

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

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JACKSONVILLE, ALABAMA 36265-9982

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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**Gift and Release Agreement:**

We Mrs Beatrice K. Wilson and Russell B. Quinn  
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

Do hereby grant permission to Jacksonville State University to copy the tape of the interview conducted at Carver Community Ctr. on the date(s) of 31 Oct 95 for the oral history collection being compiled at Jacksonville State University.

This collection will be maintained by Jacksonville State University for research into the history of Northeast Alabama and the South. We further grant researchers permission to quote from the interview on this tape.

Beatrice K. Wilson  
(Interviewee's signature)

Date 31 Oct 95

1315 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street  
(Address)

Anniston, Al 36201

238-7781  
(Telephone)

Russell B. Quinn  
(Interviewer's signature)

Date 31 Oct 95

2026 Canterbury Square  
(Address)

Anniston, Al 36207

831-3802  
(Telephone)

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: Mrs. Beatrice Whitson M/F

Address: 1315 West 16th Street

Phone number(s): 237-7781

Approximate age or date of birth: 75 yrs. 7/11/20

Mother's Name: Mary Lou Keith

Father's Name: Tomby Keith

Places lived and when: Near Rt. 1 above Germania Springs

Education: GED at Cobb night school

Religion: Catholic

Business, political and social memberships (past and present)

Imperial Doll Factory (made dolls)

Present occupation: retired

Former occupations: Rectory on 15th Street

Special Skills: quilt, crochet, walking

Major Accomplishments: Lived 75 yrs., walking certificates

National Events in which interviewee has participated:

marches

Local Events in which interviewee has participated:

Love Band Society  
marched the highway to church

National born U.S. citizen? Yes/No

Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: —

Country from which he/she emigrated: —

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee:

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: Any of the senior citizens @ Carver Center

Additional information:

Black Women Achievers

By: Bonita Quinn

Class: U.S. Women's History

Instructor: Dr. Marshall

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"It's judgement day, it's judgement day daddy," screamed Beatrice as she ran into the house on a stormy day. Her father responded by saying, "It's just a Tornado<sup>1</sup> honey." What a thought for a six year old to be thinking. How could a child, at that age know about judgement day"? This really intrigued me as she went on to say, "Every time we had a storm, I always thought judgement day coming." After talking with her and several others, the reason why she had that on her mind at such a young age is because black people back then wished for judgement day to come so the white man would be judged by the almighty God for all the wrong doings against black people. This is why all day long in the fields as the slaves worked they sang old negro<sup>2</sup> spirituals. These songs helped them to take whatever they had to in order to survive. The blacks knew that it would not always be that way. Through praye<sup>3</sup>s and songs they made it through. The spirituals also gave them that extra push they needed to press on toward their goals.

In listening to stories from back then when there were slaves, the treatment did not stop after slavery was over. It took hard struggles that blacks had to go through to make it this far. The efforts of strong black women helped to make the way easier for the men back then and other black women of today. The women had to be strong and humble in order to take what they did. They knew they had to hold their composure to make things work. They had to look out for their families, the white women, the white women's children and the white women's men. Yet black women stand strong and proud

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs. Beatrice Wilson, Childhood years, 1920-Present.

of what they accomplished.

As I interviewed Mrs. Beatrice Wilson who was born in Jacksonville, Alabama, I laughed at her enthusiasm and uplifting spirit. She was raised on a farm near what is called Germania Springs now. "Ms. B" as she likes to be called, is seventy five years old, but her memory of times going all the way back to her childhood still remains in tact. She came out of a family of seventeen children. They were all very close and helped one another ~~out~~. Her mother never worked outside the home other than the farm. Her father was the bread winner and head of the household. When Ms. B says "My daddy" her eyes light up with pride. "My daddy worked on half, they took half of everythang we picked." Ms. B recollects with a serious frown on her face. Black people were not far from just being released from slavery. They still lived on plantations that did not belong to them, whatever they picked in the fields was divided into half and the owner would take half of whatever they picked *in the system called share cropping.*

Having twenty people in her family's house hold, including her mother, father and aunt, "Times were hard for our family, I remember my daddy he would fix the soles of our shoes by using old tires from old automobiles and tack them on to our shoes. My brother said daddy put tires on our shoes so I'm gone run around like I'm a automobile." She laughed as she thought about it.

As if things were not hard enough, they were then faced with World War I. This was a serious conflict involving many men <sup>who</sup> ~~that~~

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<sup>6</sup>Mrs. Beatrice Wilson, Childhood Years, 1920-Present.

had to be drafted to go and fight. Ms. B recalled,<sup>4</sup> "My daddy didn't register, having to take care of all of us, and you know how some black folks is, somebody turned him in to Fort McClellan. They came out and picked my daddy up and took him to jail. My aunt got him a lawyer from down in Anniston and the lawyer told him to empty all the feathers from in his pillow and put his head in'em. So when he went to the court room, the judge looked at him and said look at that old man he's older than I am, yall leave this man alone. My daddy was so happy that they were gone take him home, he didn't wait on them to take him home he walked all the way home." She laughed hilariously as she told this story.

After seeing how Ms. B thought of times when they were treated unfairly and times when they were helped by whites, it helped me to realize just how positive this lady is. Her focus<sup>ed</sup> not ~~solely~~<sup>on</sup> what whites did to them,<sup>4</sup> she manages to find times when they actually received help from the whites. She seemed to just take the good with the bad and press on toward a mark that she had set for herself. Ms. B is such a strong spirited woman, even at her age she is spunky and loves to tell stories of the past and laugh. Although her life has been hard, living to see two husbands pass, she stands proud and ~~yet still~~ determined<sup>ly</sup> to enjoy life and ~~not just~~ ~~fade away by being negative and bitter.~~

She seemed to be an extraordinary lady in her time and even now. She basically raised her <sup>two</sup> kids alone and still managed to keep her sanity. This lady is a black woman typical of what black women stand for in life. She has a positive attitude which is the key to

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<sup>4</sup>Mrs Beatrice Wilson, Childhood Years, 1920-Present.

her success. Black women had to have a positive and strong outlook on things in order to survive the harsh treatment received throughout their lives. Their self esteem was literally pulled away from them as they listened to all the stereotypes that held them back. These stereotypes gave them the strength to move forward and prove them wrong. It really saddens the spirit when listening and even thinking of having to encounter these things.

My mother recalls cleaning homes for white people at nine years old to help her father with money. She remembers having to go through the back door instead of the front. Ms. B says,<sup>4</sup> "You know we couldn't even go through the front door." That reminded me of the stories that my mother told me when I was growing up,<sup>5</sup> "They wanted you to work from sun up to sun down. Those white people were somethin else. I can remember scrubbin floors with rags on my hands and knees and they had mops and wouldn't give em to you to use." My mother was determined not to do that type of work for the rest of her life and she didn't. My father died when I was two years old and my sister was six months. She then had nine kids. She took the insurance they had and raised all of us by herself. She did not recieve any help from others. Her pride kept her from begging for help from the family, afraid they would later talk about it to others. "With the help of the Lord I will make it." She did recieve food stamps for a short while and she hated it. We drove miles to the grocery store so nobody she knew would see her

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<sup>4</sup>Mrs. Beatrice Wilson, Childhood Year, 1920-Present.

<sup>5</sup>Mrs. Willie Lois Foster Westbrooks, Memories of work.



spending them. It was so funny that she was too proud to let anybody see her spend them. If we saw somebody we knew, we left and went to another store. Needless to say, we did not stay on food stamps for long.

Ms. B reminded me of my mother when she talked about her struggles. We talked about how much help she actually got from whites as she grew up. She recalls,<sup>6</sup> "One time when we were sick a white woman would come down at night and take care of us." Not wanting any other white people to see her help the blacks she did it at night. "She was a poor woman, but she was nice." Ms. B also remembers when her father was given cloth to help out when times were hard, "A cloth company was giving away cloth on Fort McClellan so My daddy went down to get some. He kept gettin pushed back to the end of the line when he got up front. So the man who was givin it away noticed my daddy and said let that man up front, I been noticing him for three weeks. He told my daddy to meet him in the back of the store and he gave daddy lots and lots of cloth, he even gave may daddy sheeting. We were so glad of that. My mother made all of our dresses with it. This is another example of when they got help from whites. There must be some appreciation for the whites <sup>wh</sup> that did help blacks back then. They were the ones who helped to change the minds of other whites. "A lot of Whites were Okay until the Jim Crow days came along." Ms. B was in deep thought as she spoke about this.

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<sup>6</sup>Mrs. Beatrice Wilson, Childhood Years, 1920-Present.

<sup>7</sup> The Jim Crow days, the generation after the end of slavery, freedom for blacks was still elusive. Strategies were being devised, such as poll taxes, to block blacks from voting, and a flurry of racial restrictions was coming to be codified as "Jim Crow Laws" existed. Jim Crow became entrenched in southern society in 1896, with the Supreme Court ruling in the Plessy v. Ferguson case. The case stemmed from an incident<sup>1^</sup> which a Louisiana citizen named Homer Plessy, was arrested for refusing to sit in a "colored" railroad car. Mr. Plessy lost on his appeal to the Supreme Court, which sanctioned the establishment of "separate but equal" facilities for blacks and whites. There had long been segregation by custom, but the Jim Crow laws, named for a minstrel show character, made it legal and official. Under the laws, Black Americans faced separate-and inferior- facilities in all aspects of society.

Ms. B describes how hard Jim Crow laws made everything for blacks. She recalls the lynchings that took place and even the days the white men would call "lynch day."<sup>8</sup> "My daddy didn't go to town on Friday's that was lynch day, we all knew that." She actually laughed as she said it. She remembers a family in Anniston that she said, "The Adams family was alright until Jim Crow started. Then they started the lynchings. There were even blacks that would lure other blacks in the woods to be lynched. She remembers a time when a white man was mad at her father, "And

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<sup>7</sup>Hearth, Amy Hill, "Having Our Say", The Delaney Sisters' First 100 Years (1993).

<sup>8</sup>Mrs. Beatrice Wilson, Childhood Years, 1920-Present.

you know what he did, he got my uncle to get my daddy and take him to the woods to get some moonshine. We were all in the bed and my uncle came to the house and said, "come on Tom-Cat, lets go get some moonshine." Say we got to go down in the woods to get it. My mother she touched my daddy in the bed and said don't, don't go. He said come on we got to go down in the woods and get it. My mother said Tommy done stopped drankin, he don't won't nothin. He begged my daddy and begged him and then he got up and went on home. Here come his wife the next monin, early, cause she was fraid of him too ya know, she come say May Lou, Tommy didn't go with George did he? Moma say naw I didn't let him go. She say good thang cause Tommy woulda been down there dead. Say that old man was over there waitin to kill him." Ms. B remembers that incident quite well as she frowns with a stern look on her face. My mouth literally dropped opened as she told the out come of the story. The idea of a black man luring another to be lynched appalled me. The only possible reason that could justify this act would be that the man feared his own life while doing it. Most likely he was threatened by the white man in order to do it. Still this <sup>is a very</sup> ~~emulates~~ all the things that went on that can not be explained. Ms. B did not even try to explain and I was too shocked to ask why. It happened and there was nothing that she could do about it.

She gathered her composure and kept on talking. This is typical of what she had to do throughout her life. She learned from her experiences. Being a black woman, she knew she had to learn and walk through all the struggles. Ms. B is confident and determined even now as she exemplifies an attitude of excellence.

Her attitude has plagued many other black women who lived through the struggles and pioneered the way for others.

<sup>9</sup> Two very strong, intelligent and confident ladies whom many people admire is Bessie and Sadie Delaney, better known as "The Delaney Sisters," Black women who became prominent professional women. Bessie stated in the book, "Having Our Say", "As a child, everytime I encounterd prejudice-which was rubbed in your face, once segregation started under Jim Crow - I would feel it down to my core. I was not a crying child, except when it came to being treated badly because of my race, like when they would't serve us at the drugstore counter. In those instances, I would go home and sit on my bed and weep and weep and weep, the tears streaming down my face. My mother would sit down at the foot of my bed and just look at me." Instead of encouraging Bessie's rage, her mother simply sat there without a mumbling word and looked at her while she cried. Bessie said, "That look comforted me and that was the most soothing salve." She knew that her mother understood what she was going through and that was all she needed at the time. This gave Bessie strength and determination. These are the types of things black mothers would do to comfort their children. Bessie's mother knew that she was hurting and it would be hopeless to try to set things straight, therefore she chose to be there for her and comfort her the only way she knew how. Her mother did not encourage her to be bitter during those situations.

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<sup>9</sup>Hearth, Amy Hill, "Having Our Say", The Delaney Sisters' First 100 Years (1993).

<sup>10</sup> Bessie and Sadie remember being shy but determined, "I just kept hearing Papa's voice: "You are college material. And if you don't go, shame on you." They both set their sights high and achieved their goals with a positive attitude. Their careers came first even before marriage. Sadie has a master's degree in Education at Columbia University and Bessie earned a Doctor of Dental Surgery Degree, and became the second black woman licensed to practice dentistry in New York. These women did not let racism get in their way. They believed in themselves and pressed on to a mark of excellence. They made careful and calculated choices. Both had to be strong and determined to enter college among the whites back then and succeed.

<sup>11</sup> Another black female who carefully picked her place in society is Cicely Tyson. She didn't set out to be a role model for black women, but she is. The book, "I Dream a World; Portraits of Black Women who Changed America", she states, "Whatever good I have accomplished as an actress I believe came in direct proportion to my efforts to portray black women who have made positive contributions to my heritage." Her careful choices of roles came as a direct result of the type of negative images that were being projected on to black people throughout the world, particularly black women. Tyson says, "I knew deep within me that I could not afford the luxury of just being an actress - I had something to say as a member of the human race, black and female. In reading

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<sup>10</sup>Hearth, Amy Hill, "Having Our Say", The Delaney Sisters' First 100 Years (1993).

<sup>11</sup>Lanker, Brian, "I Dream a World", Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America (1989).

about Cicely Tyson, a picture of sincerity, humility and class comes to mind. What an enlightening analogy of how she was in a position to explore many things and roles, but decided to represent her black women well. She succeeded in her efforts as many other black women <sup>have</sup> ~~has~~ her attitude of representation and excellence. Ms. B was one that pioneered this <sup>like?</sup> ~~in~~ Cicely Tyson.

<sup>12</sup> Johnetta Betsch Cole, the first black woman president of Spellman College says, "Black women who were in the day to day struggle learned that we were to take the notes and not chair the meetings, that we were to form the picket lines but not speak to the press. It's a bitter experience when the assumption is that it's for all of us, and then you find out it's for some of us. It's been a bitter experience for millions of black women who assumed that the women's movements were for all us and then we found out, one more time, for some of us." Johnetta Cole <sup>influenced</sup> ~~affected~~ the black woman in a way that no other can because she is fiesty and realistic in her thinking. She ~~again~~ is a very determined black female. Nothing got in her way as she fought through every endeavor to make it. Her place in society is that she is a positive black woman who reached a goal that was otherwise unthought of to be accomplished by a female.

All of these women share one thing in common other than being black and that is -Excellence-. They all have excellent attitudes. They all share an excellent determination to succeed. They all have an excellent ability to represent the female well. With the

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<sup>13</sup>Lanker, Brian, "I Dream a World", Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America (1989).

ability to be excellent in all thier endeavors, they achieved many things unthinkable for black females. They had to deal with so many stereotypes. These women are positive role models who are not focusing on the past and letting it anger them or hold them back. They are driving on to complete their own objective and that is to be individually an excellent, achieving, black woman.

Being a Black women I can easily empathize with these women when they share their stories with the public. Still a struggle ahead, I must press on to reach goals unthinkable for black females. Keeping a positive spirit and attitude like these women will definitely play a big part in my success. In order to be recognized and taken seriously, I can not just be good at what I do I have to be excellent at what I do. My experiences have proven this to me so many times. Now I have learned to take my experiences as they come and learn from every situation.

Good  
revision  
Continue to  
work on writing  
to make it  
focused.  
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