

Wiregrass Black History Project, RG 298

Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad Interview Transcript

Date Span: October 2, 2024

Biographical Sketch: Ms. Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad was a resident of the Southside neighborhood of Dothan, AL, during the 1950s. When Dothan razed Southside for urban renewal c. 1958 - 1960, her family moved to Dothan's Lakeview neighborhood.

Organizational Sketch: The Wiregrass Black History Project is a collaboration between the Wiregrass Black History Channel on YouTube (by David "Mit" Kirkland) and the Wiregrass Archives at Troy University Dothan Campus. Funded in 2024- 25 by Troy University and the Society of American Archivists Foundation through its Catalyst Grant.

The Wiregrass Black History Channel will host edited versions of the interviews. The Wiregrass Archives will make the raw interviews available on its YouTube channel and create metadata records and finding aids that link to the project and to individual video interviews.

Scope / Content Note: Video interview transcript in which Ms. Taylor-Muhammad discusses her childhood in the racially-segregated Southside and Lakeview neighborhoods of Dothan, AL, in the 1950s. She describes her schooling, her family home, recreation, and social life in both neighborhoods.

Provenance: Interview conducted by Mit Kirkland and Marty Olliff. Provided to the Wiregrass Archives as part of the grant-funded Wiregrass Black History Project.

Processing Notes: Transcriptions made by MS Word AI, then edited by Dr. Martin T. Olliff. Revisions planned to update and correct transcriptions.

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Transcript, Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad, October 2, 2024, for the Wiregrass Black History Project

00:00:00 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

. . . T-A-Y-L-O-R; Muhammed, M-U-H-A-M-M-A-D.

00:00:08 Mit Kirkland

OK. Dorothy, do you give us permission to use this footage for the Wiregrass Archives at Troy University and other archives? And plus, we could use to promote an historical . . . history of the Wiregrass.

00:00:26 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

Yes.

00:00:29 Mit Kirkland

All right. I know that you were one of the . . . you was very young when . . . when y'all left Southside. Tell me about the few years you were there and your experiences.

00:00:45 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

OK, I, I may not remember everything like Elmaree [Gordon] and Cookie [Robert "Cookie" Potter] remembered, but I can, I can, you know, go back and tell you what I do remember. Look at here. . . . [crosstalk, stage directions] I'm sorry.

00:00:59 Mit Kirkland

Tell *me*.

00:01:00 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

OK, I'll tell you. OK. I remember going to the the two room school that they were talking about.

00:01:10 Mit Kirkland

OK, hold on. Don't refer to them when you're talking. No problem, no problem. Just just talk as you're talking to Marty and and then I am here.

00:01:13 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

Oh, I'm sorry. Let me go back then. OK, I remember growing up. I had my sister Sue, who was always very sick, she had a bad heart, and she would go to Birmingham a lot of times for treatment, and, unfortunately, while she was there, there was no school. So she had . . . she didn't go to school. So by the time she got . . . I started first grade, which I started first grade when I was 5, and when I started first grade, by that year, she was able to go back to school, so we started first grade together.

It was Miss West was our first grade teacher and Mrs. Kennedy was our second and third grade teacher.

I also had a big part in a play years ago. I think I was second or third grade, but I do not remember the name of the play, but I remember having the lead role in that play.

But it was a school where we all knew each other. We all grew up together. Our parents were always friends with each other. Some of us went to the same church, some didn't. Some went to the AME church. I went to New Bethel, and then I had one or two friends who went to the Church of God in Christ

So I stayed there until we were third . . . after we finished third grade, we had to go to Montana St. Now Sue, my sister, could not walk to Montana [Street School], so my dad had to get a taxi to take us to school every day. So every day we go to school in a taxi. And then two more of our friends, Mary Alice and Joanne Anderson, joined us and they went to Montana. So we went there 4th grade.

Then by the time we finished fourth grade we had moved from Southside . . . we were moving from Southside to Lakeview. My dad had had a new house built before we moved to Lakeview, but unfortunately when they asked us to move, of course that house, you know, we had to stay over there and then we had another house built in Lakeview. And that's when I started, I guess, Stringer Street Elementary School.

But I have some good memories of them. I think we were like one big happy family. Everybody knew each other and if somebody saw me doing something I shouldn't be doing, then of course they told my parents they got at me first themselves. I don't remember anybody else hitting me or whipping me as they used to say back then, other than my parents, but they had the permission from them if they had to do it.

But, uhh. I was kind of sorry when we had to move, I guess because I had gotten to know everybody and we had all grown up together and now it's like we're being separated. Some of us, some of my friends, did move to Lakeview, so I still got a chance to see them. The others I didn't see until we went to church on Sundays. And then I got a chance to see everybody that I hadn't seen, you know, while I was in school.

But they are very fond memories.

00:05:07 Mit Kirkland

OK. What was it like when y'all first moved to Lakeview? What . . . What was . . . What was your house like on Southside? What . . . What type of structure, how many bedrooms and, and, and as far as the physical parts of it?

00:05:26 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

OK, our first house, umm, I think we had three bedrooms, we had a living room, and we had a kitchen. We had a . . . I know there was a toilet in the bathroom, but I don't remember it being a tub in there. But when my dad had the new house built, of course, it was 3 bedrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen and a full bath.

And, I don't, like I say, I don't remember going to an outhouse or anything like that when I was growing up.

Oh, you asked me when I moved to Lakeview, yes, like I said, it was kind of rough at first because you moved into an area . . . Lakeview was just being developed, so there were no . . . all the roads were dirt roads, we didn't have streetlights, so it was kind of dark out there at night, just like it was on Southside. And eventually they slowly did start to pave the streets. So when they start to pave the street and then they put in the street lights, so then things got a little better.

00:06:43 Mit Kirkland

OK, what did you do for fun while you lived on the Southside?

00:06:50 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

You know what? We got together, we played, we had something called jacks. We played jacks a lot of time. We played dodgeball, hopscotch. What else did we play over there? Hopscotch, we had the dodgeball. Uhh, well, I guess we just played out in the yard with each other. We had our little dolls, we had our little grass dolls where we can braid the little head. Well, not braid it, we called it a platten. We planted the hair back then. But we had a good time with those little dolls and just doing stuff like that.

00:07:25 Mit Kirkland

Marty, do you have any questions for her?

00:07:28 Marty Olliff

What . . . did both of your parents work?

00:07:31 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

My mom didn't work, but my dad did.

00:07:34 Marty Olliff

And what did he work doing?

00:07:35 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

He worked at Dothan Glass company.

00:07:38 Marty Olliff

OK. Do you recall your street addresses in Southside?

00:07:44 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

No, I don't. I just know I lived on S Bell Street, but I do not remember the address.

[The Dothan City Directory of 1958 records the Clem and Flossie Taylor family owned and lived at 739 S. Bell St.]

00:07:50 Marty Olliff

That's, that's sufficient.

Well, you've covered a lot of the stuff that, that I want covered and I'll tell you why I'm asking about interiors of houses. There's no other source for that information than the people who lived in themselves and I've got a captured audience here so I want to know what y'all's houses were like; because yours was very different than the ones that you all [pointing to the other narrators in the room] were describing.

Anyway. And and you went to oh, oh, I do have one more question. I'm sorry to stumble around.

You said that after moving to South . . . out of Southside, that the only time you saw all of your friends together was when you went to church on Sundays, did the entire congregation reassemble at a new facility.

00:08:44 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

OK, what I meant by that was.

When we were on the Southside, like I said, we were all like one big happy family. We all played together because we were the houses were, you know, in the same neighborhood. But when I moved to Lakeview, I wasn't able to . . . I was only able to see the ones who had moved from Southside that moved also to Lakeview. My other friends from Southside that did not move to Lakeview, those are the ones that I usually saw when I went to church on Sunday morning.

00:09:17 Marty Olliff

Because, because y'all were going to the same church.

00:09:20 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

Because we went to the same church.

00:09:21 Marty Olliff

Did the New Bethel congregation pretty much *all* move to a new facility? You may not be able to answer that question.

00:09:34 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

Now when you say move to a new facility, what do you mean?

00:09:37 Marty Olliff

Did they build a new church and did they move as a congregation?

00:09:39 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

Yes, OK, yes, we did. We had a church on Southside and then, yes, we did have the church built. It's still over there now on Allen Rd. in Dothan. [Unintelligible]

00:09:52 Marty Olliff

And, and so . . . and so the congregation pretty much moved over, except for people who may have moved out.

00:09:57 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

Right.

00:09:58 Marty Olliff

OK. [crosstalk] Yeah, that's good.

00:10:01 Mit Kirkland

If there's one thing that stands out of your mind about living there, what would it be? Just any one thing.

00:10:11 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

I think the one thing that stands out when I lived there is the . . . the community, the relationships that we had over there. We were one great community. We all looked out for each other and it was during the time when, I guess, everybody knew each other. They . . . I . . . my parents knew their parents, we knew everybody, so it was just like . . . just one great community and I . . . I like that about the Southside.

00:10:43 Mit Kirkland

Let me ask you this. I know a lot of the houses were substandard over there, so your house was not considered substandard because y'all had indoor plumbing and . . . and bathroom and all.

So, how did it make you feel, if you can remember, that y'all had these things as some of your friends did not? Did that ever cross your mind?

00:11:08 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

It didn't. I . . . I guess when you when you growing up like that, I go to visit my friends and if I had to go to the bathroom I, you know, most of the time I didn't, I guess, I wait till I got back home because we were so busy playing. So no, I guess I never thought about it.

00:11:32 Marty Olliff

I . . . I do have a one follow up questions about Lakeside. Did you feel the same sense of community in the new neighborhood eventually that you felt in the Southside one?

00:11:53 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

I don't think I ever felt hat what I had on Southside was in Lakeview although I did, once I got to know everybody, we were like one big community also.

So I can't say that I, I didn't like that about it because I did. We were one big community just like we were on Southside. Everybody looked out for each other.

00:12:12 Marty Olliff

One last question, were the roads paved in Southside?

00:12:14 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

No.

00:12:16 Mit Kirkland

Just say the roads. Answer with the question.

00:12:19 Dorothy Taylor-Muhammad

Oh, I'm sorry. No, the roads were not paved on Southside.