

15- Date: November 21, 1989

Subject: Depression Era Experiences (Depression at Gainesville, Texas, the Beaumont Race Riot, working to earn money for education at Prairie View A & M and restrictions on school teachers)

**Interviewee:** Dr. Harry G. Hendricks

**Interviewer:** Deborah L. Barideaux

**Interviewer:** Did any member of your family, perhaps your parents, receive old age pension checks?

**Hendricks:** Yes, after- I think probably along like, my sophomore or junior year in college. They were eligible and they received [old age pension?]

**Int:** This is about 19...

**Hendricks:** That was in the thirties, between 33 and 37.

**Int:** [inaudible sentence] Could you tell that, in some way, could you tell the Depression was near an end? Were there any signs?

**Hendricks:** Oh yeah, [inaudible few words] you were able to eat better, you had more jobs, you know, and the [inaudible word] was going up, too.

**Int:** What do you think really helped this coming out of the depression?

**H:** these different programs that Franklin Delano Roosevelt instituted helped a great deal cause they put [inaudible few words] they put people to work, you know, gave them jobs and they got paid for it. Nothing like what people get now, but everything was a lot [in those days?] And then when the war came on, you had shipyards and all kinds of industries going then, you know.

Airplane factories, and all kinds of factories, were booming then. The industry was on the move. People had jobs and that sort of continued {inaudible few words} war time economy. Everything was booming.

**Int:** And at that time, when things were booming, [and you remember that depression?] How did you feel, what was your family's reaction at the time when you just knew that the Depression was over? I'm sure it was a relief

**H:** Well, it was such a gradual thing, you know, there was no particular moment where you could say "this is it." Things just got better gradually. Being in school was pretty rough too, but when you came out, there was a job for you. The key to the whole thing was people could get work to do. They could get work during the depression, but there was no money to pay them. Now, they could get jobs and they could get paid for what they were doing. Jobs just gradually increased, got better, [inaudible word.] Cause eventually prices went up too on everything. But you couldn't have inflation back then like you have now, but gradually, everything went up. [inaudible few words.] everything rose, including the cost of things. Back then, you could...just a little money was a whole lot. Any kind of money [inaudible word] but later on, like you know, that's not the case.

**Int:** Like right now, 1989 huh?

**H:** That's right.

**Int:** Well, I think we've covered a-

**H:** For example, my friend's car, [that I bought?] [inaudible few words] brand new Chevrolet car, it was a sedan. It only cost about 800 dollars.

**Int:** back in what year?

**H:** That was in '41.

**Int:** That was right around the end, what historians call the end.

**H:** That was right then.

**Int:** ...of the depression era. and you only paid 800 for it, you didn't have to put up the whole 800, the bank-

**H:** the bank did. See, I was teaching students...

**Int:** Right

**H:** I paid cash, the bank- I paid the bank [that?] The car only cost 800 dollars. What kind of car can you get for 800 dollars?

**Int:** [a piece of one?]

**H:** but see, I was only making 80 dollars a month, then, and that was a lot of money. That was a lot of money. That was back in the early forties. When I came here, I was only getting 90 dollars a month.

**Int:** To teach?

**H:** These high-priced homes and all- when we built this house here in 64, this house now will cost a hundred thousand dollars if you had to build it now or had to buy it. But, in 64, it only cost 25,800 dollars. What can you get now for that? Nothing?

**Int:** Little to nothing.

**H:** And my salary, I had a doctorate degree, and I was getting 300 dollars more than I would've gotten with just a masters, yeah, I was a principal of a junior high school. My salary was 10,800 dollars, you couldn't eat off of that now. When we built this house, my wife is a teacher too, she was getting about, maybe four or five thousand dollars [a year?] And we built this house and...

**Int:** beautiful house, very, very beautiful.

**H:** [inaudible word] for that, it's 25 years old now. I said that to say, things have changed [inaudible word] overnight. Everything didn't gradually change. But see that's... some for the better and some for the worst.

**Int:** some of those carpentry skills kinda paid off, huh? What you learned at [inaudible word.] Did you help, manually help with your hands...

**H:** Yes, all of us did

**Int:** Help when building this home?

**H:** Here? Oh no, no, I didn't, I was a teacher- I was a principal. I'd come back and check it out. I knew when they were doing it right and when they weren't. I called attention to it.

**Int:** Right.

**H:** My father was an outstanding carpenter.

**Int:** You said he- in our previous conversations, something about building a church that's still standing?

**H:** Yeah, he built this church in 1904 and this church is on [pillars?] and has four steeples. That church, they're still having church in that church. And it looks as good as it did way back then. They haven't done very much to it, I remember I helped to put some- I helped them shingle the

whole church one time, my brothers and I helped them. Those towers, or something else- we had to go up on those towers and he built those towers way back there in 1904, so when the wind would blow, each tower would sway. And this is [frame building?]

**Int:** Yeah?

**H:** Yeah! No wind has ever blown them down or anything. We'd get up on top of the- on the very top of that steeple, the wind- that thing would just sway in the wind. You'd sway and could fall off of there. But he was an excellent carpenter. Houses he built way back then, He died in '49, still stand. He carpentered until he was about 82. His death was accidental, he was really healthy, never was sick. During the flu epidemic in World War I, millions of people died throughout the country. The flu would go into pneumonia, you'd catch the flu and it'd go right into pneumonia. I had it, and the doctor gave me [up to die?] I didn't...

**Int:** How old were you at that time?

**H:** about four or five

**Int:** So, Dr. Hendricks, for my final question, can you think of anything good that came out of the depression era? Something that we can apply today?

**H:** The best thing I can think of, one of the best at least, is that the economists learned a lot from the depression and how the market crash, [wall street?] millionaires, billionaires, went down overnight. They know how- they have built in devices now to prevent that sort of thing from happening in the economic system. I couldn't dare spell them out for you what they are, but they're there. It's not as easy for depression to happen now, as it was back in 1929. Cause they know how to deal with it, they know how to prevent it. I'm not saying it's impossible, but it's

more difficult to occur now than it was back then. It caught people completely unaware back then. But now, they know how to deal with it, they didn't know back then.