

**Becky Doggett 11-16-15, b. ~1939 (?)**

Becky Doggett was part of NOLA, a group of young people who met at Shorty's Barber Shop in Orange to work for desegregation, and is the source of a number of interesting photographs. She comes across as a naturally friendly, generous, unassuming, and group-oriented person whose story makes an excellent example of a woman who began by accommodating her life to the realities of the time, but then realized positive change was possible, decided to be part of that change, and helped make it happen. She took this turn after she returned to Orange from being away (at college?), and from that time on has led a life dedicated to making both Newark, Orange, and even Puerto Rico, better places, with an emphasis on the lives of children and young people. She has a special interest in providing workforce opportunities for youths entering the workforce.

Becky seems cautious at the beginning of the tape, whether because of humility, shyness, or hesitation about divulging private information about friends and family to an unknown public. The interview begins with a nearly inaudible mumble, apparently giving the name of a man who ran a store along a neighborhood street when she was a child: ?Beespoke/Bespoke?. This man was white and Jewish, and his command of English was limited. Becky's family used to get their necessities there because it was convenient and the owner would extend credit: "The kids would go over and tell him what we wanted and he would write it down, and then, you know, at the end of the week, or two weeks, my grandmother or someone else would go over and pay. Him." Another store on the same street was run by a person named Johnson.

At that time, Becky used to live on Wilson Place [running two short blocks from the Union Baptist Church on Oakwood to Central Place]. She recalls that itinerant merchants with horse carts would come around: a man who put in glass, a rag and junk man, a knife sharpener. People would collect the manure from the horses and use it on their flower beds. The ragman's horse cart business, probably starting from a grandfather who emigrated from Italy, eventually "got big" and is now Trezza's [R. Trezza and Son, Inc., a scrap metal and recycling center at 126 Hickory Street, just south of Parrow].

A reference to Parrow suggests that at some point Becky might have lived in the Alexander Houses, but if so, this specific piece of information must have been elicited before the tape begins.

By the time Becky was in college, the family had moved to Berwyn Street [which runs from S. Harrison to the Oakwood School on Oakwood]. She does not recall any white people living on that street at that time (late fifties, early sixties). She moved to Newark in 1962 or 1963 when she married [1963 here, 1962 when talking about her work with CORE]. Later, in 1995, she moved back with her second husband to East Orange, and lived on S. Harrison Street [which runs parallel to Oakwood, but one block east, at the east end of Berwyn, and features a number of brick high rises set back from the street with lawns.] She still lives there, but does not know Fran McLain, who is also on S.

Harrison.

Some time after Becky moved to Newark, thus missing the highway construction, her parents bought a house on Oakwood close to the corner of Central Avenue. Later, after the father went into a nursing home, her mother moved to senior housing on Oakwood, right across from the park, living to be 92.

Becky's father had a truck from which he sold the heating and cooling necessities of the time: ice, coal, and oil for iceboxes and furnaces; by the time she was an adult he was recycling tires, always working for himself. She does not recall the ice house on or near Oakwood mentioned in the 10/29/2015 interview at John's Market.

Both of Becky's uncles were WWII vets; one worked for the IRS, the other, after starting out with the Turnpike Authority, worked in a small factory or machine shop. During that war "all the women, including my mother, worked at **Picatinny Arsenal**," traveling by bus, or occasionally someone's car, to its location in western Morris County. They quite enjoyed the pay and the different work. After the war these women "mostly worked in factories," including a toy factory that Becky thinks was in Harrison. [sbh: This may have been Remco, which went bankrupt in 1971, during a fairly significant period in the history of Orange.]

Becky's mother, on the other hand, "when she got much better" went to nursing school, starting when she was already in her forties, and became a licensed practical nurse, subsequently continuing to get an Associate degree as a registered nurse. [The problem that the mother got better from may have been mentioned before the recording begins; and, in a partially inaudible bit, Becky asserts that her mother did well "once she got over that...got the right kind of treatment."]

Becky says adults typically did semi-skilled or unskilled jobs. Most of Becky's family stayed pretty close to the neighborhood, although her uncles moved "not far—to East Orange or something" after marrying. As noted above, she now lives in East Orange, but only a block from her old neighborhood. [sbh: In contrast to Oakwood, which currently includes, in addition to housing, older mixed-use buildings, a gas station, and parking lots, S. Harrison is lined with high rises and has an entirely residential appearance. The old "downtown" part of Oakwood, of course, is now under the freeway.]

## **280 Construction**

Although she was living in Newark when the highway was being constructed, Becky does recall hearing talk about people who were being displaced, including her aunt and uncle who lived on South Street. Small stores that had been familiar to her also disappeared, including, mostly on Hickory: barber shops, grocery stores, a restaurant (Mabin's), a pharmacy, Catlett's, owned by an African American, and especially Shorty's Barber Shop, on Hickory between Parrow and South.

## **Desegregation in Orange**

At first, after being reminded by the interviewer of comments [made before the recording began] about being involved [as a student] in the early desegregation at Central School, Becky explains that she is not sure this effort by the school district was the result of political action and court decisions like Brown vs. Board of Education, so much as a practical policy of preparing students from schools in segregated neighborhoods for the increasing diversity they would encounter as they moved into the city-wide middle and high schools. Then, after recalling that she graduated from high school in 1957, a couple of years after Brown, she acknowledges that desegregation suits [in Orange or elsewhere?] may have been part of the impetus for creating mixed classes at Central.

Becky does remember Brown, mainly "just that it happened, and Oh! you know,..." but it seemed far away, not something that was likely to affect her own life. At some point, however, either before or after she "came back" from being away [?at college?], she got involved with the NAACP of the Oranges and Maplewood, and "We started to look at desegregation issues in Orange, and that actually started with a lawsuit that Mindy Thompson Fullilove—Her parents started the lawsuit about the gerrymandering and the school segregation." This case began in 1958 or 1959, after Becky was out of school and in college, and eventually turned into an NAACP suit that got support from the national organization.

The Fullilove case was the first time Becky realized that when she used to see the white kids getting on buses and going across town, "that had a name." She thinks the suit was "a big thing for Orange." After recalling that she herself participated in picket lines at this time, she goes on to talk about her participation in a group of young people who used Shorty's as their political headquarters.

The group at Shorty's considered themselves "the young radicals," by contrast with the stodgier older group, "Citizens for Representative Government (CFRC)," organized by the parents of Mindy Fullilove. "We were going to do it better and faster and everything else. So we were kind of a rival organization there at Shorty's (laughing). So, um, we had our own candidates we were going to run. We did coalesce, we did work together for the charter change, you know, because the elections in Orange up till then were all city-wide, so that meant, you know, no black person could win...."

The change in the charter, which created separate election wards, went through in 1961 or 1962, according to Becky, with the first election "under that form" having taken place in 1962. "We worked together for the charter change, and then we had, uh, a split....So we had our own candidate and Mindy's dad decided that he had to go out and defeat us because we didn't know what we were doing (laughing). He was right!"

[sbh: See <[http://www.njstatelib.org/slic\\_files/imported/NJ\\_Information/Digital\\_Collections/MFMG/MFMGCH4.PDF](http://www.njstatelib.org/slic_files/imported/NJ_Information/Digital_Collections/MFMG/MFMGCH4.PDF)>. According to this document, Orange, although it had a charter, was governed by a commission until 1976, when it adopted a municipal charter form of government. The document also states that commissioners are elected in at-large elections, but but this may be the result of more recent legislation, as apparently a change in the charter in 1962 permitted a new type of

election at that time. By 1976, of course, Shorty's was long gone.]

The young radicals named themselves NOLA, or "Non-profit Organization for Liberal Action." Becky laughs about that now, admitting that "you can see right there" some of the group's naïveté compared to Ernie Fullilove's CFRC. The NOLA group included Shorty himself ("That's why he offered his barber shop"). Some of the group "have died already....The guy we were supporting [Ray Murphy] has died." Becky has pictures, including shots of Shorty's, inside and outside, and a float that the group had. (They had a flatbed truck on which they could put on performances to get people's attention.)

Becky says she will make sure Chris gets the photos, and then comes right up with a small album she had put together for "Pat." She agrees that Aubrey can take pictures of them and that they can be posted on Facebook. She then points to a photo of the front of the barber shop, which advertises itself as "A Sanitary Barber Shop." There is a NOLA sign in the photo. Pointing to different individuals, she notes that Cosby and another man are now deceased, but Shorty is still living. There is some inaudible conversation about Shorty that includes a third (unidentified) voice, and later on in the conversation Becky states that Shorty now lives in senior citizen housing, the one at 400 Oakwood Avenue, and she will help the interviewer get in touch with him. She adds that he loves to talk about "these days" (as pictured in the photos).

[Toward the very end of the interview, it is revealed that the unidentified voice may be 'Pat,' probably Patrick Morissy, founder of [HANDS](#).]

Becky chuckles a little over an interior photo where the men, in contrast to the current preference for informal looks, are all dressed up in shirts and ties. She thinks this shot was taken on a day when they expected a reporter from the Star Ledger (or similar) to come and interview them.

Other scenes mentioned include

- The homes across from the Alexander Houses on Parrow.
- Kids in the yards of the projects. Becky comments that she was active working with groups of kids.
- A view down Berwyn to the Oakwood Avenue School.
- Ray Murphy, "the guy we were talking about" [the deceased NOLA candidate]; and Bill Blake, who is still living.

### **Becky's Work in Newark and for the County**

Becky has a Master's in Education, and has always been interested in that field. When she moved to Newark in 1962 [or 1963—see above] she became active with CORE there, and when the War on Poverty was being talked about in 1963, she helped form the community agency, [United Community Corporation](#), that became the grantee for anti-poverty funds.

Becky worked with CORE to set up the city-wide Head Start Program, called [Newark Preschool Council](#), and considers this the biggest project she worked on. She was with

a preschool for several years and then in ~1971 moved with her husband to Puerto Rico in order to be able to spend more time with his children. During the two or so years she was there, Becky helped set up an adult basic education program with Head Start.

Becky and her husband moved back to Newark in 1972, and she helped form the Tri-City People's Center, "which was a housing and community services organization. [sbh: The current version of the [Tri-city People's Center](#) seems to be mainly a child care center.]

Becky went to work for the county when it moved from a purely freeholder to a county executive form of government, becoming head of a consolidated Department of Citizen Services. "When we went there, there were about sixty-six different departments in county government, and we got it down to six. And I was head of one of these six departments."

Asked about the freeholder form of government, Becky laughs and remarks that "We called them Board of Chosen Freeloaders," then explains that Freeholders are just legislators, and that there were nine in Essex County until the charter change in 1978, "and they ran everything: That's why there were 66 departments, because each had to have their own fiefdom," with plenty of jobs and patronage. After the charter change, the number of Freeholders went down to six. "The idea was that it would become more professional and more efficient."

[sbh: Chosen Freeholders are pretty much just like County Legislators in Westchester County, County Commissioners in Nassau, and whatever they call the members of the County Legislature in Suffolk County. The term is used throughout the state, and stems from the original State Constitution, written at a time when the less affluent were not considered stable enough to shoulder a full share of civic responsibility. Local "freeholders," or men who had a certain amount of property, voted to choose those who would represent them at the county level.]

Because she ran one of the six consolidated departments, Becky was in the cabinet of the County Executive, "and my job was to kind of corral all of these social services people." Laughing: "Okay, that was really an adventure. People had all this autonomy for years and years and years, now they had all this bureaucracy over them. They didn't want to hear it!" She was there for several years "doing welfare and social service reforms."

In 1958 Becky began working for the Port Authority. She started in Human Resources and then helped set up their Office for Business and Job Opportunity. She states that she had a lot of interest in job creation because of her former work with welfare, and therefore was especially interested in promoting opportunities for small minority businesses and getting the Authority to sponsor job training. She worked there for ~11 years.

During the period when she was employed at the Port Authority, Becky was also Auditor

General for the Newark Public Schools. This was at the time of the court takeover of the district. When the new, court-appointed superintendent took over, she asked Becky to come back to Newark to be her official advisor, as she (the new steward) was unfamiliar with the system. Becky then worked for the Newark School District for about five years.

[sbh: See the [NYT report](#) on her appointment as Auditor, and the [Star Ledger report](#) on her testimony in favor of the takeover. It is interesting that, despite all this public notice, she considers the setup of Head Start in Newark to be her most significant achievement.]

[sbh: The district takeover stems, originally, from a 1972 decision, [Robinson.v. Cahill](#), Cahill being the governor at the time, holding New Jersey's system of funding the constitutionally required "thorough and efficient" education to be inherently unfair. A revised system was again ruled out in several [Abbot v. Burke](#) decisions, leading to the creation of "special needs" districts and ultimately to the (temporary) state takeover of schools in both Jersey City and Newark.]

Becky mentions the Abbot decision that eventually led to the takeover, and the physical condition of the Newark schools at the time, with buildings that dated to the Lincoln presidency. When she realized that a need for construction amounting to three billion dollars would result in a a good deal of construction in Newark, she recalled previous struggles to get black and Latino youths into the building trades, and thought the time might be ripe to try again.

Therefore, in 2000, she left her district job and managed to convince "someone I had met" to sponsor a [Construction Careers Program](#) with the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice. By this time the unions were ready to listen, especially when they could be assured that they would not have to water down their standards, and the result was "a very strong partnership with the building trades" and "a very successful pre-apprenticeship program. And over about six years we got about four hundred people into fifteen different trades." The program works mostly with young people coming out of high school, but has also been influential in obtaining jobs for people with prison records.

The results of the program are especially satisfying to Becky because her efforts to get black and Latino youths into the building trades stem from her first move to Newark in ~1962, and were met with intractable resistance for a long time. She was with the Institute for nine or ten years in all before retiring for about the third time: "But this time around, so, I just said, 'Well, you just have to live long enough!' (Laughs.)"

She retired in 2010. "And there was Pat waiting for me! 'Cause I had promised him that when I retired I would come serve on the board of [HANDS](#)....So Pat was at my retirement party, and, [He goes,] 'Okay—' "

[sbh: The Institute web site, under "[Past Galas](#)" has an enlargeable [photo of Becky](#) receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010.]

Summing up, the interviewer expresses the hope that he will be able to sit down with Becky and talk more about NOLA, especially since Shorty's was right over 290, and she says she will "keep digging for 280 stuff." She has already given him some photos and will email some from Shirley Grey/Gray Holland(?) which seem to be on her phone. Those can also be put on Facebook, but Shirley should be acknowledged. She also comes up him Shorty's phone number, and will text it over.