

TAPE LOG COVER SHEET

Fieldworker Gutche Guisinger Date 3/22/99
 Artist/Informant Shirley Harden Time _____
 Recording Location her office at VSU Project Eng 8700
 Other People Present _____

General Subject Jahiri history Specific Subject African-American perspective

Cultural Group _____

Equipment Used Recorder

Stereo _____ Dolby _____ Tape Brand/Length Maxell 90

High Bias ☒ Normal/Low Bias _____ Metal _____

Amount Tape Used: Side 1 3/4

Summary Description of Recording Context/Technical Assessment of Tape Quality

Very difficult to hear, muffled.

Summary Description of Tape Contents

Jahiri from Africa-America perspective. Emphasis on church & education

I'll get these other
birthdays this
weekend.

Gruber

Shirley Hardin
hasn't completed
her last sheet yet
& was gone today
when I checked.
After secretary assured
me she'd have it next
week.

Shirley Hardin Interview

March 22, 1999

GG- explain project and ask for her thoughts on Jakin--past, present and future, with the centennial being a kind of marker as before and after.

SH-explains how she participated in the centennial and how it was a wonderful opportunity to see people who were influential in her life. Says that growing up in Jakin was a good experience and a bad experience. The communities in Jakin like in other small Southern towns were divided black and white. Her experiences were almost exclusively African American. Says when she went to town she saw white faces which were merchants. She was happy to go to town to get out of the country, but those were the only times that she saw their lives interacting.

Remembers that her father and other African American farmers received their goods on credit from the white merchants which was good, but says there were so many things lacking in the African American community. Says that everybody in her community was in debt. She didn't see many attempts to try to bridge the two communities.

Talks about the segregated schools. She attended the all black Carver Elementary school in Jakin. Remembers wondering why they had used books and learning that they were hand me downs from the white schools.

Talks about a sense of community and compares her experience to Maya Angelou's in I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. Says that growing up the white community seemed unreal, almost untouchable. The mailman and the merchants were white, everybody that they did business with was white. Their only connections was to do business together. Says that the white community was very mysterious, so her experience was with the African American community. The people who raised her and were role models for her life.

Mentions a community garden cultivated on land donated by the Hunters (a wealthy black family). The community planted, everyone tended and gathered in the harvest which all shared including the elderly who could not physically work.

Says that in Jakin people really cared about each other and you did not have to be blood related. Recalls that as a child if you did something wrong and a neighbor saw you they corrected you, punished you, sometimes spanked you and before you got home your parents knew and you got another spanking. Says of course there were gossipers, but that there was so much goodness.

Talks about church and summer revivals. Says that since Jesus taught in the synagogues at 12 she thought that was the age to sit on the mourners bench. She and her friends, Mabel Hicks and Betty Hunter decided to join during revival and were baptized and sat on the mourners bench. Says the church was one of the greatest influences in their lives. She attended Bethel AME which was her mother's church. All of her sisters and brother, save one joined Bethel.

Says that church in the African American community was a place to go on Sunday and just leave all their worries behind. They forgot about working hard and having more bills than money and forgot about the outside world and just praised God and knew that everything was going to be alright. Talks about misbehaving in church as a child and getting looks from her grandmother in the deaconesses corner to straighten up.

Says that church was such an influential place. One of the most influential figures in the community was the old black preacher. He was respected by both the white and black community and acted as spokesperson for the black community in they needed someone to speak on their behalf. He was someone that everyone trusted. Says that church was a wonderful place.

Discuss the age of Bethel church and Good Hope church where her aunt, Thelma Powell's funeral (which I attended) was held. Explains where the old Carver Elementary School was. Name three influential churches in Jakin, Midway, Bethel and St. Paul and that everyone went to some particular church.

Talks about schooling in Jakin prior to intergradation. Says that while the facilities at Carver Elementary school may have been lacking that the teachers really cared about the students. Said they took their jobs very personally. After Carver closed when she was in the 8th grade they were bused to Blakely, Ga. Talks about catching the bus at 7 a.m. and if they were left they had to stand on the highway and try to flag down a teacher on her way.

Says that intergradation made her realize how important education was. Talks about her highschool Washington High School which integrated in 1970. Talks about the loss of cultural identity, since their school had its own name, colors, song, mascot. They lost that identity when they were mandated to attend Early County High which retained its identity. Says that due to intergradation those black high school teachers were demoted to the junior high or the elementary school.

Recalls bad experience with the white high school counselor who ignored her request about financial assistance for college, and told her she should go to a trade school instead. She visited with her former black counselor who gave her all the necessary information, but found out that the white counselor had told all of the black students who came to her the same thing. Unfortunately some of those students followed her advice. Says that the ironically the current principal of that school was one of her friends, a black woman, Betty Orange. Says that integration was a good thing for those schools and communities who were ready for it. Says that Seminole and Early counties were very late in integrating.

Recounts story of her grandmother who worked for a white couple in Donalsonville. When the couple found out that her some of her grandchildren had participated in the first intergradation attempt at Seminole County High school she lost her job. She said that her grandmother said that she was glad her children did such a courageous thing and if that was what it took, her losing her job, then it was worth it. and she would find another, which she did.

Communities were drawn along racial lines and she emphasizes that intergradation was a good thing for those who were ready for it.

Says that she doesn't see Jakin in a state where people are concerned about building up schools or businesses. Sees the history being a vibrant history and people want to recall the way things were because they are proud of Jakin. "Am I proud of Jakin, yes, because I learned a lot. Jakin creates survivors." The hard work was good for us.

GG—the isolation. . .

SH—yes, isolation. Says that some friends tease her about going back to Jakin. If there were educational institutions there, of course, I would go back, she says. But that's not going to happen, they don't have colleges there. So we go back to visit our families, we visit our churches, we visit people in the community those who were influential in our lives. "I guess I'm acting like Jakin is a lost cause, but it's not. There are people who are survivors and that's the way of life they choose."

Asks me what I think about going back to Jakin

GG- tell her that I think at this point I would have to be committed to Jakin, I would have to make personal sacrifices to live there. If you left Jakin, there was something missing in the first place.

SH- agrees with me, particularly about the commitment you make to live in Jakin. Recalls the all the things she misses about living in Jakin, which aren't there anymore. Mentions the cane grindings which the Hunters used to have. Says that people in Jakin live simple lives, good and decent lives. But for those who left there's nothing left for us because of the lifestyles that we've chosen the roads we're on. So we go home and enjoy being there, just for a visit. Says that it's a little sad.

Describes the people who live there and what their lives are like. Says they go to work five days a week at the paper mill or in Dothan. They come home on Friday and Saturday they go to town. On Sunday they go to church and Sunday evening they are either in church or relaxing and getting ready for work. Those who chose to stay don't complain. Mentions her aunt Thelma again, who had 14 children only 3 of which stayed in Jakin, but they live very simple, comfortable lives. Says there are young white families who are raising their families in the same way.

If Jakin had more to offer, I would love to live closer to my parents, although I'm not far away now. But because of her lifestyle and she and her husband's career living in Jakin is not possible.

Shirley Hardin

Journal

Dr. Hardin's perspective on the African American community in Jakin was insightful. I agree with her about the gap between the two communities. My experience as a child with blacks consisted of those who were either farm hands or maids or baby sitters, prior to entering school. I could echo her comments about the white community being mysterious, with my experience with the black community. She and I were children very different decades: she the '60s and me the '70s, so while the black community may have felt foreign, I don't recall the feeling of it being untouchable. The only signs I saw of segregation were in the churches which were either white or black or different section which people lived. This residential segregation was more pronounced in Donalsonville or Blakey. Jakin is rural and everybody lived in the country. My grandparents were one of two white homes on a road that intersected with a predominately black neighborhood. However there probably were not that many houses in this neighborhood since there are only about 400 people in Jakin spread over a several mile radius.

Although I cannot begin to understand what intergradation must have been like, and don't pretend that racism did not exist or still doesn't for that matter, it struck me that her comments about school identity mirrored those of Virginia Harvey or my mother for that matter about the closing of Jakin's school.

I share her sentiments about returning to Jakin to live and limited opportunities it provides. However I wonder if compared to those that stayed, if the grass is really all that greener.