

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

Interview #10: Bryant, Dr. Girard T.

Interviewer: Edward Scott

Date: 04/20/1976

Length: 60:06

Summary:

00:00 – 03:00: Discussion of Dr. Bryant's family background. Dr. Bryant was born in 1905 in Wellston, Missouri, a small community outside of St. Louis. His mother, Lydia Thompson Bryant, was born in Bridgeton, Missouri. His father, Sylvester Bryant, was a Spanish American War veteran. As a child, Dr. Bryant lived with his maternal grandparents.

03:00 – 03:39: Discussion of Dr. Bryant's schooling. He attended Normandy Consolidated School, a one room school house in Normandy, Missouri. He went to Sumner High School in St. Louis, Missouri.

03:39 – 04:20: Dr. Bryant discusses his grandparents. They were named Annie Patsy Thompson and Henry Thompson. Mrs. Thompson was an independent woman who owned her own home.

04:20 – 05:48: Discussion of Dr. Bryant's high school and college experience. Dr. Bryant received good grades at Sumner High School. He went to the University of Chicago in 1922 and graduated in 1926. He was president of the university's chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi. Dr. Bryant majored in History and minored in a number of subjects, including Education, English, and Political Science.

05:48 – 09:16: Dr. Bryant discusses his teaching position at Western Baptist Bible College in Kansas City, Missouri. Dr. Bryant took the position in 1927. He taught African American history, English, and Spanish for \$70 a month plus room and board. Dr. Bryant briefly taught at Kansas Vocational School in Topeka, Kansas. He met his wife while teaching at Kansas Vocational School. Dr. Bryant came back to Western Baptist Bible College but did not stay long because the salary would not support a family. He chose to take a position at Lincoln High School.

09:00 – 10:32: Discussion of Western Baptist Bible College. The college taught students from elementary to high school with some college instruction. Dr. Bryant compares the students at Western Baptist Bible College with those at Lincoln High School.

- 10:32 – 11:48: Discussion of Dr. Bryant's experience at Lincoln High School. He was elected president of the Secondary Teachers Study Club and joined the Cooperative Teachers Association. Dr. Bryant switched from teaching English to History when the school moved to 2111 Woodland Avenue. He became head of the History Department about 1938.
- 11:48 – 12:58: Discussion of Dr. Bryant's experience at Lincoln Junior College. Matthew Carroll, dean of Lincoln Junior College, died in 1941. H. O. Cook named Dr. Bryant as the new dean of the college. Dr. Bryant received a Master's degree from the University of Kansas in 1938.
- 12:58 – 14:20: Discussion of teachers at Lincoln High School. Teachers at Lincoln High School were recruited from Big 10 schools. Mr. Jeffries, for example, was a graduate of Tufts University. This had a positive impact on students at the high school.
- 14:21 – 18:36: Dr. Bryant discusses student learning, the desire to learn, and how it has changed over time.
- 18:37 – 20:05: Dr. Bryant describes his experience in Bangkok, Thailand. He received a Fulbright grant to teach for one year in 1954.
- 20:06 – 22:09: Discussion of the integration of Kansas City schools. When Dr. Bryant returned to the United States in 1955, he assumed the position of vice-principal of Manual High School. At the time, there was a mix of black, white, Italian, and Mexican students. Dr. Bryant was transferred to Central High School. He went on to serve as assistant dean at Kansas City Junior College in 1960.
- 22:10 – 25:25: Discussion of black student graduation rate at Kansas City Junior College. There were few African American students at Kansas City Junior College prior to 1963. Part of the graduation rate problem was that teachers felt a sense of pride in being tough on students, and they often did not help students. Kansas City Junior College changed its name to Metropolitan Community College in 1964.
- 25:26 – 28:20: Discussion of the quality of education at Metropolitan Community College. Vocational education was introduced in 1964.
- 28:21 – 30:40: Dr. Bryant talks about the importance of being involved in the community. He was a charter member of Fellowship House. In 1943, Dr. Bryant participated in the Committee on the Practice of Democracy, organized by Virginia Oldham, an English teacher at Central High School. This group created Fellowship House.
- 30:40: End of side one.
- 30:41 – 32:04: Continued discussion of Fellowship House. The purpose of the organization was to break down racial barriers. Fellowship House desegregated businesses and public places, such as Municipal Auditorium.

32:05 – 36:52: Discussion of Dr. Bryant’s other community activities. Dr. Bryant served as Grand Historian for the Kappa Alpha Psi in Kansas City, vice-president of the board of the YMCA, and president of the trustee board at Second Baptist Church. In 1958 he served as a board member for Queen of the World Hospital. Dr. Bryant was secretary for the General Hospital board of directors. In 1960 he joined the Mental Health Organization of Kansas City; he was the first black president of the organization. Dr. Bryant was appointed a police commissioner in 1965.

36:53 – 38:30: Dr. Bryant discusses how he spent his summers. He worked waiting tables on the Union Pacific Railroad, taught at Atlanta University, Lincoln University, and Florida A. & M. Dr. Bryant took a year to work on his doctorate through Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri; he received his degree in 1963. Dr. Bryant also traveled during the summer.

38:31 – 41:25: Dr. Bryant talks about his children. Betty Ann Moreno is an entertainer in Los Angeles, California. Barbara Jane Wallace is a registered nurse in Los Angeles, California. Dr. Bryant has two grandchildren.

39:40 – 43:00: Discussion about Dr. Bryant’s travels. Dr. Bryant also discusses teaching at Washington University in St. Louis as a visiting lecturer.

43:01 – 46:45: Dr. Bryant’s wife, Louise R. Bryant, discusses her childhood, life, and education. At the time of the interview, the couple had been married for forty-seven years. Dr. Bryant says that Kansas City has been good to him. He has lived comfortably, and the city has recognized his accomplishments.

47:47 – 49:20: Discussion of women’s liberation and abortion.

49:21 – 53:55: Discussion of President Gerald Ford and Governor Jimmy Carter.

53:56 – 60:04: Discussion of religion and ethics. Dr. Bryant believes people put more emphasis on religion than ethics. Dr. Bryant also briefly discusses the Nation of Islam and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

60:05: End of side two.

Index Terms:

Bangkok, Thailand
 Bryant, Girard T.
 Bryant, Louise R.
 Central High School [Kansas City, Missouri]
 Education
 Fellowship House
 Kansas City, Missouri
 Kansas City Junior College [Kansas City, Missouri]
 Kansas Vocational School [Topeka, Kansas]
 Kappa Alpha Psi

Lincoln High School [Kansas City, Missouri]
Lincoln Junior College [Kansas City, Missouri]
Manual High School [Kansas City, Missouri]
Mental Health Organization of Kansas City
Metropolitan Community College [Kansas City, Missouri]
Normandy, Missouri
Oldham, Virginia
St. Louis, Missouri
Sumner High School [St. Louis, Missouri]
Teachers
University of Chicago [Chicago, Illinois]
University of Kansas [Lawrence, Kansas]
Washington University [St. Louis, Missouri]
Wellston, Missouri
Western Baptist Bible College [Kansas City, Missouri]

**Summary compiled by Tyler Janke, June 2014. Edited by Michael Sweeney,
Collection Librarian, July 2014.**