

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Robert Griffin

COLLECTION: 4700.2368

IDENTIFICATION: The Civil Rights movement participant, lifelong resident of Louisiana

INTERVIEWER: Chadwick Griffin Jr.

SERIES: Louisiana Sea Grant Coastal Change Oral Histories Project

INTERVIEW DATE: March 8, 2013

FOCUS DATES: 1952, 1956-1975, 1960s, 1970s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4293

Interviewee's full name is Robert Griffin, he was born in New Orleans at Charity Hospital on September 5th, 1952; now lives in Thibodaux, Louisiana; when he was a child there were no paved streets, just rock streets; no sidewalks; the community has changed one hundred percent; now there are walkways, sidewalks; different streets, homes, parks, and schools; the civil rights era completely changed his life; at one time he wasn't allowed to talk to whites; all kinds of riots going on; they had different opinions on life; weren't allowed to go to the movies together; describes in detail the segregation of movie theaters; there were a lot of potential problems because the races weren't allowed to mix together back then; now things have really changed because a lot of whites and blacks are hanging together, going to parks, movies, stores, they go shopping, they play sports together, they have many functions now for the kids; they have come together as almost "one"; if Dr. King were alive today he would have solid evidence that his methods and teachings had worked; that's one of the things Dr. King really wanted in life, for everyone to become one; there wasn't such thing in his life as different races, he just wanted everybody to be created equally in society; Robert says being in the military was rough; they didn't have black drill sergeants; they could not become leaders; every movie there is about the Vietnam War today has mostly white soldiers, but 340 Vietnam was mostly black; they were drafting all the blacks and sending them overseas, then they weren't giving them the responsibilities or jobs in the military; most of the time there always was a white over all the blacks; it was hard for them to move up the ranks; movies about the segregation and civil rights movement can be misleading; Some people act like today all of that racism has passed; but in some places it's still the same; there were a lot of protests right in Thibodaux during the Civil Rights Movement; there was a ballroom two or three blocks from his house that was one of the biggest ballrooms in Thibodaux, and it was a white bar and they weren't allowed to pass on the sidewalks there; it caused all kinds of racial problems and riots; he participated in turning over all of the cars; they were thrown in jail; having a big white club in the center of a black community was a major issue; Robert was in just about every riot in Thibodaux; fighting for his rights, turning over cars, he did it all; the biggest riot he ran in was about the [College Inn?]; they

turned over about thirty or forty cars, and set them on fire, they fought, beat people, cut people; they fought back; now still goes to marches and a lot of activities; the world today is very much more equal; Robert would give young residents of Thibodaux the same advice his parents instilled in him: go to school, learn everything that you can, go to college; you can't be like us, you have to be better than us, and if you ever have any kids, you teach your kids to be better than you; they've got to have improvements in life; he is very adamant about getting an education; that's why Martin Luther King fought for all of these rights for *all* people, not just some people; until you become "one" you'll never be anything in society; Robert explains that school was very hard when he was a kid because the education system was set up to fail African American students; all the wording was different; everything was different; it meant the same thing but they were taught differently; different languages, different ways of life; although it was the same it was the wording that made a difference in life; Robert spent a lot of time outside as a child; used to play in ditches with little boats and stuff like that; he didn't have the toys and everything that the other kids had who were rich; whites had way more than African Americans did and they would get stuff out of the garbage cans to play with; Robert says home means a nice place with a good environment where you can always relax; learning starts at home; parents have to create a learning environment at home; taught his son every day at home; if he had homework, he had to do it, because that's the way school is; Robert put all his energy towards his offspring having an education; he tells them to treat everybody properly, learn to get along with people; learn respect, honesty; if you want anything in life, you've got to earn it;

TAPES: 1 (T4293)

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RESTRICTIONS: None