

T. Harry Williams

Center for Oral History

LSU Libraries Special Collections



SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



General Interview Questions

Origin

- When did you come here?
- Why?
- With whom?
- What neighborhood or community did you live at first?
- How many people lived in your home?
- Anyone besides you immediate family?

Family Background

- What do you remember about your grandparents?
- Where did they live?
- When did you see them?
- How often did you see them?
- What would you do with them?
- Did they ever talk about their youth or share any stories with you about their lives?

Career

- What was your first job?
- What were your wages?
- How long did you stay at this work?
- What other jobs have you held?
- For how long?
- What job did you like the best and which job did you like the least?
- Who else worked in your family?

Community

- Define your neighborhood or community.
- What are the geographic boundaries?
- What was most important to people in that community?
- How has the community changed within your lifetime as far as physical appearance is concerned?
- What were the "bad sections" of town?
- Can you describe them?
- What were the gathering places in your neighborhood or community?
- What did you do for fun?
- Where did the men go and where did the women go?
- Were there places specifically for single people?



Neighborhood

- What do you remember about your home and your neighbors' homes?
- Who were your neighbors?
- Which relatives lived nearby?
- What were the occasions for family gatherings?
- What do you remember about them?

Childhood

- What are some of your earliest childhood memories?
- What was the greatest joy or sadness of your childhood?
- Who were your childhood role models?
- What were the things that you enjoyed as a child?
- How were you expected to behave in front of adults?

Family Life

- How were decisions made in your family?
- Who made decisions about housekeeping, budget, etc.?
- How about other decisions like schooling, moving, occupation, approval of marriage?
- Do you ever remember any conflicts over decisions or decision-making?
- Who took the responsibility for childcare and discipline?
- Did you treat your own children the same or differently than your parents treated you?

Education

- How much schooling did you get?
- Where did you go and for how long?
- Did you attend school for the entire school year?
- What did you like and dislike about school?
- How did the teachers discipline students?
- How were your parents involved in your schooling?
- What kinds of things did you learn in school?
- What were the major differences between your education and your parents' education or your children's education?

Religion

- Did your family attend church?
- Where? Who made up the congregation?



- If you do not attend, why?
- If you do, what churches have you attended and why?
- Who were some of the leaders and what did they do?
- What was your church's and minister's role in civic affairs?

Property

- What property (land or house) do you own today?
- How did you come to own it?
- Did your family ever rent?

Growing Up

- What kinds of values do you think your parents instilled in you?
- When did you first consider yourself grown up?
- Who were the people most important to you?
- How were unmarried people viewed in your neighborhood?

Healthcare

- What kind of healthcare was available to you and your family?
- Were your children born in a hospital or at home?
- Did a doctor or a midwife assist in the delivery?

Culture

- Did you ever attend a tent show?
- o Did you attend the theater?
- Did you attend the movies?
- What were the different entertainment options in your neighborhood and how did you decide what you would do on any given evening?

Necessities

- Where did you do your marketing?
- Where did you buy clothes?
- Where did you buy food?
- Where did you get your hair done or cut?
- Why did you patronize these businesses?

Travel

- What's the furthest you traveled growing up?
- How did you travel?
- What do you remember about the trip?



MUSIC/DANCE

- Where were you first exposed to music?
- What kind of songs did you sing?
- Would you describe music as part of family gatherings?
- What role did music play in your family/community?
- Did you use shape note singing?
- How familiar are you with quartet singing?
- What did your mom sing while she did housework?
- When you were little, what were your favorite songs?
- Can you still sing any of these songs? Would you?
- Where were you exposed to dance? How/Where?

GARDENING/FARMING

- How many gardens did you plant a year?
- What were the types of gardens?
- When did you start planting?
- How did you learn when to plant things?
- Who worked in the garden?
- What did you do with the food?
- Who cooked it?
- Who hoed it? Who weeded it?
- How was food used in celebrations like Christmas or harvest?
- What did you have in your yard (chickens, dogs...)
- How did you preserve the food?
- What did you do about deer eating the plants? About weeds?
- How do you plant by the moon or plant by the almanac?

FOOD

- What food today brings back childhood memories?
- What was your favorite food growing up?
- When did you start cooking? Who taught you to cook?
- What kind of variety did you have in food?
- What foods were cooked for celebrations or special events?
- What did your family do with extra food?
- What did you eat in a typical daily meal?
- What was a Sunday meal?
- Where did you get the ingredients?
- What was your mother's favorite dish to make?
- Do you remember your grandmother's cooking? What was her specialty?



LIVESTOCK

- What livestock did you have livestock (chickens, cows, pigs, etc.)?
- If so, who took care of the livestock?
- How old were you when you started doing your first chores?
- Where did you get milk?
- What time of year was for butchering?
- Would you tell me a little about fishing and hunting?
- Who did the fishing and hunting in your family?
- Where were the good spots?
- When did you hunt and fish?

MEDICAL TREATMENT

- Did you grow or gather plants for home remedies?
- Where did you get medical treatment?
- How often did you go to the doctor?
- How were babies delivered?
- How much did a midwife cost?
- Who were they?
- Did you see a midwife bag?
- Where did people learn to be midwives?
- What did you do for...
 - a. Colds?
 - b. Mosquitoes?
 - c. Broken bones?
 - d. Stomach aches?
 - e. Headaches?
 - f. Serious illnesses.
- Do you remember any special treatments or home remedies your family was known for?

BAPTISMS

- Where were baptisms performed?
- What music do you remember?
- What did you wear?
- At what age were you baptized?
- What kind of gifts did you receive?
- Was there a celebration afterwards?
- Who performed the baptism?
- What time of year did it take place?
- What preceded the baptism? (Revival...?_How many people would be baptized at one time?



WEDDINGS

- What was it like when you were “courting” or “keeping company”?
- How common was it to get married?
- Why did people get married?
- Was there a dowry?
- What food was served?
- Where and when were you married?
- Who performed the ceremony?
- What happened when there were mixed marriages?
- What music did you have at weddings?
- How would you describe the ceremony?
- Was “jumping the broom” included?
- Were you ever married? At what age? What did you wear?

FUNERALS

- When someone died, how long did you keep the body?
- What about wakes?
- What were the beliefs about what happened to persons after death?
- What role did the benevolent society play in funerals and burials?
- What did a burial cost?
- Where did you bury people?
- What cemeteries around are your community?
- What did you bury people in? (clothes)
- What materials did you send with them?

World War Two

- Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Describe your reaction/your friends' reactions. If you were in college when Pearl Harbor occurred, how did it affect your school/the students?
- How did you end up in the service? Did you enlist or were you drafted?
- Did you select the branch of service? If so, why?
- Where were you inducted?
- Describe training and adjusting to military life?
- What rank did you hold when you were inducted?
- Describe the training schools?
- What became your specialty?
- When did you ship overseas and where did you go?
- Tell us what no one else can: about your emotions, about the taste, touch, and smell of daily life.



World War Two (contin.)

- Tell us about the people you knew, your buddies, your unit.
- Tell us about your leaves, your recreation, your promotions, about all the days you spent in transit or simply waiting at a base.
- Tell me what you thought was significant.
- Tell me about the equipment that you used.
- What was the enemies' equipment like, if you know?
- Were you married before you left?
- If applicable, What happened on your first invasion?
- When did you get fired at?
- When did you first fire in anger?
- What happened in the campaign that followed?
- What did you eat?
- Who got wounded?
- How good was your C.O.?
- And the other officers?
- When and where did you sleep?
- Charge forward?
- Receive a counter attack?
- Where and when did relief come and what did you do?
- Describe leaves and weekends -- entertainment, USO shows, dinners with local families, attending church, etc.
- Describe your reaction and the reactions of the soldiers in your unit to the end of the war in Europe (V-E Day, 8 May 1945). How did your unit celebrate the victory?
- Describe your reaction to the V-J Day. How did you feel about the use of nuclear weapons to end the war in Japan?

The Civil Rights Movement

- Do you remember any particular controversy in your community/neighborhood?
- How was it settled?
- What was the role of boycotts of businesses, schools, transportation?
- When did you first vote?
- What do you remember about people organizing around voting?
- How did you get local/national news?
- Which newspapers did you read?
- Who were the most important people in your community?
- Who were the important black national figures in this time?
- What was it like being black in the South at that time?



The Civil Rights Movement (contin.)

- What were the signs and symbols of the Jim Crow era?
- What were some of the differences you encountered? Schools, public places?
- Who were some of the people fighting against segregation?
- Who was fighting for segregation?
- What role did soldiers returning from WWII play in the movement?
- What role did women play in the movement?
- What role did churches play in the movement?
- How did the Civil Rights Movement affect your life?
- Was there an NAACP in your community?
- If so, who belonged?
- What were the main voluntary associations or clubs in your community?
- Who could join them?
- What did you think of the fraternal organizations and the sororities?
- Do you belong to any organizations?
- If so, how are decisions made at meetings?
- How are conflicts resolved within the organization?

LSU Alum

- Why did you decide to go to college? Why did you choose to attend LSU?
- What did you hope going to college would do for you?
- Did many of your friends or relatives go to college or was this unusual?
- How did you pay for college?
- Did you work while a student at LSU?
- How did you find work? Who did you work for? What were your duties? What were you paid? Did you learn anything valuable from this work?
- Describe your first day on campus.
- Was there any hazing of freshmen? How did you and/or others respond?
- Where did you live? If not in the dorm, how did you find a place to live?
- Who were your roommates? Did you know them before or were they chosen for you? Describe them.
- Describe your dormitory room.
- What was your major and why did you choose it? Did you change it and if so to what and why?



LSU Alum (contin.)

- What was your favorite class? Why?
- What was your most memorable class? Why?
- Who was your most memorable professor? Why?
- [For students between 1941 and 1979] Did you have a class with T. Harry Williams? Describe Williams and the class. What did you learn in this class? If you did not take any of his classes, what if anything did you hear about his classes?
- What rules applied to dormitory living--housekeeping, quiet hours, lights out, closing hours, visitors, etc.?
- For women, describe the closing hours, sign out procedures, dress codes, and any other specific regulations for women.
- Who made these rules and how were they enforced (i.e. by residence assistants, a student-run dorm council, university administrators)?
- What were the penalties? Can you recall any specific example of someone breaking these rules? What happened to them?
- What activities were you involved with? [Student government, honorary and professional clubs and societies, service clubs, theater/music groups, newspaper or annual, etc.] What were the major activities of this group?
- Describe fellow members and any faculty or administrators who were involved.
- Did you hold any offices? How did you get this position? Was it appointive, elective? Describe process.
- What sports if any did you take part in? Who was the coach? How were teams selected? What was the most prestigious sport? Why?
- Social Life? Dances-dress, drinking? bands-black? chaperons? sponsors, frequency.
- Dates- activities, frequency.
- Concerts, theater, other cultural activities sponsored by LSU? or available in BR.
- Riding with boys? rules about this?
- Did you belong to a sorority or fraternity? Why? Why not?
- Describe rush. What were the criteria by which pledges were chosen? Why did you choose the sorority/fraternity you did?
- Describe your house or meeting rooms.
- Describe initiation. Was there any hazing involved?
- Describe other activities, ceremonies, etc.
- What was the role of sorority/fraternities on campus?
- Which ones were most prestigious? Why?



LSU Alum (contin.)

- Did s/f affiliation affect who you dated?
- Cadets (ROTC): What company were you in? Who were the officers? What were their duties?
- Who was Commandant of Cadets? Describe him.
- Was there any hazing of freshmen?
- How did freshmen respond to this?
- What did you especially like or dislike about military training? Why?
- What did you learn from it?
- Who were the sponsors of the cadet companies, members of Angle Flight, and other military auxiliaries? What was the function of these groups?
- Student Leaders: Who were the most popular and/or influential students? What offices did they hold? What f/s did they belong to?
- Who was Darling of LSU, homecoming queen, Sweetheart of Sigma Chi, etc and how were they chosen?
- What was the greatest contribution of your LSU experience to your later life?
- What do you wish LSU had given you that it didn't?

NOTES: