

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Wendell Meeks

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Family Memories Oral History project

Interview # FM-A-L-2016-049

Wendell Meeks, who grew up in Centralia, then attended Oberlin College before pursuing a long career in education, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Family memories* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Oct 20, 2016 Location: Meeks residence in Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript
being processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 3:05 / 3.08 hrs.

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on March 28, 2017.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Wendell Meeks, *Family Memories*, FM-A-L-2016-049

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Wendell Meeks was born in July, 1944 in Centralia, Illinois, and grew up there, attending a segregated elementary school before moving on to the city's only high school, where African-Americans were a distinct minority. Wendell thrived in the school, however, serving as the class president his sophomore year, and playing on several sports teams. He ran the 440 in track, played the guard position in football, and was center on the Centralia Orphans basketball team, starting his senior year. The basketball team made the state tournament in 1961, Wendell's junior year, but was beaten by only two points in the Super-Sectionals by Collinsville, the state's champion that year. In 1962 they again made the tournament, beating Belleville in the Super-Sectionals before losing to Chicago-Carver in the Quarterfinals. Carver went on to win the championship that year.

Following high school, Wendell selected Oberlin College in Ohio, a school with a long and rich history of progressivism. He received a scholarship from Oberlin, but the scholarship required him to work in the cafeteria. Between his work, academics (he majored in mathematics) and sports, especially basketball, Meeks kept a very busy schedule. He enjoyed his time on the basketball team, but Oberlin was never competitive with other teams in their league. He discussed many of the historical events that occurred while he was there, including the civil rights movement, the Kennedy assassination, and the emerging anti-war movement. Following graduation and his initial failure to find a teaching position in Centralia, he attended graduate school at Northern Illinois University, earning a Master's Degree and a teaching certificate in 1967. He taught first at Lake Forest, then at Florida A & M before moving to Springfield, Illinois in 1976, where he spent the rest of his career in education.

Subject Headings/Key Words: growing up in Centralia, Illinois during the 1950s; race relations in Centralia during 1950s; Centralia *Orphans*; Oberlin College; 1961 Illinois State basketball tournament; 1962 Illinois State basketball tournament; 1963 Illinois State basketball tournament; Civil Rights movement of the early 1960s;

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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