance by leasing it

to a community group called the Veterans Swim Club, a membership-only organization that blacks were not allowed to join. Protests by locals ensued, and the NAACP brought suit against the city for this practice, eventually winning and opening the pool to all in 1948.<sup>5</sup>

Looking through *The Warren Tribune Chronicle* underscores the depth of the invisibility of African Americans in the area during the period. While Warren's population continued to grow from 42,837 in 1940 to 63,494 in 1970, and the percentage of African Americans in the city increased from 8.8% of the population in 1950 to about 11% by 1970, the paper contained few stories concerning the issues of this growing minority. There were many other articles covering myriad local issues like roads, zoning, politics, law, business and union activities. Articles featuring local African Americans focused on athletics, churches, criminal activity, or were lumped under a section titled "For Colored Subscribers" during the early part of the 1950s. While the paper usually ran AP reports when looking for stories focusing on national situations like the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, or the passage of the Civil Rights Act, it rarely attempted to discuss these national occurrences against the backdrop of the local racial situation. The editorial page regularly weighed in on other national issues like the Cold War, unions, politics and business, but the only mention of race and its local ramifications came in light of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. In one of the only editorials that tackled the sensitive issue of race, the editors identified the Supreme Court ruling as "historic" and "not surprising," yet ignored Warren's own *de facto* segregation by suggesting that "segregation in the schools of the south will of course be a major change for that section of the country, where it has been the custom for so long." The paper echoed the attitudes of its white

majority, as local resident Wesley Shaffer recalled when asked about his reaction to these events, "I guess they weren't for us . . . you know because around here everything was smooth." In the final analysis, the Warren newspaper, which balanced its pro-business editorial policy against its overwhelming Democratic base readership, neither explored nor ignored the local African American population. Rather, it rarely bothered to delve into the many problems that plagued this community because it did not see the situation as being as problematic as it was in the South. During the early 1960s, the paper ran more stories about the black population, yet continued the earlier trend by ignoring issue related stories and focused instead on human interest or community relations stories.<sup>6</sup>

The oral history interviews reveal the decidedly different ways in which the two racial groups saw their collective past. Most of the white respondents agreed that there were few racial problems in the Warren area and that segregation and racism were southern phenomena. White residents like Alice Surrena remembered that while some people in Warren did not want to drink out of the same water fountain as black residents, it was far different from the south where blacks would have to "step off the sidewalk to let a white person pass." Paul Starnes told his interviewer that down south "they wouldn't [allow blacks to] eat in the same restaurants," and then said without recognizing the contradiction, that he could not "recall ever seeing a black person" in the diners downtown. Betty Sloan did not "remember ever seeing any black men down in Warren."<sup>7</sup>

For most white residents the city's black population was simply out of sight and mind – people who accepted their situation without complaint. For example, Ruth Johnson told her interviewer that the reason no blacks worked on the railroad was

because she didn't "think any of the black people cared to work for the railroad." Emma Buckner's understanding of the segregated eating establishments in Warren had less to do about race and more about people belonging to different "social clubs." The responses from these white informants suggest that the Warren newspaper was just a part of the general societal tendency toward marginalization and invisibility of the black population. Mary Homlitas, reflecting on her lack of knowledge about the issue of race, defensively told her grandson interviewer "we did what we were told to do, lived according to the law. That was it." But others, like Merrill Hall, realized that the city was segregated culturally and financially, as "black people knew where they would be unwelcome."<sup>8</sup>

For the African Americans interviewed, there was no doubt as to the flagrancy of Warren's racism. Olive Reese loved to go to the movies and there were three theaters in the downtown area; but in each, blacks were only allowed to "sit upstairs." Morris Hill, who in 1966 became one of the few black police officers in Warren, recalled that the segregation was done in a way that "hid it more than anything." "They tried to keep the segregation out of the eye of the public, but you could feel it and you could see it" if you were black, he said. Frederick Harris placed the pervasiveness African American invisibility in Warren into the larger context, explaining, "we thought this is the way it was everywhere – this is the way it works." But he also saw the contradiction and dehumanization in the system, particularly when recalling how his mother had to go to the basement of the local courthouse to go to the black bathroom. "She was my mother – there was nothing wrong with my mother!"<sup>9</sup>

The African American informants recalled with tremendous detail the ways in which Warren made sure they stayed in their place. JoAnn Turner remembers the

problems associated with buying her first house in Warren during the early 1960s. The first realtor took her and her husband to the worst areas of town and simply told them these were the only houses he would show them. Dejected, they found another agent who sugar-coated the situation better, saying up front that he would show them “the nicest that I have that *you* can buy.” The hurdles in the community were complex. Bertha Barber remembered the difficulty black girls had in securing a job after high school graduation: “white girls that didn’t go to college went to the factories” (which didn’t hire black girls), while “black girls went to the hotels and housecleaning [because] that’s the only thing that we could get.” Education as a means to advancement meant little in Warren, as Muriel Robinson related that after she graduated (in the upper third of her class) she could not even get an interview when the new bank opened in downtown. It hurt her because she knew the “girls – white from her class – who got the job” to be less qualified. Black men also had to settle for low paying jobs. “Packard Electric,” James Johnson told his interviewer, “only hired people from the black community to clean bathrooms and things. They didn’t work in production.” One exception to the occupational limitation was Isnell Rumph. She got a political appointment in the latter part of the 1950s as the Clerk of the City Council, an important position for a black woman at the time. Yet, she still faced the *de facto* invisibility of the region. She recalled that when candidate John F. Kennedy visited Warren in 1960, she posed with him along with the City Council, Mayor, Chief of Police, and other notables. However, when the photograph ran the next day in the Warren newspaper along with the story of the visit, she was “blocked out.” It upset her, but she “held [her] head up and prayed and kept on.”<sup>10</sup>

The African American respondents understood that there were many places they were not welcome. There were no signs prohibiting them, but rather an informal understanding that segregated the city. One of the most obvious places of this *de facto* segregation was the area's restaurants. "No restaurants would let blacks in" to eat, Bertha Barber recalled. They would however employ blacks to "wash dishes, wait tables, or work downstairs in the laundry with the linen." Lou Tabor told his interviewer that becoming a young black adult in Warren in the late 1950s and early 1960s meant recognizing "we could not go to restaurants and be served." After the 1964 Civil Rights Act, though, he and many others began going wherever they wanted to eat, much to the consternation of some local whites. Rosalie Price, a white resident, recalled that eateries "would not let them [blacks] sit with the white people." Annemarie Graziosi worked in a downtown Warren restaurant at the time and when the "first black person came in" to eat around that time, the staff didn't know what to do. After the manager talked with him, they served him dinner but were afraid that "maybe if he came in other whites wouldn't."

Amidst this *de facto* social segregation, the city of Warren hired three black police officers during the civil rights era, including the department's only female officer, Geneva Owens. The city of Warren hired its first black police officer, a man named Walter Rogers, in 1941; and Owens was hired in 1945.<sup>11</sup> After their respective retirements, the two married and lived together until Walter's death. Their careers spanned the civil rights era, and both are considered leaders and legacies among contemporary African American and female officers.

When asked about racial segregation in Warren's restaurants and movie theaters, Geneva Owens said: "I heard about those days, but I don't remember them myself, you

know. . . .They couldn't treat a police officer like that."<sup>12</sup> In this understated sentence, Owens both acknowledged the existence of racial segregation, and its cultural rather than legal basis: as Owens was well-known as a police officer to white business owners and other community members, the informal (i.e. non-legally sanctioned) rules of segregation were not applied to her.

Included among Owens' duties was controlling the city's juvenile population, and in upholding her job, she was perceived by some as being an agent of racial segregation. Frederick Harris, a lifelong Warren resident and public safety director at the time of his interview, remembers her in this way:

We would go to the high school football games – I would stand there and watch in the wintertime. . . . at halftime, the girls would go into the bathroom; well, all the black girls. She [Geneva Owens] would go in there and make them come out. They weren't allowed to go in there, while the white girls could stand in there and get warm. . . . We would ride from the high school and switch buses to go to the east side. Well, we would stand in Kresge's because by the window they had a nice big heater. . . . Well, we wasn't allowed to stand there. And the white kids would laugh at us because we had to stand there like this [crosses arms, pulls head down and shakes] in the cold, waiting on the bus and they were standing in the warm. Now Geneva couldn't tell the white kids anything – see, she was strictly for us. And she enforced it: 'get out, get out, get out – you don't belong here, get out'.<sup>13</sup>

Geneva Owens remembers this aspect of her job differently:

I had nothing to do with them catching the bus. My job was to see that they didn't loiter in the stores.... If you were a school child and were loitering or violating the law, you had to move. It didn't make any difference what color you were... I have never been called or asked ... about segregating anybody.<sup>14</sup>

However, Paula Johnson, an African American Warren resident and a student interviewer, added this observation to subject Geneva Owens during a break from asking questions: "Oh, I remember you policing us—we were afraid of you. Our parents used to say 'straighten up or else Miss Owens will come for you'."<sup>15</sup>

African American interview subjects had complicated views of policing during the civil rights era. On one hand, police officers were regarded with suspicion, as agents of segregation serving a community structure not friendly to the needs and concerns of its African American minority population. On the other hand, respondents spoke with pride about the existence of black police officers and noted that there were not the problems with police brutality "like today" (and a far cry from the blatantly abusive actions of southern white police against black citizens in the same time period).

Warren resident Muriel Robinson recalled:

At that time, there were some black officers on the police, but I don't remember the number. . . they walked up and down the street, and you could always go up and talk to them, you know. You didn't have then . . . police brutality like it is now. Now it may have been, but at that time I was not aware of it. All I knew was to see a policeman was a friendly person in my neighborhood.<sup>16</sup>

"I got sworn in as a policeman on the Warren Police Department in 1964," recounts Morris Hill. He tested so high on the civil service examination that Police Chief Manley English was told to hire him, despite his reluctance to do so. "I overheard him, he said 'I've got my quota of coloreds and I don't want any more'." English refused to interview Hill, so Hill went to the city mayor and safety director, who returned to the police department with Hill. "The mayor and the safety director went

in there and I could hear them at that point when they closed the door. They totally chewed the chief's butt out." After the two left, the chief called Hill into his office.

He [the chief] said, "well, it seems like you got a lot of clout... they told me I have to hire you this week". So at that point in time he told me: "I'll tell you what, to be a policeman with the Warren Police Department, you got to know how to spell". He went and got a college dictionary and he gave me a piece of paper, and he called of a bunch of words out of the dictionary for me to spell. I guess I must have done pretty good. Because when he got finished with me he said "well I can see that you can spell and they told me I got to hire you".<sup>17</sup>

I rode with a senior officer names Walt Rogers. He was one of the – he was *the* first black policeman on the Warren Police Department. They called him 'number one'. It made you feel proud to ride with the man they called 'number one', because he knew everything, and he knew how to train you to be the best police officer you could be, . . . There was only one policewoman on the Warren police department in 1964 – her name was Geneva Owens. And they would not hire any more women, period.<sup>18</sup>

Geneva Owens corroborated Morris Hill's account, while also describing a different kind of discrimination she faced. "It was in the *Warren Tribune* that they were having a competitive test for a police woman. And I read that, and I applied and took the test – the civil service exam – and I passed it. And one day I got a call and said I passed it, and I was going to be the police woman, and I was happy and excited." However, she went on to note that in 1945, ". . . when I started as a police woman with the Warren police department – I did not make the same thing as the policemen. My wages were lower from theirs because I was a female."<sup>19</sup>

Owens noted that over the forty-year span of her career, she faced more opposition and discrimination for being a woman than for being black. She was not

allowed to compete with men for supervisory roles because she was the only policewoman, a category regarded differently from that of police officer. "Who you going to supervise?" was the response she received from the police chief, to remind Geneva of her distinct position as the department's only woman.<sup>20</sup>

"They started out as being a police woman, and I did that until the women's liberation came into effect, and then they made me a police officer. And that made me equal with the men, and that's when my wages were increased to be the same as that of a police officer, and that made me eligible to take the promotional examinations, so that's when I could compete with the sergeant and lieutenant," Geneva added. She retired from the police department in 1984 as a lieutenant.<sup>21</sup>

Both Geneva Owens and Morris Hill indicated throughout their interviews that they believed that African American police officers like themselves, Walter Rogers and a handful of others had an important place in their city, especially to the African-American community. In fact, Morris Hill indicated that it was the lack of African Americans represented in the police department that influenced his decision to become a police officer. "You didn't have very many black policemen on the police force. Every time you had a problem it was a white policeman who come to rescue a black person. And some of them was using force at that point in time and turning the young kids against the police department."<sup>22</sup>

Warren resident Olive Reese noted that because African Americans were not well-represented in the police ranks, she was aware that members of the black community were reluctant to call the police for assistance: "Well, actually, we tried to not be bothered calling them, because sometimes they wouldn't always listen to us. So

sometimes we didn't always call them and we tried to take care of our own situations the best way we could."<sup>23</sup>

One interview subject expressed frustration that the African American police officers, who were in positions of establishment power relative to other blacks, didn't get involved or voice concerns about racial segregation and even racially motivated police violence. Fred Harris remembered,

I could not understand why African American policemen didn't do more to help us, because there were things going on – especially when I was in high school – there were things going on with the police, the way they were abusing us – that I could not understand why an African American policemen didn't step forward and challenge some of these abuses. You know, rolling up those *Life* magazines and *Look* magazines . . . They were thick magazine, and they would roll them up and pop us in the head with them. At the time, the nightsticks – it was legal – they had lead pipes running down the middle of these. And boy, they would whack us in the legs, and it would leave marks – for nothing, for nothing.<sup>24</sup>

Geneva Owens said she had no recollections of racially-motivated police violence. "I never knew nothing about that," she said. But she did remember racism directed toward her in her role as a police officer: "I think it was about the first or second arrest I can recall being called a nigger. But that didn't bother me because I was reared to never accept that name. If you call me a nigger, I just ignore you because I don't consider myself a nigger."<sup>25</sup>

In talking about his fellow black officers, Morris Hill recounted this story: "They were treated with respect by all their fellow police officers, except the first time that James Junior made sergeant. . . . We had this one white police officer – his name was Lenny Bowers. James Junior came out of the office and told Lenny to do something.

And Lenny looked at him and told him 'I don't take no orders from no nigger,' like that. . . . The sergeant just looked at him and didn't say anything."<sup>26</sup>

The officers also noted the power in having a badge. Sometimes the power of the badge shielded African American officers from the effects of segregation and other aspects of racism. While other black Warren residents had to adhere to the unwritten codes of segregation, Geneva Owens noted that police officers were not treated like that, possibly because, in a pattern different from that in the American south, Warren, Ohio didn't have laws like those southern codes commonly known as "Jim Crow laws," that specifically detailed segregation. In Warren, segregation was part of the cultural fabric, mostly enforced informally through social conventions. As a result, Geneva Owens witnessed a change in how whites treated her when they realized she was a police officer. "I always wore plain clothes, but the moment I would show my badge, I got respect."<sup>27</sup>

However, the power of the badge could also be a negative, enforced by racist police officers. "Some policemen get badge happy, and they use their authority to go out there and hurt people – the people that they are sworn to protect," acknowledged Morris Hill.<sup>28</sup> Fred Harris concurred, saying, "When you give a person a badge and a gun, and that badge says you have the power to arrest anybody – it's the only occupation in the United State of America that says you have the right to take a life, to shoot somebody – so it does strange things to you when you have these kinds of powers. It make little guys into big guys when they have a gun and they can legally shoot you." Harris went on to recount specific examples of police brutality and misuse of power directed and him and other African Americans.<sup>29</sup>

Warren residents also provided stories of police officers misapplying the law to uphold segregation or to harass African American citizens perceived as stepping out of “their place.” Interview subjects recounted other examples of police officers enforcing the informal rules of segregation, such as stopping African Americans when they were in neighborhoods that the dominant society believed should be white-only. Fred Harris remembered,

When I was in high school, I worked for that caterer, and I went out there to pick up some knives and forks that we had forgot—out there on Country Club Drive . . . I had a station wagon full of forks and knives, and, catering equipment, and those policemen stopped me and made me get out and spread eagle on the car and they frisked me, and they followed me to Mr. Crady’s house . . . he was having a party. And they took me and made me go back to his house and knock on the door, and those two policemen stood there, and Mr. Crady had to vouch for me, that I was working at that party. And they said ‘okay’ and walked away-- because I had no business being there on Country Club Drive because I was black, you see.<sup>30</sup>

Clifford Johnson, a retired principal and high school basketball coach, recalled this situation occurring after he and his family became the first African Americans to live in a neighborhood near the city’s country club: “The first couple of weeks, when I was jogging, I had a personal police escort to follow me around. And it turned out I did know the police chief, so I called him and I told him ‘what a wonderful town this is – how you protect your joggers’. And obviously he got the message and for some reason I was never followed.”<sup>31</sup>

Even though African Americans perceived that this treatment was wrong, they also perceived that they had little recourse, even if there were no specific “Jim Crow laws” in the Warren city ordinances. For example, Fred Harris recalled that “They let it

be know that we wasn't welcome. And we didn't challenge it because we thought this is the way it is everywhere. This is the way it works. I mean, we didn't necessarily like it, we wasn't stupid, but you have to remember now, this is before the 1964 Civil Rights Act—this was legal.”<sup>32</sup>

The interviews reveal an interesting dichotomy concerning the framing of race. For the black informants, empowerment came from their ability to openly discuss the past in racial terms. This was particularly true as they were imparting their experiences to young white students with little understanding of the pervasiveness of the region's segregation. They used the interview to frame their experience as one that made them a better and stronger person. Muriel Robinson looked directly into the camera and expressively told her interviewer that to document all the instances of prejudice and racism would take far too long. The importance, she said, was understanding that “as a person [this was a journey she] was supposed to travel.” Her experiences made her “aware of who [she] was through the racism and prejudice . . . and it made [her] a wise, knowledgeable person.” From the modern perspective their experiences reflect the general acceptance of African Americans into mainstream society, so there is a pride in the way they frame their responses. Theirs was a difficult journey and as survivors their stories reflect the empowerment and consciousness change to which they were a party. They recall vividly not only specific events, but how these events made them feel and the legacy of that feeling.<sup>33</sup>

As for the white respondents, theirs was a different framing. To talk in the present day about racism and to admit complicity to the system that supported it was difficult. Instead, they chose to frame the situation in the manner described above: namely, that it was not a problem in Warren and that generally everyone got along as

long as they stayed in their place. Given the tumultuous history of Civil Rights in the United States, their understanding and conception of race underwent some alteration. This is not unusual in oral history, as Luisa Passerini's study on Italian fascism suggests. In her interviews, she found that because of the negative view of fascism by those that came after, the informant's ability to discuss the times they lived under fascism fell under two broad categories: those who told their stories without any mention of fascism and those who recalled how it had affected their lives. Both Italian groups had gone through the same period, but chose different ways to recall this shared past.<sup>34</sup>

The white informants for this study followed a similar tack, using denial or social acceptance as the way to better reframe their collective past. The difference between how the two groups recalled the racial experiences – through the eyes of those who experienced the negative effects and therefore were quick to set the record straight and those who did not suffer this discrimination and in many ways benefited with regards to housing, education, and employment and thus were reluctant to discuss their tacit complicity – helps us to better understand how the framing of race has changed since that era. Within the interview itself, Ronald Grele reminds us, the “active participation” of the interviewer, whether through the phrasing of questions, gestures, body movements, even clothing often serve as cues to direct the flow of what he labeled the “conversational narrative.” The interviewer and interviewee share cultural symbols and language and the establishment of this informal relationship help maintain the flow of the interview.<sup>35</sup>

Although white informants discussing race were united racially and (in general) culturally with their white interviewer, an historical separation existed concerning civil

rights. Most of the interviewees were born after the Civil Rights Era and grew up during a time when racially disparaging comments were considered incorrect, mean, and without an exact definition, racist. It had to be difficult for the informant to discuss race openly with their conversational cohort, for it might reveal a less than flattering side of their personal history. Instead, they framed the racial situation with words and phrases that suggested segregation and even violence while denying the totality of the racism that permeated Warren. Phrases like “that’s the way things were,” or “everyone got along and stayed in their place” suggest the division between the lived experience and the recalled experience. While on the surface these phrases were true of the situation, they reveal little of the reality that had to be observable to the informants. But, given the nature of how race and segregation had come to be framed, their ability to talk in more frank terms was impossible. Had the interviews taken place in 1956, 1964, or even 1978, the responses might have revealed more of the ingrained racism present, but would also be mitigated by its historical situation.

Similarly, when the black informants discussed their situations, they did so with a new framing of race that allowed them to be more critical of the past. In this situation, the modern framing of race allowed for them to discuss more freely their feelings about the situation and how the racism affected their daily lives. Society had created an open space for their conversational narrative that had been closed for many years. Had the interviews taken place in the same years mentioned above, certainly the stories would have been framed differently. But in the new century, their stories took on an almost religious evocation, where stories of injustice and ignorance were defeated by courage, truth and a commitment to righteousness. This abstraction of the interview relationship is the most significant, according to Grele, because it reveals not just the historical

recollection, but the “larger community and its history” as each informant and interviewer views it. They expose “hidden levels of discourse” which open up new understandings as to how both groups view their history and their place within it.<sup>36</sup>

“People kill me today,” Norman Smith said as he shook his head. “They really don’t realize the price that we paid for freedom here (in Warren).” In his interview, Fred Harris said: “When I die, I’m no longer here, I’m the last of my group – we was the last group that actually faced legal discrimination, so when we’re no longer here, our children, our grandchildren, they have no idea what we went through. My son doesn’t know – he’s never heard this, ‘cause I’ve never told him.” Muriel Robinson shook her head and somberly stated: “As we tell the world we are a great nation, there is nothing great about being racist, prejudice against a people because of the color of their skin.” The Warren oral history projects revealed how racism and segregation in this northeast Ohio city made black residents invisible within their community. But more importantly, it allowed the community to be witness to these same people coming out from the shadows and perhaps allowed both sides to see their memories as collective and thus open the potential for future histories of this tumultuous era to be written with more attention to the personal and individual participant.<sup>37</sup>

## Appendix

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*Community History Project Drs. Kenneth J. Bindas & Molly Merryman Kent State University -- Trumbull Oral History Permission to Use/Disclaimer*

Please fill in the below information, date, and sign. Please print.

Name of Interviewer

Name of Interviewee

Date of Interview Location of Interview Current Address, Interviewee

Current phone, interviewee

*As a participant in the Warren-area Community History Project I agree to allow the video and audio tapes and transcripts of this interview to be used for research purposes by scholars and students with no restrictions and without legal recourse (if there are restrictions, please line out "no restrictions" and list restrictions on the back).*

Signature

Date

### Section I: Biographical

In this section we want to know basic biographical information to create an accurate historical portrait of your life experience.

- What is your race/ethnicity/gender?
- When and where were you born?
- If not born in Warren, when did you come to the area and why?
- During the period from 1954-1964, generally, where did you live?
- What is the extent of your education?
- What was your main occupation(s) during the era?
- Were you married at this time? When?
- Did you have children? Ages?
- If you attended church at this time, do you recall its name?
- Did you vote in local elections at this time? National ones?

## **Section II: Work and Education**

In this section we want to ask questions that will allow you to elaborate more and begin to paint a more complete picture of the area during the period 1954-1964.

- If you were in school during this period, what school did you attend? (if they were not in school, skip ahead)
- What was school like? Describe a typical day?
- How did you get to school?
- Where was the school located?
- What were the other students like?
- What do you remember about specific classes or teacher?
- Do you recall if your teachers were more female than male, black or white?
- What type of clothes did you wear? What were the fashions?
- What role did sports or other extra curricular activities play?
- What options were known to you upon graduation? College? Trade school? Work? Marriage?
- Were your children in school at the time? If so, where?
- How did you feel about their education?
- How did you dress the kids for school?
- Where were you working at the time? What type of job?
- How did you get the job? Why did you want to work there?
- Did you think your wages were the same as others you worked with?
- Did you work with folks from your neighborhood?
- Did you feel there were opportunities for advancement at your job?
- If you didn't work, what did you do for money?

## **Section III: Home Life**

In this section we want to know what life was like in your house, with your family, and in your neighborhood.

- How many people lived in your house at the time?
- Were you married, divorced, widowed (or live in a home)?
- Generally, how did everyone get along?
- What types of discipline were used when someone broke the rules?

- What types of possessions did you have? A car? Etc?
- Who cooked? What were some of the best meals you recall eating at home?
- If you cooked, do you remember how to make some of the family's favorite meals? Describe.
- What did you normally eat for dinner? Breakfast?
- Where did you do your grocery shopping? Why?
- Where did you go shopping for other necessities like clothes, hardware, gas, etc? Why did you go to these places?
- Did you listen to the radio? What station? What made you choose that station?
- What were some of the songs you recall from the time?
- Did music play an important role in the house? How?
- Was there a TV? Color or black and white/?
- What were the favorite programs you watched? Why?
- What other forms of home entertainment were there?
- If you went to the local parks, what were they like?
- Where might you go for dates or entertainment outside the home?
- Why did you go to these places?
- Were you aware of any restrictions on where you were allowed to shop? Dine? Go for a drink? Work? Live?
- Did you feel that your neighborhood was safe? Why?
- Were the local police accommodating to your needs?
- If you could recall, how did your family view the local law enforcement officers?
- To your knowledge, were there any African-American police officers? Firefighters? Elected officials?
- If there was a need, how did the local authorities treat you, your family, or the folks in your neighborhood?
- Were you or anyone you knew active in local politics? How?
- How do you think the local politicians felt about your needs and desires?
- Within your family, what was the attitude about the local police?
- How did you come to this opinion?

#### **Section IV: Community**

This section seeks to look at Civil Rights activities in the local area and awareness to national activities.

- What types of community activities were you involved in?
- What made you get involved?
- When did you first hear about Martin Luther King Jr.?
- What was your reaction to him and his activities?
- Were you aware of folks in your own community that were involved in similar activities?
- Were you aware of the Montgomery Bus Boycott? How did what occurred there effect the local Warren community?
- Were the busses here in Warren segregated?
- Do you recall the Little Rock, Arkansas crisis? If so, how did you feel about what was going on?
- Were the schools segregated in Warren?
- Do you recall the sit-ins by black students at lunch counters in the South in the early 1960s? If so, were similar things happening in Warren?
- Where/ When? Do you remember who led such demonstrations?
- Were there other Civil rights related demonstrations and activities in Warren before 1964? Where? What type? What was the result?
- Do you recall the March on Washington in 1963 (when MLK gave the "I Have a Dream" speech)?
- Did you know anyone who went?
- Did you hear about other activities like the Freedom Rides, Freedom Summer, or voter registration drives in the South? (If so, let them talk about what they know as long as they like. Ask follow up questions)?
- Did you watch the television reports about the demonstrations in the South?
- How did watching them make you feel?
- Who were some of the local church leaders involved in the Civil Rights struggle here in Warren?
- What activities were they involved in?
- Who were some of the community leaders involved in the Civil Rights struggle here in Warren?
- What activities were they involved in?
- What influence did the NAACP, CORE, the Urban League, or SNCC play in Warren? (then ask follow up questions accordingly)

- Do you remember any specific event or events that sort of define the situation of being black in Warren during this era?
- Did you feel that the role of women within your community was equal to men?
- Among those who were seen as leaders in the African American community, do you recall any women? How did the Democratic or Republican party treat the local African American community?
- What other things about the time period and dealing with Civil Rights would you like to talk about?
- How did you feel at the time about your potential in life?
- What things would help you achieve your potential?
- What things stood in the way?
- If you had to remember only one thing about the time period, what would it be?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Johnson, interviewed by Laurie Dangerfield, October 2002, *Documenting Justice* DVD, produced by Molly Merryman and Kenneth J. Bindas, 2002. Hereafter *DJ*. These interviews were part of a community history project discussed in the text and involved the digital video interviewing of 14 people.

<sup>2</sup> Delores Capan, interviewed by James Atkins, April 2003, page 8. Community History Project, in author's possession. Hereafter referred to as CHP.

<sup>3</sup> The next semester Bindas taught a separate course that had students interview any resident of the city, which resulted in an overwhelming number of white respondents. Merryman directed two independent studies with students to add interviews with Geneva Owens and civil rights activist Staughton Lynd.

<sup>4</sup> Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, "Black Women's Life Stories: Reclaiming Self in Narrative Texts," in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 43-57; Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," in *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1988), 87-100; Ronald Grele, "Movement without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History," in *The Oral History Reader*, (from his 1975 *Envelopes of Sound*), 38-52; Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 15-28; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), 1-223, 220-245, 309-323. There are many sources that discuss the importance of such a community based project, including A. Glenn Crothers, "Bringing History to Life: Oral History, Community Research, and Multiple Levels of Learning," *Journal of American History* 88 (March 2002):1446-1450; John Forrest and Elizabeth Jackson, "Get Real: Empowering the Student Through Oral History," *The Oral History Review*, 18 (Spring 1990): 29-33; Michael H. Ebner, "Students as Oral Historians," *The History Teacher*, 9 (February 1976): 196-201; Roger D. Long, "The Personal Dimension in Doing Oral History," *The History Teacher*, 24 (May 1991), 309-312; Joanna Bornat, "Oral History as a Social Movement: Reminiscence and Older People," in *The Oral History Reader*, Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. (London: Routledge, 1998): 189-205. The questionnaire was divided into four sections; the first section focused on personal information like birth date and place, school attendance, date of first job, and other general biographical questions. The second section asked questions related to family and lifestyle, such as where they lived and shopped, their roles within the household concerning discipline, and their understanding of the community. The third section focused on getting a living and how they interacted within the community. The final section asked questions specific to race and the interconnection to national events during the time period.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long As They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2000); "A Review of the Problems and Activities of the Warren Urban League: as They Relate to the Needs of the Colored Population of Warren, Ohio," by Warren M. Banner, Director of Research and Community Projects, National Urban League, April, 1948;

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"Swim Pool Season Ends," *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, 8 September 1947, Section A, page 1; "Court Hears Swim Pool Protest Case," *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, 24 September 1947, Section A, page 1, 6. For an interesting take on a similar situation, see James Patterson Smith, "Local Leadership. The Biloxi Beach Riot and the Origins of the Civil Rights Movement on the Gulf Coast, 1959-1966," in *Sunbelt Revolution: The Historical Progression of the Civil Rights Struggle in the Gulf South, 1866-2000*, Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 210-233.

<sup>6</sup> Meyer, *As Long As They Don't Move Next Door*, 6-10, 212-215; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *16<sup>th</sup> Census of the US, 1940, Volume I, Population* (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1942), 815; US Bureau of the Census, *US Census Population: 1950, Volume II, Characteristics of the Population, Part 35, Ohio*, (USGPO, 1952), 35-54; US Bureau of the Census, *US Census Population, 1960. Detailed Characteristics. Ohio. Final report PC (1)- 37D* (USGPO, 1962), 37-538, for employment comparisons, 37-614-867; "Segregation Decision," *Warren Tribune Chronicle*, 19 May 1954, Section B, page 8; Wesley Shaffer interviewed by Nikki Shaffer, 22 March 2003, no page number, CHP; After the most recent census, an interesting article appeared in the local paper detailing the continued residential segregation amidst the increase in the African American population. Matt Walcoff and Raymond L. Smith, "Census shows a more diverse Warren," *Warren Tribune*, 25 March 25 2001, Section A, pages 1, 2. See also Raymond L. Smith, "Census a mixed bag for Mahoning Valley," *Warren Tribune*, 20 March 2001, Section A, pages 5, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Alice Surrena, interviewed by Sarah Surrena, 17 March 2003, page 9; Paul Starnes, interviewed by Danielle Wojnarski, 6 April 2003, page 12; Betty Sloan, interviewed by Joshua Sloan, 28 March 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Johnson, interviewed by Laurie Tonn, April 2003, page 8; Emma Buckner, interviewed by Trisha Buckner, April 2003; Mary Homlitas, interviewed by Scot Homlitas, March 2003, all CHP.

<sup>9</sup> Olive Reese, interviewed by Sherry Bacon-Graves, *DJ*; Morris Hill, interviewed by Holly Davis, November 2002, *DJ*; Frederick Harris, interviewed by Theresa Davis, November 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>10</sup> JoAnn Turner, interviewed by Kristy Rider, May 2002, CHP; Bertha Barber, interviewed by Renee Pisan, October 2002, *DJ*; Muriel Robinson, interviewed by Paula Johnson, October 2002, *DJ*; James Johnson, interviewed by Michael Ciferno, October 2002, *DJ*; Isnell Rumph, interviewed by Dino Haidaris, April 2002, CHP.

<sup>11</sup> Civil Service Documents, property of Warren Police Department.

<sup>12</sup> Geneva Owens, interviewed by Paula Johnson, February 2003, *DJ*.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Harris, interviewed by Theresa Davis, October 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>14</sup> Geneva Owens, interviewed by Paula Johnson, February 2003, *DJ*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Frederick Harris, interviewed by Theresa Davis, October 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>17</sup> Morris Hill, interviewed by Holly Davis, November 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>18</sup> Morris Hill, interviewed by Holly Davis, November 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>19</sup> Geneva Owens, interviewed by Paula Johnson, February 2003, *DJ*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Morris Hill, interviewed by Holly Davis, November 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>23</sup> Olive Reese, interviewed by Sherry Bacon-Graves, October 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>24</sup> Frederick Harris, interviewed by Theresa Davis, October 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>25</sup> Geneva Owens, interviewed by Paula Johnson, February 2003, *DJ*.

<sup>26</sup> Morris Hill, interviewed by Holly Davis, October 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>27</sup> Geneva Owens, interviewed by Paula Johnson, February 2003, *DJ*.

<sup>28</sup> Morris Hill, interviewed by Holly Davis, October 2002 *DJ*.

<sup>29</sup> Frederick Harris, interviewed by Theresa Davis, October 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Clifford Johnson, interviewed by Laurie Dangerfield, October 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>32</sup> Frederick Harris, interviewed by Theresa Davis, October 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>33</sup> Muriel Robinson, interviewed by Paula Johnson, October 25, 2002, *DJ*.

<sup>34</sup> Luisa Passerini, "Work ideology and consensus under Italian fascism," in *The Oral History Reader*, 53-62.

<sup>35</sup> Ronald Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (Chicago: Precedent, 1975), 127-154.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Norman Smith, interviewed by Cindy Martin, *DJ*; Frederick Harris, interviewed by Theresa Davis, October 2002, *DJ*; Muriel Robinson, interviewed by Paula Johnson, October 2002, *DJ*.