

6-6-1969

Interview no. 22

Mrs. Del Barton

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Del Barton

INTERVIEWER: _____

PROJECT: Speech

DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 6, 1969

TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: _____

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Talk on beliefs and spiritual values of Indians contrasted with those of white people.

7 pages

Mrs. Del Barton, The Westerners, El Paso Corral, June 6, 1969.

B: There is one subject I think that I am an authority on and that is being an Indian. When I was five years old my great, great grandfather decided that I must learn the why and how the white man thought. He sent me away to be raised by white people to be educated and raised as a white child. When I was 18 I met my grandfather, and I am sorry to say that the whole point of his plan was a complete failure. What I learned was that I was an Indian. That probably sounds rather strange but when you're five years old and taken away from your people and live as a white person you begin to forget. As the years go on you have no knowledge of the fact of whom and what you are because I think most children don't anyway. If they are not in contact with their own heritage and their culture, they lose sight of the fact that they are possibly different. As I grew older I began to realize that I was different, and I didn't know why. It took me a long time to find out why and that's when I came back to my own people and felt that I was at home again. That's one of the things I want to talk to you about--this difference of other people.

As far as the environment and heritage are concerned, that has been settled for me, but perhaps environment has a great deal to do with a child if that child is of the same cultural background. But I don't believe it does if the backgrounds are different.

I lived with my white parents in a white society until my whole heritage was a completely forgotten thing. There was never any mention of the fact that I was anything but their child in all those years

that I lived with them. But since I did come back and did learn the difference I believe that the cultural background of a person is the most important thing in their lives. And I believe that this cultural background, this cultural contact between the white and the Indian, was the real thing that shaped and formed this nation. I do not believe that it was the battles. I do not believe that it was the clash of the two people other than this difference in background and the fact that they could not understand each other. This lack of understanding still goes on to this day. Because for the white man what is ambition, to the Indian is pure greed; what is expediency is fraud; what is diplomacy is simply a lie. Now, because of these differences and not being able to understand each other I hope that tonight I don't say anything that is going to offend you.

Commander McKinney was all upset when he came in to inform me that this was referred to as 'squaw night'. He had so carelessly phrased it I was going to defend it. Commander McKinney trying to explain something that he doesn't know how to explain is frightening.

The Indian ideal was honored above all things. Now 'honored' meant acting truthfully in all things even when it was to one's own disadvantage. It was the excellent respect for each person's right to form and shape his own individuality and his own destiny. It was pride in himself, in his nation, and the extent to which he kept these laws was a measure of manhood. I don't intend to try and convey the idea that we did not have our scoundrels. Oh, yes we did, and we've still got them. We have a

very positive code of punishment. For those who transgressed, the greatest punishment was banishment. For, of all things, the Indian family life is the most desirable. Some of the lesser forms of punishment was death. And this is one of the areas in which we have a great deal of misunderstanding because in a white man's world death is the ultimate punishment. Death for an Indian is not punishment at all, it's a rectification. To understand that you would have to understand Indian philosophy. The Indian knows that there is no such thing as hell. There is no termination of one's self. His knowledge of the continuation of life makes life as a simple classroom where the individual has the opportunity of advancing himself. All life is one stage or another of learning. When a person is failing his course and he is bound to flunk, there's only one thing to do, send him back and let him start over. But with the white man, death being the ultimate--the Indian just cannot understand this sort of thing. Christian philosophy seems to use the same thing about a continuation of life, but it's very difficult for the Indian to understand how the white man can advocate such a philosophy and yet consider this death so undesirable. So undesirable, in fact, that he'll do almost anything to prevent it. He'll sell his honor, he'll sell his soul, he'll betray his fellow men, all to save his own life. And he is apparently justified from doing so by his fellow men. One would think that this song, "Everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die" sort of sums it up very well. But the Indian, because of his philosophy, finds very little that is necessary in the material world. His objective is supposed to be spiritual achievement. It was pretty much so before the advance of

the white men. Therefore, he was and he still is at a loss to comprehend the white man's burning ambition to attain these material possessions. The Indian cannot understand what it is that the white man seeks. For even to this day, actually, the minority groups still seeks not only possession of the earth but of the moon and the stars and this is beyond Indian comprehension, absolutely.

It was beyond his comprehension years ago when he fell back, always falling back, hoping that the white man was going to be satisfied. It took him a long time to learn that the white man is a hunter and he is a hunter of nothing in particular and everything in general. When the Indian hunts he feels he should have something in mind; when the white man hunts, he is hunting because he has an innate curiosity and a determined design to place his mark on everything he discovers. Because of his very nature, he does this. And what my people never understood and still don't understand is that this is not exactly a racial trait, it's an individual trait with the white man. After all, aren't the Americans and the Russians right now vying with each other trying to put their flag and their feet on the moon first? We can't comprehend what there is so great about this 'first' and why. I doubt that there are too many people who can tell me just exactly why we must have an American put his foot on the moon first. That I can't understand, can you? But is it possible for an Indian to comprehend why it is necessary for a white man to dissect everything he discovers, when he's discovered it? He was, and he still is, appalled by the white man craving to take out, put in, cut down, build up, plow up,

recede, dry up, drill into, pull out of. It appears as if the white man is not the least bit contented with creation the way it is. He has to attempt to improve on it. To the Indian, all he's managed to do is destroy, contaminate, corrupt, and pollute. It's beyond the comprehension of the Indian that anybody but a fool would continue on a course that ends in one disaster after another. He felt very confident when the white man came to these shores that he had proven to him that it was disastrous to try to take over this continent. All too late, the Indian learned that these men were neither fools nor were they going to give up just because there was one disaster after another. Too late he learned there were many men that would sell their honor to achieve something. They would sell their soul for something they coveted. And that's what defeated the Indian. It was not the wars, it was not the arms, it was not the many, many people who came to this continent. It was their inability to understand and to comprehend their code. It was the Indian's inability to think, or to feel or to react as anybody except an Indian. It was his inability to know the ambitions of the invader. It was his inability to anticipate his foe. And that's the real reason the history of this country reads like it does now. If my people had been able to comprehend the nature of the white man they would have united just as Tecumseh planned for them to do back in the days just preceeding the Indian War. Today, Mr. Nixon would not have lost a single hour of sleep wondering whether his personality was going to project on TV. So I would like to ask you, our modern day historians, to think about these

differences in people and keep it in mind as you attempt to portray the past events in as much as they concern my people. The history of those early days was written entirely by white men who, humanly enough, were not only prejudiced in their own favor but they were inclined to shade a great many events into the color of their own objectives and they were totally unaware of the Indian's inability to comprehend them. Thank goodness we are somewhat more enlightened. There is less prejudice now. Not only in this country but throughout the entire world. Because after all, prejudice is nothing more or less than a lack of understanding and fear of that lack. It's disappearing now from the heart of things. This may not seem true to a great many people at this moment when we're all concerned with the cry that is being made over this country between the white and the so-called minority races. But nevertheless, it is true because just like the measles, the worst contagion is over once the rash breaks out. Once prejudice was classified as a sin--something to be abhorred. Today most people see it for what it is, as a fear. Once there were a great many good men who tried to stamp it out because they did feel it was uncharitable to call attention to the differences in men. Their intentions were very good. But they were advocating a false concept--that all men are alike. Like most false concepts, there were those who recognized them as just that, false, and so prejudice continued. But if we would consider these things, that people are different, perhaps then we can find out what is wrong and correct it. After all, is it so important to recognize a rose as a rose and know that it smells sweet, or a thistle as a thistle and know the distinction. We do this in nature

every day. So I think people should recognize the fact that people with centuries of cultural differences are going to be different. There is nothing and no way that we can classify them all into one lump and say, "I judge this man by my standards." It cannot be done. We can't expect the Indian to react like a white man and we can't expect the white man to respond like an Indian. If we can just recognize these things as so, and if we could understand them and respect them and know that these differences make us what we are, white or Indian, without in any way lessening or enhancing either of us as individuals or people, we'll come a lot closer to knowing each other. As historians you can't change the course of history but you can, if you will, change the color of it by casting the white in the shadows of these prejudices to reveal a complete picture in vivid detail, leaving no room for imagination, conjecture, or doubt. Perhaps you can bring about an understanding of the Indian and portray him not contemptuously as an ignorant savage as he once was, who stood in the way of progress, nor sentimentally as the Noble Red Man, victim of a more enlightened civilization. He was simply a man who loved his home, his family, and his way of life. He was simply a man who was shaped and motivated by his own concept of his relationship to life. Because he was himself, he lost. Not necessarily to avoid intelligent people, but more certainly to avoid determination to possess. When he did learn this, it was too late because he was already a prisoner in his own country. But I like to think that even though this is so, there are still some of us who will always remain Indian. Some of us who will remember the teachings of our father who find the cost of civilization much too dear to ever attempt to be anything except what we are, Indians.