

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: John B. "J.B." Barnes, Jr.

COLLECTION: 4700.2102

IDENTIFICATION: Clinton, Louisiana Native [b.1923]; Lockport, Louisiana resident [1954-2012]; Israelite Baptist Church choir member; Israelite Baptist church deacon; Valentine Sugar Company plantation overseer; African American

INTERVIEWER: Mary Tannehill

SERIES: Bayou Lafourche Oral History Project

INTERVIEW DATE: September 17, 2010

FOCUS DATES: 1920s-1930s [childhood]; 1954-1979 [working life]; 2010

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3948

Introduces interviewees and interviewers: J.B. Barnes and Albertha Campbell; interviewed by Mary Tannehill with Claire Gallaspy [engineer]; Barnes was born in Clinton, LA [c. 1923] and grew up in Baton Rouge; Barnes discusses family life; he was one of seven children, two sisters older than him, four siblings younger than him [surviving siblings: brothers Clyde Barnes, Walter Barnes, sister Addis Williams]; as oldest boy Barnes had to take place as father after father's death [year? six months before birth of younger sister]; started working from 6am to 6pm, for fifty cents a day; got weekly \$2.50 check made out to his mother; family raised food to eat: chickens and pigs; pigs were slaughtered in February by traveling slaughterer; Barnes received stamp to purchase shoes; six month for work shoes and dress shoes once a year; would carry shoes for eight mile walk to school in church; Barnes's childhood Sunday routine; no playing; chores were done on Saturday; went to church and school; now he goes to church and comes back to have drinks; back then was rough but everyone looked out for one another; no one locked their doors; it was a good time but Barnes wouldn't want to go back there; Barnes discusses community dynamics; children obeyed orders and didn't speak to elders; proud of his upbringing; mom taught Barnes not to lie; Barnes tells story about seeing drunk neighbor on way to church, stops and helps then continues onto church; Barnes tells story about milking cow and befriending/taming wild dog; applies lesson to people: never give up on people; discusses children he helped raise; girl, Ruth Barker, with him from six days to twenty-one who called Barnes her daddy; recalls driving her around town; Barnes believes it pays off in long term to be generous and reach out; Barnes mentored seven children from Saint Lafourche [?]; most recent, Clint, graduated two years ago [2008?]; went to shipyard to work; Albertha is Barnes's secretary; discusses working dynamic between the two; jokes about two heads being better than one; Barnes wasn't able to [socially] stay out until he was 19 years old, mother raised him without his

dad; friends were able to stay out later; Barnes tried smoking and drinking but it wasn't for him; when Barnes was young and spending time with his friends and "didn't know any better", "I wished my parents were dead, [so] I could have my way"; came to appreciate his mother; punishment was sitting in corner rather than whippings; got "teaching and fussing" from his mother; he and brother were old fashioned; Barnes discusses his 14 operations; degenerative spine; he is turning 87 and is proud of age; not afraid of dying because of his relationship with God; Barnes depends on God for guidance; with religion devil can't harm you; on Feb. 24, 1954 Barnes came from Clinton to Valentine [Sugar Company]; church [Israelite Baptist Church, Lockport, LA] had window fans and uncomfortable pews, now there's central air and heat, comfortable pews; dressing for church not as important as what's in the heart; Barnes learned from elders, didn't "just pick it up from the street," like to work with older men; Barnes is ordained deacon, Master Mason [?]; deacon's role in church; rain or shine should be at church; role as overseer of church akin to pastor's role as overseer of congregation; Barnes still has a church membership [St. John Baptist] in Clinton and will be buried there; has been in Bayou for 54 years and loves "little church in cane field" [Israelite Baptist]; nice community; "we go in with a hug and a kiss and we leave with that"; doctrine of kindness; Barnes discusses church renovations: reoriented building; importance of being child of God; blessings; thanks God for operations; nervous breakdown; operations; heart attack; attends Israelite Baptist Church [Lockport, LA], established in 1920; wood frame building; looks like doll house; fits 100+; choir would perform in New Orleans and Baton Rouge; [Barnes sings verse of "Home over the mountain," written by Margaret Pleasant Douroux]; learned song in 2009; [Barnes sings verse of unnamed song, refrain is "It's all right," Albertha joins]; Barnes has been member of choir 40-45 years; practice should be once a week, but actually less; everyone respects Barnes because he's the oldest; Albertha used to teach at Larose Civic Center; teachers told Albertha about interviews; mentions Margery Landreaux [?] and DeDe; Barnes feels at home in house [?]; part of the family; helped raise DeDe; Barnes worked on the plantation of Valentine Sugar; did all different kinds of work, wasn't just one thing at the factory; also worked at the Valite division [resin made as by-product of sugarcane]; in 1970 Barnes was called to be labor manager; "something like 500 people, men and women, white and black"; "My job to see if a man showed up, I had to place that man"; factory closed in 1979; enjoyed working with people; "They had to come to me to do it [hiring and firing]"; ran into some problems with white bosses who didn't like him as black man over them, "they didn't like that so well"; Barnes told owner of factory he was going to run it or quit; "only one color that I go by"; "we work men, we don't work boys"; Barnes discusses being called man vs. boy; put names on work hats so no foreman would say 'hey boy'; after Valentine closed Barnes worked at sugar house in Raceland; became water attendant; describes duties: keep steam levels for mill operations; six years; retired at 62 because night shifts were midnight to 8am; hired here [where?]; worked for 16 years, until last year [2009]; helps find things; wanted to be on jury duty when he was young; Barnes rejected dialysis; daughter will be 60 in July; happy with friends; originally came to Lockport for a short while; started saving and stayed a little longer; family in Baton Rouge and Clinton, including hospitals BR General and Lady of the Lake; changes in Bayou Lafourche: only one bridge; now there are a lot of short cuts; back then everybody looked out for each other; Christmas traditions: shopping early, cooking Christmas day, go from house to house; doesn't feel like Christmas anymore; didn't get many gifts as kid because of family's finances; Barnes discusses poverty; had to wash clothes every night; bring bagged lunch, biscuit with meat, and saved bag; Tannehill questions

Barnes about his concept of “home;” Barnes says he has more friends in Lockport than in Clinton; met a cousin at church in Clinton; Barnes was nervous to do interview; happy to have done it; [Barnes says prayer for interviewers]

TAPES: 1 (T3948)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 44 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 4 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Interviewer prep sheet; Interviewer index; Obituary

RESTRICTIONS: Barnes - “We are in the process of copyrighting some of the same info for our church history.”