

Black Archives of Mid-America / Kansas City Public Library Oral History Collection (AC12)

Interview #45: Neal, James McKinley

Interviewer: Rose Bell

Date: 03/11/1975

Length: Part 1, 59:55; Part 2, 13:09

Summary:

00:00 – 01:43: Discussion of Mr. Neal’s family background and education. Mr. Neal was born in Greensboro, Georgia on March 8, 1907. He was the fourth of ten children in the family. He graduated from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. He later received a B.S. from Capitol College of Pharmacy in Denver, Colorado.

01:43 – 03:09: Discussion of how Mr. Neal came to Kansas City, Missouri. Mr. Neal worked his way through Morehouse College as an agent for the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. He traveled fifteen years for the company after graduating from college, serving as state manager in a number of states, including Missouri. When Mr. Neal came to Kansas City, Missouri, he met and married his wife. Mrs. Neal was already established in the drug store business and encouraged him to join the business.

03:09 – 05:07: Mr. Neal discusses his political career. Mr. Neal was elected to the Missouri state legislature in 1946. He served until 1964. During this period, Mr. Neal became the top man in seniority in the legislature and served on five legislative committees. He was the first African American to serve as chair of a standing committee. Mr. Neal sponsored all of the civil rights legislation introduced during his tenure.

05:07 – 07:43: Discussion of legislative appropriations that improved conditions at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. During Mr. Neal’s tenure in the Missouri legislature, Lincoln University established a ROTC program and built an auditorium, a gymnasium, new dormitories, and a student union.

07:44 – 10:33: Discussion of Mr. Neal’s accomplishments as a state representative. Mr. Neal believes the legislation creating the Human Rights Commission in Missouri in 1957 was his most important legislative achievement. He also worked on the bill that made Kansas City University part of the University of Missouri system. Mr. Neal was the first African American to stay in a Missouri hotel as a permanent guest. During the majority of Mr. Neal’s tenure, he had to stay in the guest dormitories at Lincoln University because he could not stay in the local hotels.

- 10:34 – 12:21: Mr. Neal discusses working with white legislators in the Missouri House of Representatives.
- 12:22 – 13:49: Discussion of Mr. Neal's first home in Kansas City, Missouri, and residential segregation in the city.
- 13:50 – 16:52: Mr. Neal discusses how his circumstances were different from other blacks in the city. As both a legislator and business owner, he had the respect of both blacks and whites in Kansas City, Missouri.
- 16:53 – 19:26: Discussion of changing conditions for African Americans in Kansas City, Missouri. Mr. Neal began operating Regal Pharmacy at 2462 Brooklyn Avenue in 1934, on the edge of the 25th Street racial dividing line in Kansas City. He also discusses the work of civil rights organizations.
- 19:27 – 23:48: Discussion of soldiers returning from World War II and women on the home front during the war. Soldiers were more militant when they returned, seeking civil rights in various areas, including housing and education. Many women were employed at the Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant making better wages than they had before. Relief organizations took a more active role during the war to help support black families on the home front.
- 23:49 – 28:30: Discussion of Mr. Neal's legislative activities. Mr. Neal notes that most African American legislators were expected to sponsor civil rights legislation, but he supported all good bills regardless of whether they were introduced by a white legislator or not. Mr. Neal worked closely with the Urban League and the NAACP. Legislative success came from being rational and using facts. Mr. Neal also discusses working with Frank C. Mazzuca and other legislators from the Kansas City area.
- 28:31 – 30:06: Mr. Neal discusses his wife and her commitment to running the pharmacy during his legislative career.
- 30:07: End of side one.
- 30:08 – 32:14: Discussion of Mr. Neal's family and books written by his son-in-law.
- 32:15 – 33:50: Discussion of education for social advancement.
- 33:51 – 38:00: Mr. Neal discusses his involvement with the Urban League, Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Hospital, and Paseo Baptist Church. Both Mr. Neal and his wife were strong supporters of Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Hospital.
- 38:01 – 40:45: Discussion of the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Neal helped organize and served as executive secretary for the Kansas City Negro Chamber of Commerce. The white chamber of commerce desegregated in the 1960s.
- 40:46 – 45:09: Discussion of black churches. Mr. Neal describes why he believes churches are not as integrated as other organizations.

45:10 – 48:11: Discussion of African American employment. Mr. Neal describes the differences between black employment in the 1930s and that of the present.

48:12 – 49:59: Discussion of local organizations that improved the lives of African Americans in Kansas City, Missouri. Mr. Neal credits the NAACP and Urban League for improving conditions for blacks.

50:00 – 53:07: Discussion of the Model Cities Program.

53:08 – 59:53: Mr. Neal discusses Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Hospital and his interest in health and welfare. He says that good health is next to education in importance. While the hospital has an integrated staff, that majority of the staff is black.

59:54: End of tape one.

00:00 – 13:08: Inaudible.

13:09: End of tape two.

Index Terms:

Atlanta Life Insurance Company
 Capitol College of Pharmacy [Denver, Colorado]
 Chamber of Commerce [Kansas City, Missouri]
 Churches
 Education
 Greensboro, Georgia
 Human Rights Commission
 Kansas City, Missouri
 Lincoln University [Jefferson City, Missouri]
 Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Hospital [Kansas City, Missouri]
 Mazzuca, Frank C.
 Missouri State Legislature
 Model Cities Program
 Morehouse College [Atlanta, Georgia]
 Neal, James M.
 Negro Chamber of Commerce [Kansas City, Missouri]
 Paseo Baptist Church [Kansas City, Missouri]
 Politicians
 Regal Pharmacy [Kansas City, Missouri]
 Segregation
 State Representatives
 Sunflower Army Ammunition Plant
 Urban League of Greater Kansas City
 World War II

**Summary compiled by Kirsten Patton, June 2014. Edited by Michael Sweeney,
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