

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Gary Oncale

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IDENTIFICATION: Thibodaux, Louisiana, Native [b. 1953]; Golden Meadow resident; contract welder for shipping in Bayou Lafourche and oil industry

INTERVIEWER: Brigitte Noble, Lauren Fonda

SERIES: Bayou Lafourche Oral History Project

INTERVIEW DATE: October 1, 2010

FOCUS DATES: 1980s-2010 [professional life and time in Bayou Lafourche]

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3943

Interview conducted in Port Allen, Louisiana, for Coastal Sustainability Studio at LSU; lived in Golden Meadow since 1982; in Thibodaux before that; “city life just wasn’t for me”; more work opportunities “down that way”; most important things to people along Bayou Lafourche is seafood, way of living; everybody helps everybody on bayou; no community divisions; ethnically [race, culture, background] there’s not a lot of difference on bayou, everyone tries to get along; mixed population; everybody works in the same place; Oncale has no personal connections to Houma tribe; [interviewer asks complicated question about geography of bayou]; not a lot of difference in bayou, up and down; changes in bayou; improvement in work opportunities; Port Fourchon’s economy has been growing; better highways; deep-water drilling is a lot of what the bayou is about; interviewer asks living above/below lock system [in Golden Meadow]; above flood gates population has hurricane protection; below flood gates during high tide people end up with water in their yards; Oncale had water in yard once; Oncale likes hunting and fishing in his spare time; go to lakes in boat [rather than bayou]; Oncale believes it’s important to contribute to community; but doesn’t have much time to volunteer; major industries: [fishing, oil,] shipyards, building boats; Oncale works in oil fields; contract welder which means he owns all his own equipment; drives truck to position; has traveled all over [Venice, TX, “I’ve been around”]; usually drives to work, seldom that he has to take a boat to a rig; interviewer asks if oil spill in Gulf was bad for Oncale; “in some ways yes, in some ways no”; deep water vessels got laid off jobs, but “if the boat’s not working than I can fix it”; [whole industry takes] a cut in pay but it has given Oncale a lot more work; has to decontaminate boats [with oil on boards], can do work when they are docked; job openings in Port Fourchon; now a major port for state of Louisiana; big increase in jobs in that area; interviewer asks about construction of homes; a lot on slabs, a bunch on pilings, depends on where you live; below floodgates houses are twelve/fifteen feet in the air for hurricane season; house is above floodgates; “everyone has a plan of their own, this is what they want from their house” [not by race]; Oncale’s house is wood frame; three bedroom; faces east, street and bayou beyond; street

is seventy-five feet from front of house, across street is bayou; Oncale can walk across street and fish in bayou; only one house on property, property lines are fenced off; Oncale has good relationships with neighbors; “need something and all you have to do is holler across the fence”; one neighbor is old, other is new people that come in and out; Oncale has let them know they are welcome; Oncale’s home is more private than social; more place of residence than real emotional center; home has never flooded but he has gotten storm water, knocked down trees, “normal situation”; religion is not a part of Oncale’s life; has been to church [in Golden Meadow] a few times; mostly local congregants; parents played part in religious education; Catholic; has used religion to cope with disasters; growing up was taught all the Catholic prayers; community change? a lot of traffic has been diverted by four-lane highway in back of town; hasn’t affected population because location was basically vacant lots; people weren’t living there; now people are building in that area, which is good for the economy; a lot of changes could happen, but Oncale doesn’t have a lot of say-so; quiet community and it needs to stay the way it is; too commercial already because with new bridge through Leeville; overpass through marsh means they get more traffic going to Fourchon; Oncale believes land foundation is not that great over there; “when an 18-wheeler passes you feel your house shake”; Oncale thinks something needs to be done about coastal erosion; what the state of Louisiana should do is purchase large suction drainage [barge?]; work it from one end of state to the other; they could pump back in all the sand that gets washed out; could rent barge to Texas or Alabama; have crew working twenty-four hours a day; return all the sand in that’s washing out, so we could be like Mississippi, where you can walk 1/2 mile out into water and still be knee deep; interviewer asks about oil spill; Oncale says, “we need about five more of them” because it helps the economy, put a lot of people to work; as far as seafood, trawlers went to work for BP and made more money than they did catching shrimp; different line of work; BP is doing enough to clean it up, everything they possibly can; people on beach still and whenever oil comes up they clean it.

TAPES: 1 (T3943)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 17 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 3 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Interviewer contact information; Interviewer index and bio of Oncale

RESTRICTIONS: None