

Conversations with Theodore C. (“Ted”) DeLaney, Jr.

I: “Growing up in Segregated Lexington”

With David S. Peterson, Interviewer

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Peterson: Welcome. I'm David Peterson, professor of Renaissance history here at Washington and Lee University. It's August 13, 2018. I'm in the Mason Taylor New Room with my good friend and colleague, Professor Theodore C. Delaney, professor of African-American studies, cofounder of the Africana Studies minor, holder of the [Harry E. and Mary Jayne W.] Redenbaugh Chair for Distinguished Teaching, and recipient of numerous honorary degrees, fellowships, and awards, and positions in scholarly societies. This is going to be the first of what we hope will be a series of conversations about Ted's very interesting life, a life that encompasses the history of Lexington, the history of Washington and Lee and, indeed, the history of our nation. So without further ado, I'd like to begin by asking Ted if you could tell us where you were born and when.

DeLaney: I was born right here in Lexington, Virginia, October 18, 1943.¹ I was born in my grandparents' home at 7 Tucker Street in Lexington. I would hasten to point out that in the early 1940s, most people were born at home rather than in medical facilities, so I was born in my grandparents' home where my parents were residing at that particular point.

Peterson: Could you talk a little bit about your family: your parents, your siblings, where your people came from?

DeLaney: Three of my grandparents are from Rockbridge County. Both of my maternal grandparents were from Rockbridge County, and I'm pretty certain that my maternal grandmother was actually born here in Lexington. Their names were Charles Henry [1875-1951] and Margaret Jane Jones Franklin [1885-1958]. My paternal grandmother was born in Natural Bridge and her name was Ruby Myrtle Carter DeLaney [1891-1978]. Only my paternal grandfather was not a Virginian. He was born in Knoxville, Tennessee. His name was Sterling Byars DeLaney [1889-1927]. Those are my four grandparents.

During my early childhood, during my first eleven years, I only had one sibling and that was a younger brother named Charlie, who was named for my maternal grandfather. Charles Henry was his name, in fact.² I grew up with Charlie and with a cousin whose mother was my mother's

¹ Theodore Carter DeLaney Jr.

² Charles Henry DeLaney (1946-92).

sister. Her nickname was Candy.³ It was the three of us. I was two years older than Candy, three years older than Charlie, and so it was the three of us together for most of my life.

Peterson: Could you share with us some of your earliest childhood memories of the Diamond Hill neighborhood, the traditionally African-American neighborhood of Lexington?

DeLaney: The African-American neighborhood in Lexington was a lot larger than it is now.⁴ One of the reasons for that is that in 1928 Lylburn Downing School's present location opened, and soon thereafter, they began to push toward getting at least one or two high school years added to the school. The result of Lylburn Downing School opening was that it caused black folks to move in from the county so that their children would have an opportunity to get an education. There were no school buses and so the idea was that you moved in from places like a black community near Collierstown, for instance. They had a church out there that had a sabbath school attached and sabbath schools oftentimes were schools that taught "the three Rs". That church sort of becomes defunct when these people move into Lexington to give their children a chance to be educated.

So the black community grows. The black community is on the east side of Lexington and it really has three divisions to it. One part of the black community is south of Nelson Street Bridge, which is a bridge that, in my lifetime, I've never been able to understand because it just cuts off a hill. Otherwise, there would have been a steep hill that people drove down and then drove up the other side. On the other side of that bridge was the African-American community that sometimes called itself Centerville, sometimes called itself Mudtown. Interestingly enough, my maternal great-grandparents' home, that bridge was built straight in front of their house, and so when I was a kid, you could walk across that bridge and look directly into their upstairs windows. That great-grandfather made bricks. He was sort of a building contractor, and so he had a business of his own that was going on in that part of the black community.

³ Sandra Merle Williams (Johnson, 1945-), daughter of Bernice Franklin Williams. Ted's mother was Theodora ("Teady") Henry Franklin Delaney Morgan, 1922-99).

⁴ See also Ted's interview with Dr. Beverly Tucker of August 9, 2011, pub. In the Historic Lexington Foundation's newsletter of Black History Month (February) 2016, summarized in Beverly Tucker, *The House on Fuller Street: African American Memories in Lexington VA* (Buena Vista, VA: Mariner Publishing, 2013), pp. 14-22.

The other part of the black community that was pretty central was the black community that encompassed Tucker Street, Henry Street, Randolph Street, Massie Street, Fuller Street, and Lewis Street. That area was called Green Hill.

The one that most people associate with, and it's mostly because Lylburn Downing School is on that street, is Diamond Street, which is a steep hill, and so that whole neighborhood and the streets that are clustered around Diamond Street become Diamond Hill.

When I was growing up all of that neighborhood was, in the three divisions that I've mentioned, black residences. There were a lot more black people in town than there are now. A lot of those neighborhoods now have, in the more recent past, been communities where student housing has been, and those students have occupied what were formerly black homes.

Peterson: What memories do you have of your early boyhood? Happy memories?

DeLaney: Most of my memories of my boyhood are very happy. In fact, most of my memories are the same kind of memories that children have anyway. Children find ways to entertain themselves and to have fun. There was absolutely no recreational stuff in Lexington for kids who were growing up who were black when I was growing up, so you had to entertain yourself. Entertaining yourself meant finding ways to play and keep entertained with playmates who were your siblings, so your relatives are those who are close by. Some of the close-by neighbors also would have been playmates that would have been across racial lines because there's a thin barrier all through the South, but in Lexington too, with where a black neighborhood ends and a white neighborhood begins.

Growing up on Tucker Street, one of the interesting realities is that the perpendicular street was Washington Street, and so Washington Street was sort of a mixed street. There were both black and white families on Washington Street. One family in particular, whose yard was sort of on the other side of the fence from our yard, was the Munger family. Bob and Betty Munger were fairly well known in Lexington. He was a physician and they were Sally Mann's parents.⁵ Sally wasn't born at the time, but Sally's older brothers were my playmates across the fence from our

⁵ The noted photographer.

backyard. So in that instance, here were little white boys that I was playing with when I was growing up.

On the other hand, Lexington was completely a Jim Crow town. It was completely segregated. The Mungers were very liberal white folks, but they lived there on Washington Street in a house that is presently right next door to Dr. Crews's office when I was a small boy. Of course, the house where Dr. Crews's office is, that's been greatly expanded on with the White home, but if you cross the street to the place where Cornett Tax is, that house was owned and occupied by an elderly black woman when I was a child and was growing up. There were other black families who had homes on Washington Street as well.

Peterson: The issue of segregation has already come up, in a sense, in recalling your childhood. When did you realize, become aware of the fact, that you were living in a segregated society?

DeLaney: That's really hard to date. One of the things that I mentioned to you before is that you can sort of link that with Stonewall Jackson Hospital. We can talk about that for a little while. Stonewall Jackson Hospital, when I was a kid, was in the Stonewall Jackson home, and there had been a lot of adjacent buildings that had been attached to that building to make it a hospital, a hospital that opened in 1909 and closed in 1954. If black families used that hospital, they had to transfer their care to a white physician because the two black physicians who lived in Lexington when I was growing up, Dr. John Gilmore and Dr. Alfred Pleasants, were not allowed to practice in a hospital because they were black. If you were going to be a patient in the hospital you had to transfer your care to that of a white physician in order to be in the hospital.

When I was nine years old, with no explanation to me or my cousin [Candy] or my younger brother [Charlie], we were paraded into the hospital to have our tonsils removed. There was a black ward in the Stonewall Jackson hospital. There was one room that had five beds in it and that was the only place black patients could be. Our mothers were pretty upset about us being in there because there was an elderly black woman in that same room who was dying. I can remember the issue and the fact that there was this great fear on the part of my mother and my aunt that we might witness this lady die while we were recovering from our tonsillectomies. That didn't happen, but that's an early memory of racial division, the black ward in the Stonewall Jackson Hospital.

Certainly there are other memories. As I think about it, I was in sixth grade when the Brown v. Board of Education decision was promulgated, and certainly that, at the time, where teachers were emphasizing change that's coming with regard to race relations. Interestingly enough, the teachers were sometimes more optimistic about the changes that would come than the state of Virginia was because the state of Virginia adopted a plan called Massive Resistance, which outlasted my years in the public school system. When I graduated from high school in 1961, it was still a segregated high school and Rockbridge County schools were still segregated, as were schools in most of Virginia. Brown v. Board did not change things overnight.

Peterson: So in a sense, your response to segregation was hopeful. I've read interviews with other African Americans maybe older than you, who lived in an earlier age, where well before 1954 some people have spoken of feeling angry about it, ashamed, or stoic. I have read a number of interviews in which African Americans have said they simply, I wouldn't say accepted segregation stoically, but just accepted it as something that was in the world, their situation that wasn't going to change.

DeLaney: I think a lot of those views are hindsight views. Having done interviews of people about desegregation, the hindsight views are the ones that oftentimes bothered me. Nobody was really ashamed during the time. They might have been annoyed about the lack of opportunities. But to be ashamed, what's to be ashamed of? They didn't create segregation. There was nothing they could do to change it. It seems to me the shame and —

Peterson: Maybe anger's a better word.

DeLaney: Well, I think shame is worth talking about because I've encountered this with a lot of students, students who don't want to acknowledge very humble jobs or very menial jobs that blacks had in the past. It was honest work and sometimes those people were quite happy in these menial jobs that they had and were proud of what they were doing. This whole idea of being ashamed of something is something that is hindsight and is something that a different generation sort of inflicts on the past, which is always a problem.

Stoicism, I also have a hard time with that. One of the things I can tell you about growing up in a segregated society is that black people were perfectly happy with what they had. They were unhappy about the lack of opportunities. They were unhappy about the way they were oftentimes

treated in discriminatory or rude ways. But with regard to their own society, that is not the case at all. One of the things that blacks did have were their own institutions and their own institutions that provided social outlets for them. The black institutions also were very, very different in that regard. They fulfilled needs that the community had in ways that parallel institutions across racial lines may not be having to address those same kinds of needs in the white community.

The whole idea of the Lylburn Downing School, once again, it was almost like the community felt ownership there. It wasn't just the kids in the high school. It was a mutual experience that all black people in Rockbridge County came to have, going to Lylburn Downing School. The fact that they were bussed past white schools in the morning on very long, circuitous routes to get to Lexington was not something that angered them. They were excited about coming in to Lexington to go to school where they would be with other members of the African-American community. Some of my classmates came from as far away as Glasgow. A twenty-mile ride on a school bus in the morning, where sometimes they boarded the school bus as early as six a.m. for a nine o'clock school, they weren't unhappy. They weren't angry about it. They were delighted with the fact that they loved the school. There were people that would have been angry if desegregation had come while they were still in high school.

It's a complicated thing. I never remember feeling anger at the time with regard to the fact that society was segregated. The only times I felt anger were when I was mistreated, and mistreatment could be a fairly common thing, to be treated rudely in a store or to be treated rudely for some reason because you were black. One vivid memory I have of a Sunday afternoon I was out riding my bicycle, and across from the State Theater there was a place called the State Drugstore, which was just a lunch counter that served drinks and sandwiches and stuff. It was segregated but black people could go in and buy a drink or whatever as long as you didn't sit down. You could get a drink at the end of the counter. I'm on a bicycle so I don't want a carryout. I ordered a large fountain drink and I'm drinking it near the door inside of the establishment. I'd nearly finished it and was ready to go out and ride my bike and ride away when the waitress noticed that I had consumed it inside of the store and she started chewing me out. "You know better than this. You're not supposed to drink this in here." Times like that you do get angry. I must have been thirteen or fourteen years old and I was angry because I was being treated in a very, very rude fashion. Other than that, life was not a time that you spent

gripping and complaining and “Oh woe is me because I’m black,” because that was not the way we lived.

Peterson: What were some of the most important dos and don’ts that a young black man had to learn?

DeLaney: Well, one of the things that has certainly been a necessity in black culture for a very long time is to learn how to stay out of trouble, that is, going to be trouble with regard to interracial relations somehow. One of the most extraordinary things about growing up for me was that the most famous lynching of the 1950s occurred when I was about twelve years old. That is the murder of Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi. Emmett Till was two years older than me, and so Emmett Till sort of ends up being one of those examples for black families to point to. You don’t want to end up like that. And in this case, of course, we know now from the famous interview last year that he really had not gotten fresh with the woman. She said she made the story up. But it’s not to cross a line with a white woman or it’s not to cross a line with a white girl. It’s to be very conscious of your station in life so that you don’t cross any lines that might end up with those kinds of violent repercussions.

Black families were always afraid of lynching. So there is this latter-day lynching in 1955 that gets national attention only because the mother of Emmett Till wants him to have an open coffin so the world can see what they did to her son that black magazines published. There was that moment that there was this national news, and so black families could point and say that’s why we want you to watch what you do. That’s why we want you to be safe. The Emmett Till murder is very important. It seems to me that that very same kind of message black families still try to teach their children as they come of age.

Peterson: Was there ever, aside from Emmett Till which was a national phenomenon, a sense of present danger closer to home? Was there violence in this area?

DeLaney: Well, I’m kind of amused by the question and the reason is that my mother always thought there was. My mother always was very, very conscious of the idea that this kind of danger existed. My mother was a bit overprotective and so, at least for me, there was this reality, that my mother perceived that there was that kind of danger. On the other hand, on an academic level, having researched Virginia history during that period, I know that Virginia, probably alone

among southern states, passed tough anti-lynching laws during the 1920s. Governor Harry Byrd didn't like lynching because he argued that it gave the South a bad name. And so Virginia probably was a fairly safe state to live in with regard to those kinds of dangers after the 1920s and certainly by the 1940s and '50s. But my mother didn't know that; I would surmise that most black families did not know that either; and so I am a man in my fifties when I learn that Virginia has strict anti-lynching laws that go into place in the 1920s. To that extent, the fear was there. The fear was certainly there in the black community. I would also argue, as a student of southern history, that white families who were bigoted were probably happy that the fear was still there because the fear would have been perceived as a deterrent of some sort. But I don't think there was a real danger with regard to that kind of thing when I was growing up.

Peterson: I've been told that in Lexington in the '40s and '50s race relations were relatively civil.

DeLaney: Well, I wouldn't say that. I would not say that at all. When you have total segregation in a community and when you have people who are not easily able to register to vote in a community, those are not civil relationships. I have a real, real hard time with viewing relationships as civil when they are as divided as Lexington was when I was growing up.

Peterson: So there definitely were places you should not go and things you should not do.

DeLaney: There were places that you should not go. The only two integrated places that I can think of in Lexington when I was growing up, one was the public library. God knows that was a godsend because on Saturdays we could go to the public library and check out books and have them for two weeks or however long we wanted. The public library was one place that was not segregated. The other place that was not segregated was St. Patrick's Catholic Church, which is the parish I grew up in. There were always a few black members at St. Patrick's, but everything else in Lexington was totally segregated.

Peterson: It sounds like your mother gave you most of your mentoring on dos and don'ts, places to go.

DeLaney: Well, my parents were divorced when I was about ten years old and my father,⁶ prior to that, would be away working all day. I didn't see my father very much and so my mother was my mentor. My mother's way of mentoring was sometimes a little bit bizarre to the extent that, "I work hard," and "I have to work to feed you guys," and so "You will not get in trouble because I don't have the time to go get you out of trouble." That was the kind of mentoring that we got. I had a large, extended family network in Lexington too, so they always knew where we were and what we were up to. There's more mentoring actually that happens from my mother's family than just my mother.

Peterson: I guess they relied on the extended family because, if I've understood correctly, both your parents would have been working.

DeLaney: Yes, but my mother was able to oftentimes either work in the family business when it was on Main Street or at home. My grandfather had seven children.⁷ He had one son and six daughters and he could not afford to educate them, but he used to boast about teaching them his trade. He was a barber and so he taught several of his daughters, including my mother, how to be barbers. My grandfather had a barbershop on Main Street in the block that was between Washington and Henry for, my gosh, gee whiz, maybe fifty years. I don't know how long that barbershop was there. But my mother ran the barbershop - she ran the barbershop after he died in the early '50s - but when she stopped running the barbershop, she set up a shop at home. She had people who would come to the house for barbering or for hairdressing.

I would also say that my grandfather was not the only person who was black who had a business in that block on Main Street. There were two black restaurants in that block. There was another black barbershop in that block. One of the black restaurants was where the shop Pappagallo is and that was a building that was owned by a black lodge. The other side of that building was a black billiards hall. There were black businesses in that portion of Main Street.

That reminds me. There was another desegregated place in Lexington. That was my grandfather's barbershop because he boasted of being able to cut both black and white hair. He had people who were in his barbershop who were both black and white.

⁶ Theodore Carter DeLaney Sr. (1917-76).

⁷ In addition to Ted's mother Theodora and aunt Bernice, there were Claudine, Dorothea, Evelyn, Ruby and Russell.

Peterson: He had white customers?

DeLaney: Yes.

Peterson: That's interesting. What were some of the greatest, or even one of the greatest, cruelties that you saw as a young man? You have mentioned being offended at being scolded in the soda shop unjustly, but did you see worse things happen to other people?

DeLaney: Right now I can't really come up with something that I would say was worse than being scolded in the shop like that. I can remember once my grandmother's sister was very upset about being called "auntie" by a clerk in a store when she was checking out. There were always those kinds of things that were demeaning. I'm not sure that it's more cruel than demeaning.

Peterson: Little verbal slights and this sort of thing?

DeLaney: Right. I probably had some of those kinds of things happen when I was a boy. When I was a teenager I had a gardening job. It was really kind of funny when I think about the view that one gets of how the other half lives when you have jobs like this. I had a gardening job and I was really making a lot of money for a sixteen-year-old. The gardening job was at the house where Sally Richmond presently lives;⁸ it was called the Fletcher house then. The yard is huge. It has rock gardens and it was a really beautiful place. It was being rented by an elderly couple whose last name was Anglicized, pronounced Barsena, because the elderly woman in this marriage had Anglicized her Mexican husband's name, who was Barcina. They hired me and I was making a dollar an hour.

He was quite a character and would spend a lot of time in the yard talking to me as I was working in the gardens. I really enjoyed working for him and doing what I was doing. He also was a real friend of Jack Daniels and frequently had a drink in his hand. One afternoon he had had enough to drink that he decided that he wanted to invite me in to dinner. It was an extremely interesting and awkward situation because my mother's oldest sister [Bernice] was their maid and cook, and so I learn from the conversation that I'm not hearing from inside of the house as well. His wife, who was originally from Buffalo, New York, was completely humiliated that he would invite me in to sit down at the table to eat dinner with them. My sitting at table with them

⁸ VP for Admissions and Financial Aid; on Liberty Hall Rd. next to Belfield.

did not happen, but at sixteen years old, it's sort of an interesting thing to witness and to be on the other end of. On the other hand, that was what life was about. That was probably something that wouldn't have been such a big deal in our time in 2018, but it was a big deal in the 1960s.

Peterson: I guess we've talked about safe places, prohibited spaces, and points of contact. I wanted to ask you a little bit about the solidarity and cohesiveness of the black community itself, the African-American community. Who provided leadership for the black community?

DeLaney: First of all, there were professionals in the black community, which is interesting, because there are very few black professionals in Lexington today. There were a lot more of them in the 1950s, the 1960s. As I mentioned before, there were two black physicians, both of whom had been trained at Meharry Medical College. There was also a black dentist in Lexington. There were sixteen black schoolteachers in Lexington who were on the faculty of Lylburn Downing School. There were black entrepreneurs who had businesses on Main Street. And so there was a vibrant middle class black community, and certainly out of that black community there is leadership. Even though the Lylburn Downing School was owned by Rockbridge County, from the principal on down it was all black. So there are certainly leaders within this community.

There are also black businesses that influence Lexington that are from outside. For instance, one of the most successful black businesses historically in the United States during the early twentieth century was a black insurance agency called North Carolina Mutual. A lot of black folks in Lexington were subscribers to North Carolina Mutual. There was an agent who would come around weekly collecting their premiums for their insurance policies. That agent who comes to mind ended up being also local president of the NAACP. There's a local chapter of the NAACP, and what the local chapter of the NAACP does when I'm a boy I don't really know, but there were those kinds of leaders.

The churches also have well-educated ministers—First Baptist and Randolph Street Methodist—and so there's leadership within those churches and there is a kind of solidarity within these organizations. In your notes earlier I noticed Odd Fellows and Masons. Those are also organizations that are black even though there are white counterparts that have the same names.

Within the black community there are people who are hopeful. There are people who are working for change.

One of the most extraordinary examples of leadership is that there was constant parading back and forth to school board offices in Lexington and Buena Vista to beg, and I mean these people are literally like hat in hand and assuming the most humble demeanor to beg for improvements in the schools. This is happening during the 1930s, the 1940s. I've read these school board minutes and you see these people who are going back and forth, back and forth, begging for better bathrooms in the school, or a cafeteria, or whatever. The idea is that, somehow, if you can make the school better, then your child is going to have a better opportunity in the future. It's a kind of leadership that is not as profound, if you will, as those people who are trying to kick over Jim Crow, but are just trying to create a better situation within the constraints of Jim Crow segregation.

In fact, a lot of this begins to work. In 1948, just to sort of pick that as a rough date - it's also a post-war date when attitudes are beginning to change - but beginning in 1948, you see some real improvements in at least the building facilities of black schools in this part of the state. There is a great effort to equalize schools. After the Brown decision is handed down in 1954, there are some people who think well, gee whiz, let's just try to keep equalizing these schools to keep the black people happy because then maybe Brown won't be fully implemented. There's this kind of activism that takes place, at least to improve schools or to improve neighborhoods or whatever, and certainly I'm thankful that there are people doing this.

There's also an effort that begins in the 1950s to get a black member on the city council which is pretty futile. A black member of city council doesn't come about until 1969, but at least there are people who understand that there are ways to bring about change and maybe black representation on the city council, maybe black activism with regard to promoting better schools, a stronger black PTA, for instance, is the way of bringing about general improvement.

Also the teachers, the public school teachers, the ones who are younger, who are more optimistic about Brown v. Board and think this is really going to happen, then they are pushing their students to become the best students they possibly can be because they are going to have to compete with these white kids eventually. I think some of the older black teachers looked at

Brown v. Board and thought “it’s just rhetoric, it’s not going to happen.” They were almost right because it took so long for the implementation. It’s that kind of thing that’s happening in the black community that may not seem so profound, but it’s an important kind of leadership that looks to the future and looks to probably more practical ways of preparing younger generations for future change.

Peterson: It sounds like, and I’m summarizing this and a few other comments, in the post-war period you could say, after World War II - and perhaps Korea was a factor also - you’ve got African-American veterans coming in and then Brown v. Board of Education. It almost sounds as though after 1945, even if the change isn’t happening yet, there’s an expectation of change.

DeLaney: Well, one of the things that happens is that there are soldiers who come back from World War II. What they have seen with the end of the war, and black units helping to bring the war to an end in Europe, is a change in attitudes for this young generation of GIs returning to the United States.

On the heels of that, Harry Truman becomes the President. And Harry Truman surprises all of his own relatives by being very, very progressive because he is infuriated by some of the abuses of black GIs who have just returned, who are still in uniform. For instance, one is beaten up on a bus in South Carolina and injured pretty badly. Truman is so outraged that he makes statements about this and how outrageous it is that these GIs who have done such service to the country are returning home to be brutalized. Truman ends up beginning to push for the earliest civil rights change of the twentieth century.

With Truman’s pushing, then you have the incredible election of 1948 where Truman gets smeared as a liberal who wants to bring about racial change. On the other hand, you’ve got Strom Thurmond who bolts the Democratic Party to run on a Dixiecrat party against Truman. You also have a liberal wing of the Democratic Party that bolts and runs against Truman. Truman has a Republican and two Democrats running against him and manages to pull the election out. The election of 1948 does have great significance with regard to race and progress and is a part of the change that’s coming. Then Truman will, by the stroke of a pen, integrate the armed forces. And so change is happening in the late 1940s. When I selected 1948 as sort of a

date to pull out of my cap, it's a significant date because, with regard to race relations, the Truman era is the earliest that we can see this kind of promise.

Peterson: So you have an African-American middle class of teachers and doctors and lawyers and so forth who are very alert to what's going on on the national scene and, presumably, projecting a lot this information down into the rest of the community.

DeLaney: Yes, and the one thing that I would point out is that they also read the newspapers. My grandfather had a subscription to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, which was a terribly conservative newspaper but it was delivered to the front porch every morning. My grandparents read the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. They knew what was in the news. They knew what was going on.

I've read some of those *Richmond Times-Dispatches* professionally in my own research and some of them are really surprising. For instance, two or three days after the Brown decision is promulgated, there's the most incredible article in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*⁹ It was like a heart-attack moment when I was reading it. This one was an article that the best-trained teachers in Virginia and the ones who were most easily retained and stayed in the teaching profession were black, but getting white parents to accept these black teachers would be a problem. I'm sitting there reading this article and they actually have written this and published this, that black teachers are better trained than white teachers.

Peterson: And should be brought into white classrooms?

DeLaney: But the problem is whether white parents will accept them.

The problem for me with regard to research was how are black teachers better trained than white teachers? That was an easy piece of information to ferret out. For instance, there are three levels of certification. One was normal certification, which meant you only had two years of college. There were people literally all the way up to 1965 who were teaching on normal certificates. Another level of certification was collegiate and collegiate speaks for itself; you had a bachelor's degree. The third level of certification was professional, which meant you had a master's degree or higher. What the problem here is, is that black teachers were competing against one another

⁹ "Negro Teachers' Role Poses Problem." *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, May 18, 1954, p. 7.

for a finite number of jobs since they could only teach in black schools. If you are going to be best qualified to compete against other black teachers, you're going to have the highest certification you possibly can. Black teachers were clamoring to have more than the normal certification. At the time of desegregation, there were a lot of white teachers who were still teaching on normal certificates but there were very, very few black teachers who were still teaching on normal certificates, because just to get the job in the Jim Crow world they had to have either a collegiate or a professional certificate. On the other hand is the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* publishes that and there's a black researcher, who's reading this more than forty years later, thinking oh my God, I can't believe the *Richmond-Times Dispatch* said that. Then to think what would a white parent have thought when they were reading that in 1954.

Peterson: Ted, I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about the role of the churches here in the African-American community.

DeLaney: The first ten years of my life were spent at Randolph Street Methodist Church, which was my grandparents' church. My mother was very active in the Methodist church, but I guess when my mother was going through the divorce and whatever, she became inactive. After she remarried she was really inactive although she contributed financially to Randolph Street Church.¹⁰ So we were kind of free to do what we wanted to. Seven Tucker Street is around the corner from the original St. Patrick's Catholic Church. The original St. Patrick's Catholic Church was on Henry Street, which is where there's a Church of Christ in God now, which is a black church.

The first priest in town was a guy named Father Aloysius Selhorst . He was the first parish priest and belonged to a religious community called the Precious Blood Fathers who were based in Dayton, Ohio. He was stationed here and there were always a few black Catholics around. My mother-in-law, who I didn't know then, when she would be in Lexington because of my father-in-law being stationed someplace that she couldn't go—she was a cradle Catholic who was born in Pennsylvania—she went to mass there. There was always a teacher or two at Lylburn Downing who was Catholic who would go to mass there. When I was a kid, Father Selhorst

¹⁰ Her second marriage was to Harry Thomas Morgan, with whom she had three daughters: Theresa Marie Morgan (1954 -), Janet Dorothea Morgan (Jones, 1955-), and Carla Benita Morgan (Cooks, 1957-).

evangelized three African-American boys and I was one of the three. I was actually baptized at St. Patrick's when I was eleven years old. I grew up in St. Patrick's.

The churches were, as they almost still are—the most segregated hour of the week is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning. All of the churches in Lexington are still mostly like that, with a few exceptions.

Peterson: Segregated?

DeLaney: Segregated.

Peterson: Separate black and white churches?

DeLaney: Right. Part of the segregation today is cultural more than anything else, but when I was a kid that was not the way. The black churches would always welcome white visitors and occasionally there would be white visitors, especially since graduation from Lylburn Downing School for a long time took place in First Baptist Church. There was no gym when that was happening. That was before they built the gym over at Lylburn Downing. If they were going to have a graduation ceremony the only place they could do it would be at First Baptist Church. It would be a big to-do and, of course, there would be the white members of the school board, et cetera, who would be there.

With regard to St. Patrick's, one of the things I sort of look back fondly at is that at ten-thirty mass when I was growing up in the '50s and early '60s, every Sunday morning at ten-thirty mass there was a white guy who was my age named Dennis Morgan. He and I were the two altar boys at St. Patrick's Church. In those days, altar boys did a lot more than altar servers do today. They answered all of the responsorial prayers, in Latin, for the congregation. You had these classes where you were learning how to pronounce and you were doing some degree of memorizing, but there were always prayer cards for the altar boys to use. It was sort of a heavy responsibility when you think about the fact that those very same prayers that the whole congregations answers today in English, a teenage boy was answering for the congregation in Latin when I was growing up.

One of the things that was really wonderful about St. Patrick's, and I think that it's because the Catholic church was pretty much of a church of immigrants, particularly where the Catholic

church becomes located in the South. Catholic churches, even in Virginia, especially in this part of Virginia, are so few and far apart, like maybe one to a county, or something like that. I have nothing but fond memories of the way I was treated by people who were white at St. Patrick's when I was growing up. A lot of those people were very different from people here because their last names ended in vowels. There was a movement of immigrant people to the South in search of jobs and people who did not seem to have the same racial hang-ups that people who had been born and reared in Rockbridge County had. I have nothing but fond memories of growing up in St. Patrick's Church.

On Monday afternoons after school there would be religious education classes and there would be nuns who would come from Clifton Forge to teach these religious ed classes. This was a taste of school integration, certainly a token taste of school integration. It was learning the catechism in classes that were conducted by nuns, but I never, ever remember being treated in any kind of disrespectful manner in that church.

There were a lot of other churches by contrast, and they've come a long way, but I can use Grace [Episcopal] as an example. There were two teachers at Lylburn Downing School who attended First Baptist Church. They were graduates of St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, Virginia. St. Paul's College is a historically black college that was Episcopalian. At one point the Joneses decided they really didn't enjoy going to the Baptist church. They were really Episcopalians and they were going to go to then Robert E. Lee [now, Grace] Episcopal Church. Members of the congregation were so upset that they asked the pastor to ask the Joneses not to come anymore. That pastor as I recall, and I may have my chronology wrong but as I recall, that pastor was Joseph Fletcher. Joseph Fletcher made quite a name for himself in the church but also had a very, very famous sister named Louise, who was an actress. He refused to tell the Joneses to stop coming to church. The Joneses stuck it out in the church until they left after Lylburn Downing desegregated. Delores Jones was a mezzo-soprano and she ended up contributing richly to the church music with her voice at Robert E. Lee [Grace] Church. But as I understand it, a lot of people - well, maybe not a lot but there were people who stopped going to that church because of the Joneses.

I know nothing that is parallel to that with regard to St. Patrick's. I know of no people who stopped going because there were occasional black members. There certainly were not a lot of black members, but there were black members, and there were black adult members as well.

So, in a nutshell, that is what the churches were like and I don't think that the churches have changed very much. I know that there's been a lot of goodwill and a lot of effort on the part of Lexington Presbyterian, but people go sort of where they want to go. The interesting thing about Lexington Presbyterian is that there's that famous slave Sunday school that they had that ran from the 1850s until the 1880s, and for there not to be any local black Presbyterians in Lexington seems to be extraordinarily interesting, given that history.

Peterson: St. Patrick's sounds like it was an unusually desegregated space in an otherwise segregated society.

DeLaney: It was. Of course the Catholic Church, it's sort of a top-down kind of church. The bishop makes a pronouncement that things are going to be thus and so, or the priest does, then certainly in those times it's not going to go against the will of the priest. One of the things I would say is that prior to 1954, Catholic schools in Virginia were segregated, but when the Brown decision was handed down, the Bishop of Richmond said "no more; we are integrated." The very first schools to become integrated in the state of Virginia are parochial schools.

Peterson: Possibly a last point if we've got time for this: the role of businessmen in the black community. There seem to have been a number of successful African-American businesses, as we've indicated, in that block of Main Street between Washington and Henry Street. Surely well-to-do black businessmen must have had a leadership role in the community.

DeLaney: Well, the Walker-Woods family was the most affluent black family in town. Historically, Harry Walker was the grocer who had his grocery shop in what becomes the Wilson-Walker House. The family owned that building – oh, gee whiz - probably through the 1980s, but that family had a lot of very valuable real estate. You have to think about the town in a very, very smaller dimension. Harry Walker's farm was just on the periphery of Lexington. His farm land ran from Kroger's east, and so all down that hill was Harry Walker's farm. The family leased those properties out there where those businesses are for a hundred years and made a great deal of money off of real estate. Eventually those properties were sold, but it was a period of

time where there was some movement of blacks into town and whites out of town, and so Harry Walker is able to buy Blandome, which had been a Tucker home.

Peterson: This is a very distinguished Italianate house that goes back. I guess Civil War generals stayed in that house.

DeLaney: Yes. I forget when it was built but it's probably an early nineteenth-century house. The family owns that house and the family is very prominent in organizations that are larger than Lexington. For instance, Harry Walker's wife was a member, as that Lexington book demonstrates, that picture book, of the Federation of Colored Womens' Clubs,¹¹ which was a national movement of women activists. As a black family, they also are able to afford to educate all six of their children. Their son, Edwin, becomes one of the first medical doctors to graduate from the University of Virginia medical school and I think that he graduates sometime around 1954. He is the only surviving one of his siblings at this point.

It was an interesting family and interesting situation that they fell into with regard to being able to make a fortune off of real estate. There's another factor I don't know whether it's apocryphal or not but the other thing that I've always heard is that they also once won the Irish sweepstakes. I don't know whether that is really true or not, but the real estate part certainly puts them on easy street.

Peterson: Well, Ted, we've covered an awful lot of ground this morning. I guess I'd like to ask you if there are any memories or issues that we haven't discussed that you would like to share before we wind down?

DeLaney: I think that we've probably come to a good stopping point, so I don't have anything that I'd like to add right now.

Peterson: Well, good. I'll look forward to our next discussion then. Thank you.

DeLaney: Thank you.

[End of interview]

¹¹ *Images of America: Lexington*, ed Sharon Ritenour Stevens, Alice Trump Williams on behalf of the Rockbridge Historical Society (Chicago: Arcadia, 2009), p. 63.

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