

**VOICES OF 1968**  
**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

University of Delaware Library, Museums & Press

**TIMESTAMP DOCUMENTATION**

Notes from Claire La Mar Carey and Harmon Carey interview

Interview Date: August 13, 2018

Interview Location: One-Button Studio, Morris Library, University of Delaware

Interviewer: Dr. Roderick Carey

Note taker: L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin

<b>Time (M/S)</b>	<b>Topic/Notes</b>
00:00	Introductions
01:16	Claire La Mar Carey began employment as the first black female chemist at Hercules on September 13, 1965. Recruited as an analytical chemist for positions at Hercules and DuPont. Met Harmon through volunteerism at Peoples Settlement in Wilmington.
02:25	Harmon Carey was program director at Peoples Settlement Association, 408 East 8 <sup>th</sup> Street, Wilmington, near where he grew up in the 400 block of East 5 <sup>th</sup> Street. Peoples Settlement had been an all-white institution serving white families. Programs helped immigrants adjust to the United States. Programs changed over time.
03:50	Big push in the mid-1960s for programs for African-American communities. James Sills, who had been supervisor at the State of Delaware Family Court became executive director of Peoples Settlement. Harmon Carey had been on staff at Family Court; Sills recruited him to be program director at Peoples Settlement. Previously, Sills had recruited Harmon to be program director at Department of Public Welfare, 1958.
05:00	After service in the Army and college, Harmon Carey obtained his masters in social work at University of Pennsylvania; his experience was in case work, not group work nor in community organizations. Became in charge of programs at Peoples Settlement; sought African-American adults as role models for youth, especially young ladies.
06:40	This was how Harmon met Claire and she became coach of the girls' basketball program at Peoples Settlement.

- 07:15 Claire met Harmon through her roommate. Hard to find housing as a single black woman in 1965. This was around time of fair housing issues. Claire's mother, who had been on the board of the Phyllis Wheatley Branch of the Y in Augusta, Georgia, drove with her up to Wilmington and helped her move into the YWCA. Lived at YWCA at King and Ninth Street. One of the program directors at the Y was an African-American woman, Sylvia DuBose from Ohio, who became her friend and roommate. Sylvia, also a professional social worker, knew Harmon and introduced him to Claire.
- 09:40 As a volunteer, Claire began coaching girls basketball in 1966. Also launched a group called Teen Queens.
- 10:00 Claire was also in night classes at University of Delaware, which is how she knew so many chemistry professors at UD.
- 11:00 Harmon described programs and needs at Peoples Settlement. Girls wanted to join clubs for recreation but program directors also hoped that they would learn other skills, manners, etiquette, so role models were important in the selection of volunteers.
- 12:25 Example of learning: girls attended a luncheon event and were served tossed salads. None had ever seen a green salad like that before. Important to be exposed to other lives and experiences.
- 13:05 Claire spoke about African-American role models (called Black/Negro at the time) and the need for kids to see people with the same color as their own skins; other than knowing teachers, this was first chance for most kids to see a black woman in a career like a chemist.
- 14:30 Claire was first black at Hercules. Not overtly difficult position. Seen by some as abnormal. Arrived in Wilmington in her suit, white gloves, and Jackie Kennedy pillbox hat; Dr. John Robinson met her at Hotel du Pont and didn't know she was black. He supported her and they were close from her employment until her retirement in 2003. He later recruited Harmon for a Hercules study in Amsterdam. There were some difficult times but also some wonderful people over the years. Dr. Burke Weldin was a true mentor at Hercules.
- 16:40 There was some condescension, some monitoring of her work, some strong people. Claire had come from Fisk University and Ohio University.
- 17:38 Sought continuing education courses at UD. HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) were lacking at the time in practical experience. Studied instrumentation at UD. Took two courses the first semester she was in Delaware.
- 18:45 Harmon: she came down from Wilmington. Claire: 22 years old and living at the Y.
- 19:20 What was the political climate? Claire was living in an apartment with Sylvia on 7<sup>th</sup> Street between French and King, on the top floor, over doctors' offices. The building was owned by Dr. Leon Anderson, a pioneer black doctor in Wilmington. He was a key rebuilder of the Bethel AME Church; his daughters went to Fisk. Building co-owner was

Dr. Woodrow Wilson, a dentist. Claire felt protected in this black-owned apartment in an urban environment.

- 21:45 Married at the end of 1967.
- 21:58 Recollection: Harmon had confronted racism three blocks away from where he grew up on the East Side, at 420 East Fifth Street, Remembers living across from Pyle Elementary School, near St. Mary's Church, down from Bancroft.
- 22:42 Potent memory: Peoples Settlement at the time (when he was a kid) had a wading pool that was limited to white kids. Harmon remembers really wanting to just go in and have fun. Seems ironic that he was later the second executive director, after Jim Sills, at Peoples Settlement. Recalls a name, Jean Michener, was social worker for girls.
- 24:25 Married end of 1967. Harmon became executive director in August.
- 24:55 Memory: Harmon met board president Dr. Alden Josey, a DuPont chemist, who had a beard; prior to that Harmon could not have a beard even though he wanted to wear a beard. Elizabeth Wilson, country superintendent at the Welfare Department, had told him that beards were not professional and wouldn't allow it. Claire said Harmon didn't have a beard at the wedding because her mother wouldn't allow it.
- 26:13 Jim Sills moved out of Peoples Settlement. Jim and Evelyn Sills lived in an apartment on second floor of the Settlement but moved out after they developed daycare on second floor at the location. The Sills moved to East 6<sup>th</sup> Street.
- 27:26 Peoples Settlement was one of four community settlements serving different neighborhoods: Kingswood Community Center on the North Side, West End Neighborhood (serving mostly white Italians in the area of 8<sup>th</sup> and Lincoln), Christina Community Center (on East side, 7<sup>th</sup> and Church Streets), and Peoples Settlement (East 8<sup>th</sup> and Lombard Streets). There was a study from United Way that resulted in forming the Association of Greater Wilmington Neighborhood Centers (first executive director was Jim Sills, again later followed by Harmon Carey). Jim Sills went on to Washington, D.C., office of the National Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Houses.
- 30:21 Leaders: Frances Bazzoli, West End Neighborhood House. John Cooper was at Christina. [No first name] Dixon was board president and executive director at Kingswood. The four groups resisted association control from the Greater Wilmington Neighborhood Centers. Each community center had their own executive board and there was little cooperation; they tried to convince United Way that structure didn't work.
- 32:50 Harmon Carey brought in Jim Baker as an organizer for community development program; even though Baker didn't have a college degree he had equivalent experience and military service.
- 33:55 Memories of April 4, 1968, and early 1970s. Martin Luther King assassination. Harmon was executive director at the time, was at a Peoples Settlement annual dinner at the Bancroft School. "Black Power" was the cry of the time, across the nation. Dr. Nathan Wright, from Newark, New Jersey, was speaking about black power and urban unrest

(this was the title of his book, *Black Power and Urban Unrest*, 1968). Received the news that MLK had been shot in the course of the dinner, in the middle of Dr. Wright's speech. Harmon, as executive director, was passed a note with the news. A pall came over the evening. There was an entertainer, Al Brown, doing covers of James Brown songs; it didn't seem right so they cancelled the rest of the evening. News drifted in that King had died; people went home early.

- 38:12 East Side families saw more of what happened in Wilmington. Harmon and Claire drove home every day to Arden where they lived. Riots started within a day and were concentrated on the West Side in The Valley. Called "The Valley," rumored to be from the 23d Psalm (Valley of the Shadow of Death) as a warning to white people. Lots of pain and suffering that people had; blaming of white people. Why was unrest in the Valley?
- 40:15 By time of the riots, The Valley was mostly populated by blacks in area on the West Side: around Tatnall, West, and Madison Streets. Area on the East Side had been torn down for urban development.
- There were groups and gangs such as the Blackie Blacks and Zulu Nation on the West Side and the North East. Young population heard the cry for black power. On the East Side, there were the 12<sup>th</sup> Street Stompers and the Downtown. The organization WYEAC (Wilmington Youth Emergency Action Council) tried to bring harmony to the gangs.
- South Street, South Side emulated the national cry. Gangs had picked up. BJ's Corner, a youth center at the Riverside project, was named with the initials of a kid who was killed [B.J. Keller].
- 43:27 What were gangs doing, were they in the riots? Structure was part of it. It was like a candle; all it needed was a light to set it off, like the LA riots. George Brown was killed in a gang fight near Lombard and High Street on the East Side. Brown grew up near Harmon Carey; Harmon was surprised that this little kid became a gang leader.
- 44:36 What was climate of the riots? Claire said it was not that bad but they were rarely in town. Mostly travelled the back roads to Hockessin, between work at the research center at Hercules or at home in Arden. Recalls that Hercules, DuPont and Atlas had an Opportunities in Industrial Communities (OIC) program run by Leon Sullivan. This was a training program to recruit African-American youth. Claire manage a lab with 6-7 technicians and gave guidance on work habits and basic training for employment.
- 47:48 Claire recalled taking her friend Sandy home from work to the West Side and being aware of the curfew. National Guard with guns caused social anxiety.
- 48:48 Frustration with no jobs. Frustration with killing of the peacekeeper MLK.
- 49:20 Wilmington was in a small state with the Guard. Was it necessary? Harmon said there was a need for the Guard early on but people felt it wasn't necessary for them to stay and that they stayed too long. They were intimidating; it was humiliating.

- 50:40 There were a few fires, windows broken, looting of grocery stores. Mullins and other stores downtown were OK; neighborhoods suffered most.
- 51:22 Governor Russ Peterson removed the Guard as first act and believes his position against the continued occupation was a factor in his winning election.
- 51:49 Governor Charles Terry wanted liaison office with the black community. Harmon met with Terry in the governor's office on Scott Street, off Pennsylvania Avenue, to advocate having a link with the black community. Harmon suggested Jim Baker and Baker was hired by Gov. Terry as the Governor's special assistant for community affairs.
- 53:45 Other thoughts. Claire and Harmon both attended graduate school at UD. Claire in Chemistry and Harmon in the Department of Urban Affairs and Public Policy. UD was not a liberal place for students, even in the 1970s. Harmon described lasting memories of incidences reflecting bias, residuals of racial animosities, one in grading and another in acceptance of his dissertation proposal.
- 60:28 Claire served as graduate advisor to Alpha Kappa Alpha - Lambda Gamma Chapter, 1970s. Helped get it established because of pain and hurt of African-American students, something they continue to feel. Gave support to help kids. Stayed late many times to help the students. Racism puts tremendous pressure on students. Worked with [Assistant Dean of Students Richard] Sline on requirements to establish the chapter.
- 62:00 Delta [Sigma Theta] was the first African-American sorority. Doris Smith was president of the sponsoring graduate chapter in Wilmington. Claire also helped West Chester University in founding their chapter.
- 64:40 Harmon's dissertation was about the role of the media in facilitating or negating black leadership's ability to ascend to power. Media picked sacred cows; held others as sacrificial lambs according to whether they were advocates for change or went along with the status quo. The active, aggressive advocates got bad press.
- 67:41 Claire still hearing same frustration of fifty years ago; heard it through involvement with bringing students in Black Achievers program to visit UD.