Dr. Linda Mayes
Voices of School Desegregation Project
The Roberson Project on Slavery, Race, and Reconciliation
Oral History Session #1, July 15, 2025

Eleanor Dean (00:02)
This is Eleanor Dean and Chloe Strysick with the Voices of School Desegregation Oral History Project with the Roberson Project. This is Oral History Session Number One with Linda Mays on July 15th, 2025. And this oral history is being recorded virtually using Riverside. Linda, could you please spell your name for me?

Dr. Linda Mayes (00:25)
My last name is Mayes, M-A-Y-E-S, first name Linda, L-I-N-D-A.

Eleanor (00:32)
And this might sound a little impolite, but where and when were you born?

Linda (00:37)
I was born in Sewanee, Tennessee on October 14, 1951.

Eleanor (00:44.344)
And can you just tell me a little bit about yourself?

Linda (00:48)
So I think you already, well, you wouldn't know, I was born in Franklin County, Sewanee, Tennessee. I grew up there, consider myself a native of Franklin County, but I am currently, well, have been a pediatrician, and I work at the Yale School of Medicine where I have been for a number of years.

Eleanor (01:14)
Can you tell me about your family?

Linda (01:17)
Sure. So I'm an only child. My mother was born in –. Both of them–. Can you hear me?

Linda (01:29)
Let me see if I unplug this. Can you still hear me?

Eleanor (01:34)
Yes. Yes.

Linda (01:36)
Great. Okay. We don't have the background. My mother was born in Warren County, so she is a native Tennessean. And my father was born in East Tennessee in Claiborne County. My mom's family

wound their way down to Franklin County where she grew up as a teenager in Decherd, Tennessee. And my father came to Franklin County when his father, my grandfather, was a county agent. County agent is an agricultural advisor.

And he was a newly minted county agent and came to Franklin County bringing his family with him. They were always kind of still oriented to East Tennessee even though they lived in Franklin County all my life of knowing him. So both of my parents, born in Tennessee, probably generations in Tennessee, and came together in Winchester in Franklin County. Like I said, I'm an only child.

My parents' business was the theater. We ran movie theaters, both the theater in Winchester as well as the drive-in theater.

And I in essence grew up in the movie theater, but we also sold eggs. We had a poultry business and sold eggs to groceries, to restaurants, to university dining, all around the county. So that's pretty much them. My grandparents

lived–. My father's parents lived behind me. We have a house and a farm on Liberty Road. My grandparents,

Linda (03:19)
the Mayses live behind us. My mother's family lived over in Decherd. So it was very close to my grandparents as well. I knew them all quite well.

Eleanor (03:31)
And can you give me the full name of your parents?

Linda (03:36)
Sure. So my father was Edward Earl Mayes and my mother was Marion Virginia Garner or Marion Virginia Mayes.

Eleanor (03:47)
What was the place, what was the significance of the Oldham in Winchester and in Franklin County's community?

Linda (4:01)
Well, the Oldham Theater was, I don't remember exactly when it was built. There was an earlier theater called the Rivoli, which was across the square from the Oldham well before I was born.

My father started working in the theater when he was 11 years old. And when he graduated from high school, he had a theater job. I think the significance–. And then the Oldham was built after he was graduated from high school. They moved the Rivoli to there.

I think the significance of the Oldham, as is not unusual for many, many small towns in the South or elsewhere, is it was a gathering place. People came, that's where you came, for–. It was pre-Internet, was pre-Internet, pre-a lot of things, you came there to either church you gathered or you gathered at the theater. And movies were really a central part of–

Of community life. Movies changed more rapidly than they do now. They oftentimes had three or four movies a week. So people would come and, again well before I was born, movies were a place where local or even regional musicians would come and do a show before the movie. It was a place where people gathered.

Linda (05:37)
I don't remember this well, but the Oldham was segregated. So whites on the first floor, Black families on the second floor, only upstairs. And probably stayed, I don't really know the dates very well, I think stayed segregated probably until schools became desegregated. But there was always that kind of legacy that...

Of the Oldham. And then when it was no longer segregated, there was just the upstairs balcony and people would sit there or move–. It was a really big crowd. You'd fill both levels. I'm not sure that answers your question, but to me that's what theaters were and still are, but much less now since people can stream. They're not a community gathering place.

Eleanor (06:34)
That was a perfect answer. And you mentioned churches as another place of socialization. Can you talk about the role of religion or religious community in your childhood, if there was one?

Linda (06:53)
Oh yeah, sure. We were members of the Methodist Church, the First United Methodist, which is still in Winchester. Still a pretty active church. That had been my father's,

My father's denomination. My mom grew up a Southern Baptist, but when she married, she moved to the Methodist Church.

Methodism and the Methodist Church was very central. My grandfather was a lay minister. He was a member of the Methodist, it's called the Methodist Conference. Because of Methodism, the lay members of the conference select their ministers. So he was a member of that. And the church was just a part of my growing up and a part of our life. My father was an usher in the church.

My mom taught Sunday school. It was–. But it was not unusual in the sense that that's another place where families came together. Families came together. There were programs for children, programs for adolescents. It was kind of the center of a community. Whatever your church, whether it's Baptist, whatever. I don't know that that's true now. I suspect it is much, much less true now.

But it certainly was true in my growing up.

Chloe Strysick (08:25)
[ ]

Eleanor (08:32)
Chloe, we can't hear you.

Eleanor (08:43)
Would you like me–?

Eleanor (08:46)
Chloe, I can ask a question for you. If you're–.

Eleanor (08:58)
Dealing with.

Linda (08:58)
It shows Chloe that you're still muted on my screen that shows you're muted.

Chloe (09:08)
Can you hear me?

Linda (09:10)
Yeah. Can hear you. Barely hear you. There's a lot of static.

Chloe (09:22)
I'm sorry. I was just wondering [ ]

Linda (09:30)
Can't hear it Chloe. Heard "I'm just wondering." Sorry.

Eleanor (09:41)
Yeah, it's the audio quality. Like we can hear it's like coming from an ocean.

Linda (09:42)
It is like coming from the ocean, right.

Eleanor (09:58)
Do you want–?

Eleanor (10:14)
Since I have the question written out for me, do you want me to go ahead and ask it? Okay.

Eleanor (10:22)
Where was community outside of the church and the theater for you in Franklin County?

Linda (10:32)
For me it would have been school as well. So that–. I went to Mary Sharp, which is no longer there anymore. I went to there for first and second grade,

then to Clark Memorial before high school. And that was the other community place.

Not only my family, many families just really engaged with school activities, after school activities. By the time we got to high school, of course, it was, I was in the band in high school. It was after school band practice. But it was all a kind of, again, community really orienting around, it's really school, church, and theater. Not every family will say theater, but for me it was theater as well.

So at school, no question.

Eleanor (11:27)
And what kind of activities did you do outside of the marching band?

Linda (11:36)
Well, there weren't a ton of activities available as there are now. I was a part of the, I'm trying to remember, I was a part of the annual editorial staff. What else?

I can't remember. There were a few other clubs and things. It was mainly music. It was really mainly music and writing. I was very into science, doing a lot of science and science fair kind of things. But mainly, really music was a huge, if you will, extra, outside of school, classroom for me.

Eleanor (12:29)
And outside of this interview, you introduced us to your friends, Mark Stewart and Houston Bynum. Did you meet them in school?

Linda (12:40)
Yeah, Houston and I were actually, we were very close in high school. We stayed very close for our whole four years of high school. And then Houston went his way and I went my way.

And then we reconnected actually just a few years ago. And it's been really quite wonderful to reconnect with one's high school friend in that way. It's interesting that Houston has different memories than I do. But we roughly can work. Mark, I know because the Stewarts have been attorneys in Winchester for generations and my mom worked for Mark Stewart's father.

Mark Stewart's father, Rick Stewart, was an attorney and my mom worked in his law office for him. And so I knew Mark and his brothers, Jeff and Larry, through that association. Mark is younger than Houston and I. But we're roughly that sort of same era. So that's how I know them. And Mark helped my mom a great deal. My father's death...

We helped her a great deal around the legal issues that she needed to deal with around the theaters. And now he's helped me a lot, actually. It's a really nice intergenerational thing around my farm and the land trust and all that. Mark's also a graduate of Sewanee. So we have that kind of connection, too.

Eleanor (14:18)
And who were your other friends at school? Who were your other friends?

Linda (14:23)
My other, I'm sorry? Quite a few friends. So I don't know that I can name them all. Because you see, I think one of the things, and I'd be glad to do that, but one of the things that's different for me from many of my friends of that time–.

And Houston implicitly reminds me of this, is because he stayed in the area. He has kept up with so many more of our high school, of our high school colleagues. He knows them so much better than I.

But I moved out. I mean, I went to Sewanee, then I went to Nashville, to Vanderbilt, and then from there I came to New Haven. So I've stayed less,

while I'm very tied to Franklin County and feel very, feel it very much a part of my identity and upbringing,

I don’t know the people nearly as well. I am both an insider and an outsider.

Whereas Houston reminds me a lot. He will say, remember so and so. And while he remembers them vividly, I may remember them not so vividly. I remember them, but they're kind of in amber. They're 16, 17 years old. He knows them as 50, 60 year olds. So with that, I can give you a number of names, but I don't know if that's as important as that really kind of reflection.

Very close to a lot of people in the band. Joe and Mike and just a lot of people in the band. But you see, I also went on a different path than many of my peers. I went to Sewanee. A number of my peers went to college, but I went on a different path and a different place and had a different trajectory. So we kind of...

Linda (16:38)
I don't know whether the phrase would be parted ways, because parted ways is so often used to sound like something broke. We just went on different paths and thus just stayed less connected. So in so many ways, I'm grateful to reconnecting with Houston, because he's reconnected me.

And then also realize the real power of staying in a place. Then you see that place change, and it's very, very close details, where I see it change in a much broader, much broader tapestry.

Eleanor (17:23)
How did you handle that transition out of Franklin County and how do you handle it coming back to Franklin County?

Linda (17:36)
Well, I'm not sure if this gets at what you're-

Linda (17:44)
I think leaving Franklin County, of course going to Sewanee, I didn't go very far, but you could argue that Sewanee is a kind of different world, even though it's in Franklin County. You could argue that it is a different world.

And I'd already been very involved in Sewanee even while I was in high school because I'd come to the Sewanee Summer Music Center for two summers before I graduated. So I was already involved. And the former Vice Chancellor of Sewanee, Dr. McCrady,

had invited me to join a chamber group that he had on Sundays. So I was this local student from a local high school coming up the mountain every Sunday and going to Dr. McCrady's house and playing with a variety of people that I didn't actually really know who they were except they were Sewanee professors. So I was already, in a sense, in a different world. Or I was already very familiar with Sewanee.

And going to Nashville, I'd been going to Nashville as a child. I'd gone to Nashville regularly because that's where we went to get supplies for the theater. So going to Nashville was not a kind of going to a different place. It was just very familiar. We went there for the theater. So going to Nashville for medical school was actually very nice.

It was like moving to a big city and there was a lot of things around. I think the other thing that probably for me personally, excuse me, is when my mom graduated from high school, she graduated at the end of World War II, the very end of the war. And she, for the last few months of the war, worked at an army camp in Tullahoma,

Linda (19:40)
where they processed supplies, processed troops moving back and forth. It was called Camp Forrest. Remarkable job for a 17, 18 year old just graduated

from high school. And then some folks there told her that the war was ending and that Camp Forrest would close.

So they actually helped her know about that transition. They helped her. She was one of the last people to close it out. And then she got a job in Nashville working at the Veterans Administration. So from my growing up, in a way, Nashville was also this place that my mom discovered because she would tell stories about living in Nashville.

I knew exactly where she lived because she showed me. I knew the paths that she took to get the bus to go to the VA because she showed me. So in a way, Nashville was not an unusual place to me. It was both that we'd gone there a lot, but it was part of a mythical, if you will, or family story of growing up. So really it wasn't till coming to New England, coming to New Haven.

that I actually really left Franklin County. Because when you live in Nashville, as you know, you can go back and forth. And you're still living in a Southern place. It was coming to New England that–. Where it was really different. Although actually for years, many years, I denied that it was different at all.

I would say, it's not really that different. You get to know it. It's not really that different. Which probably was a reflection of how much I missed the South.

Linda (21:35)
And also how much I didn't want to acknowledge that, yeah, I'd actually left the South and I was living somewhere else. I've come to acknowledge the differences, and I really like the differences of New England, and I still miss the South. But when I think probably to your question of how did I manage it, I partially managed it by minimizing the difference.

And then when I found anyone that had a Southern accent that we could go and we could talk our native language if you will. But there was that transition. I was also, because of some time at Vanderbilt where I had gone to

graduate school in history, I was also very, very interested, very deeply immersed in the

Southern writers that had moved to New England. Robert Penn Warren, many of them who had moved and actually wrote about the South from the vantage point of being outside. And that was particularly meaningful to me. And I think that was another way of managing, in retrospect, none of that was clear to me at the time, but managing the transition.

Eleanor (23:01)
We're now going to shift focus towards school desegregation. How aware were you of the desegregation case in Franklin County? How much did you know about it? What did you know about it happening in other parts of the country, in other parts of the state? Yeah.

Linda (23:28)
Yeah, so it's a really interesting question. And obviously, we've talked a bit before we've done this more formally. And in our speaking–.

Was it just last week? In our speaking last week, I realized–.

I actually realized that I knew very little about the case. And I don't know whether my parents knew. I'm assuming they did. And I actually had the opportunity to speak to Mark Stewart and ask him, did he know anything about it as a child? And he didn't either. And he was very much a part of a legal family.

And we should explore this further because I might be unique, Mark might be unique, in not knowing. If you have a chance to ask Houston, you should ask him. But I'm wondering, what I'm wondering is that the fact that we as 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 year olds, that we didn't know.

Linda (24:42)

Was it a product of the adults around us not talking very much about it?

Linda (24:55)
Was it a product of our own–.

Trying to think of a way to put it, of our own privilege, if you will, our own whiteness, that it wouldn't even occur to us. That would be very unsettling to me, but possible.

Was it kept so quiet in the community,

So untalked about except in certain circles that it just wasn't a part of the community discourse? I don't know.

Linda (25:36)
And that's what I find actually extraordinarily haunting, that we–. I, let me simply say, knew that desegregation happened, welcomed our, at least by my memory and perspective, our peers from Townsend High School to the high school.

That I have absolutely, that I remember well. I remember them joining us. I remember them being in our classes. I remember teachers from Townsend coming to Franklin County High School.

Linda (26:23)
But I don't remember any discussion at all about the case and about the controversy. I don't remember any of that. And I really do, quite frankly, find that reflecting in my current age, I find that incredibly distressing.

Linda (26:43)
I think to me, at least I hope to me, they were the students, our peers who came from Townsend, they were our peers. I had grown up in a family that,

although as we all talked about, we are a part of our culture, but I had grown up in a family that was pretty progressive in their views about race.

Progressive for a small southern town. Quietly progressive, but when forced to make, or when something unjust happened before them, my parents would speak out, especially my mom. Did that influence me? Well, probably. I'm sure it did.

But you also asked me a question last week. And this is so, this is, so you asked me the question last week, did you have a prom? And I said, I remember saying, I think we did. And then I reflected back on that and thought, I don't remember a prom.

Linda (27:59)
I think my memory's okay, but I don't remember. So to be very straight, Mark Stewart was talking to me and he says, you know...

Now he's saying this as an adult, not aware at the time, saying as an adult, he says, you know, they canceled the prom for a number of years because they didn't want Black and white, they were afraid of what would happen for Black and white students getting together on a dance. And I said to Mark, really?

Nobody talked about that. He said, no, they didn't talk about it. They just canceled it. In his class, because Mark is just a little bit younger than me, his class was the first class to have a prom, and he thought maybe 10 years. Maybe not quite 10, but they were the first class.

And he laughed at his current age and said, and we all just had fun. There was no problem at all. But they probably were still worried by the adults. But I didn't know that. Now you could also say that I was a geeky high school–.

You know, really, really, you know, into music and studying and just not paying attention. That's highly possible. But I think there's also the element of

people didn't talk about it, and especially the people that I was most associated with. Even if they felt it was unjust, which I'm sure they did, at least I would assume certainly my parents were, they just didn't talk about it. And there was a kind of community.

Linda (29:53)
Suppression. Now this is all thoughts that have come to me over this last week because I didn't, you know, I said to you quite glibly, well I think so, but we didn't.

Linda (30:11)
So I'll stop there and see if any of that isn't all helpful.

Eleanor (30:16)
It's all helpful. What did you know about desegregation happening in the rest of the country?

Linda (30:26)
Oh, I knew a fair amount of, well, a fair amount as much as a 16, 17-year-old knows. But I knew about it. I knew it was happening. I knew in places that it was much less, it went much less smoothly, obviously, than it...

Seemed to on the surface go in Franklin County, but I gather now, looking, learning and looking back, it didn't go smoothly in Franklin County either. But it was more, there was much more unrest, much more violence. I knew...

Well, there's two things I can tell you. One is when Martin Luther King was shot. Those were tremendous turbulent times. Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy, all that period of time. Actually, I remember quite well when Martin Luther King was shot that...

My father was in the National Guard and they were mobilized. They were mobilized because there was enormous fear that there would be riots in

Nashville and everywhere. And so I had music lessons in Nashville every Saturday.

And my mom and I drove to Nashville with my father's great worry because nobody knew what was going to happen. There were National Guard vehicles along the way. Nothing happened. Nothing happened at all.

Linda (32:01)
My father talked about it as actually they really did nothing, that it was all very peaceful, very sad, tremendously sad, at these assassinations. So I knew broadly about it was happening across the country. I obviously saw the images from Birmingham and other places. And it is...

Linda (32:29)
I feel like switching voices here because I want to say this is one of the reasons I'm so committed to helping you and help moving this project along. As I think that there was a tremendous amount of–.

Linda (32:48)
Splitting is a psychological term, but there was a tremendous amount of splitting of perspectives. People's lives just went on when there was a lot of violence and injustice happening all around us. And especially as a teenager, it was happening all around.

Were we, was I, was I with my peers? Were we totally aware of it? Did we talk about it? With my peers, we didn't talk about it. Maybe with others, they did. But with mine, we did not.

I didn't have many people that I talked about politics or history or anything happening in the nation, other than my family. But, so yes, aware, but what I find so still quite distressing, frankly, is to realize that aware on this broad national level, less aware on the local level.

And I only recently, by being involved with Professor Register and a number of other people, have learned much more about, for example, the Highlander Folk School in Grundy. I knew nothing about that.

I asked my mom before she died, did you know anything about the Highlander Folk School? And she didn't either. And my mom was an extremely informed, well-read, read everything she could get her hands on. So that was another split there as well, to hear all of this incredible activity around the Civil Rights Movement was happening less than 20 miles away, just up the mountain. But it didn't filter down.

Linda (34:39)
It did not filter down. Other than perhaps some, which I would have chosen not to pay attention to, my parents probably, other than probably some rhetoric about communism or something happening up there in that strange place. But I would have discounted that. Didn't know anything–. Didn't know Rosa Parks came to the mountain. Didn't know Martin Luther King came to the mountain. Didn't know anything.

Linda (35:07)
So that's what I mean of that history happening around us, but there was this kind of cultural bubble, in a sense. That's why, again, switching hats, that's why this project is so important.

Eleanor (35:27)
What else did your parents, what did your parents say to you about the Civil Rights Movement?

Linda (35:37)
What they said, and probably my mom would–. My dad was just by nature a very quiet person. He didn't, he felt deeply and felt values deeply, but he didn't always comment on it.

My mom would have been more vocal.

They both felt that, how to put it, they obviously felt that racism was wrong, that the segregation, that the inequality was deeply wrong, and that it was overdue, that it had to change.

Were they out on the front lines? No. In their own quiet way they were trying to do things, but they were not activists on the front lines. But they certainly felt that it was wrong and...

And I think they both–. Though we never talked about it actually. My mom and I maybe a little bit.

Linda (36:45)
They both had grown up. My mother's mother is of Appalachia, hills of Kentucky.

And so did not have a lot of experience with Black families until she moved out of the hills. My father's father, my grandfather and grandmother were frankly more racist. were. They grew up in a much more... They were from the hills of East Tennessee, but a more... They had more fixed ideas about race. From an individual level, they were very kind.

But from a kind of social level, I never had the conversations with my grandfather. I just knew from some of the things he said that we certainly wouldn't agree. But I think both of my parents came out of that and found their own way to a more, what would now be called a more social justice frame. We didn't call it that.

It's just not right. And it may be what other generations thought or whatever, but it's just not right. It has to change.

But we never really spoke more broadly or more deeply than that. I'm sure they would be appalled, were appalled by all violence and anything associated with desegregation and all of that. They were absolutely appalled. And I'm–. I know that my mom, for example, I told you that the Oldham was a segregated place. My mom hated that. Absolutely hated that.

Linda (38:32)
And was completely relieved when it was no longer.

Eleanor (38:44)
Shifting back towards school desegregation, what do you remember from the first month or semester of classes at a desegregated Franklin County High School?

Linda (39:00)
This is not going to be very deeply nuanced. What I remember is that we had new, you know–. So see, I had gone from the grade school into high school and so many of my peers were with me in grade school and came to high school. And so what I remember is great, we have new people in our class that we didn't actually, many of us didn't know because they went to another, they'd gone to another school and here they were.

I'm deeply embarrassed to say or to reflect on–. That I'm actually, I would be probably, I think I'd be pretty sure that my Black peers, women and men, I'm pretty sure they probably experienced some pretty–.

Linda (40:00)
terrible things said to them in the halls or being shunned or whatever. I don't remember it. None of them talked to me about it. But I would be reasonably sure that they did. And I'm horrified to realize that among my peers, we didn't talk about it. It didn't come up.

And I don't ever remember being put in a position, and I deeply hope that had I been put in that position to have defended or just stood up for one of my peers, I hope I would have. But I don't remember ever being put in that position.

So were we what I don't know? And actually, when I asked Houston, would he talk to you, Houston interestingly said to me, yes, he would talk to you as much as he remembered, because he didn't remember much. I can assure you Houston's memory is a lot better for those years than mine. So was there a kind of segregation, even in desegregation? Or in our classroom?

Linda (41:18)
New friends, peers in our classroom? But was there a kind of keeping to each group still keeping to itself, except for hateful incidents on the football field or in the hallways or whatever. That's what I don't know. That's what I suspect now at my current age likely happened. That it wasn't all smooth and beautiful and easy and...

They just came and everybody said great.

No. That didn’t happen.

I don't know the experience of the teachers that came from Townsend.

How are they? One of them was Mr. Hunt, our biology teacher. How did he feel?

It is the naivete of a 15, 14, 15, 16 year old to not even know to ask, Mr. Hunt, how is this for you? What's it like coming from a school that you were actually the principal of, as well as the biology teacher? What's it like? My current age? I'd ask him. 15, 16? Didn't ask.

Linda (42:38)

Is that a statement of whiteness? Possibly. Don't know.

Eleanor (42:48)
Do you remember making friendships and building relationships with these new Black students?

Linda (42:59)
I don't. But I have to say, again, you may hear something different from Houston. While you asked me earlier about my friends, I had friends.

But I... So let me go back another way.

My family, we were a very close family. And what we did every night was we went to work. We went to work at the theater. So I would come home from school, usually go to the theater in town. Then we would go home. We might have dinner at home. And then we would go to work at the drive-in theater. Many of my friends, my closer friends,

were the young men, because my father, he didn't hire any young women, he hired young men, were the young men that worked at the theater. That was sort of my after school experience, unless I went to band practice.

So I had a different kind of after school peer experience. My family was very close and it was all oriented around work and the theater. So while I might know some of the new students or my friends who came to the theater, my socialization was really at the theater. Save for Houston and a handful of other people.

Linda (44:31)
So it's not some, it may very well be that there was segregation within desegregation, but I think there's also individualness to it that...

Our family was very insular and very, very focused on work.

Eleanor (44:58)
Did you build–. Like, Mr. Hunt was a biology teacher and you were really into science as you've already said. Did you build a close relationship with any of the teachers from the Townsend School?

Linda (45:14)
No. I didn't. I mean, I knew Mr. Hunt and he was a good biology teacher, but no. My science, my closest teacher around science was actually a grade school teacher.

Seems so outdated now. Her first name was Dixie. It's Dixie Vaughn.

And her husband had run a hardware store in Winchester. She was a mentor to me from the third grade on. She didn't follow me to high school, but she didn't teach in high school. But I continued to be friends with her and connected with her until I went to college.

Some–. So the chemistry teacher was Mrs. Neese, whose family ran another hardware store. I was probably more connected teacher-wise to, and I'm just thinking, I think Mr. Hunt was the one teacher that I had who came from Townsend. There were other teachers, but I was not in their classes.

Linda (46:33)
I was more connected actually to the English and literature and history people than I really was to the science, so I was very much into science. Just how it was.

Eleanor (46:55)
You mentioned your teacher named Dixie, which feels pretty relevant to another conversation about Franklin County High School, the Confederate mascot. How did you feel about the Confederate mascot? How has that perspective changed?

Linda (47:18)
Perspective is, my perspective on it has changed quite dramatically. And I, you know, I actually wonder this is something

I'll never know.

What I wonder is, would my perspective have changed as dramatically as it has had I not moved to New England? But, don't know that. I think at the time, the mascot was the mascot. I think I told you earlier that there was two. One was the very gracious...

You know, never, the gracious Southern colonel, never to be bloodied or dusted or battered in any way, that was the one that most time appeared. And then there was the really bloodied, beat up, snarling Confederate, never give up kind of side of the mascot.

I never liked that one. But at a deeper level.

Linda (48:29)
Even though my family, at least on my father's side, well documented, were members of the Union Army, part of the occupation of Nashville, were not a part of the secession. And I think probably on my mother's side it's less clear.

So my family, from the very beginning, we had this kind of funny history, in a way, for living in the middle of the South. We lived in the middle of the South, understood Confederacy, et cetera, but always had this different lineage. We didn't fight for the Lost Cause.

But I didn't think much about that in high school. I was very much into the Civil War. It wasn't until I came to New England to realize that other parts of the country call it the War of the Southern Rebellion. I was very much into it. I

could tell you the details of all the battles. I could tell you all of that. But the deeper significance of what it actually meant and why was it so enduring.

And what did it possibly mean for Black young men, because there were no–. Women's athletics were just coming into being when I was in high school. So it was mainly Black men athletes. What did it mean for them to run out under the Confederate flag?

I sort of, I don't think I ever even questioned the Confederate flag.

Linda (50:09)
That I knew it was a symbol of something that–.

As a friend of mine once said when she was reading *Gone With the Wind*, I don't think it's going to work out well for the Confederacy. That it was a symbol of something that people seemed to care a lot about. Okay, it wasn't my symbol. But it was broadly a symbol of the South. And so I don't, again, it is embarrassing to me, but I don't think that I

asked at that age, ever took it more deeply of what is this really a symbol of? What does it actually really mean? I understood enslavement. Well, I knew about enslavement. Did I understand enslavement in the way I do now? No. I knew about the paradoxes of Jefferson and all of that. But to ask it on an individual level...

What did it mean for my peers? What did it mean for what were we as white southerners–. What were we compromising in ourselves? What were we suppressing in ourselves when we played Dixie on a touchdown?

Those were the questions I didn't ask at that age. Those are the questions I ask now, but I did not ask at that age. I went to graduate school in the intellectual history of the antebellum, of the post-war South, post-bellum

South, and started to ask some of those questions, but not at that age. And I deeply wish,

Linda (51:59)
I say this not out of regret, but I deeply wish that there had been teachers.

Those were not questions even that my parents asked, though we didn't celebrate the flag or fly the mascot or any of that. But I wish there had been some teachers.

I wish they could have, but maybe they couldn't. Maybe they couldn't step out of their culture that would engage us in those discussions. What would that have been like? Again, it's not out of regret because I suspect that people just couldn't ask those questions. And that, in a way, is an almost more tragic statement about humanity.

In order to resolve the paradox, we have to suppress one side. To resolve the paradox of how you can play football under that flag and under that mascot, you have to suppress what that actually means on a deeper level. It's a tragedy. I don't know if that's helpful. That's the reflection back.

Eleanor (53:16)
All of this is helpful. What were you taught about the Civil War?

Linda (53:23)
Well, I don't mean to sound really...

Linda (53:30)
I don't want to sound. Well, I'll just say it.

We weren't actually taught a great deal, but I knew a lot more because I was actually really interested in it. And like I say, I was kind of a geeky kid. And so I read a lot more than what we were taught in classrooms.

What I vaguely remember, but I already knew when I was in high school that this was a little more nuanced than this. What I vaguely remember is we were sort of taught about, you know, it was a lost cause. You know, the Confederacy did its best, but lost. And that's, it was a tragedy. And I already knew at that time that it was more complex than that.

That there were economic issues. I kind of knew that it was a fight over enslavement. I didn't know it at the deeper levels. But it was really kind of a...

It was a very, it was, my memory is it was a very, very–. History is always about stories. It was the once–. The story was that the South lost, but they were valiant. The South lost but valiant. Gave it the best try they could. And then the Northern, the Northern industrial complex.

Linda (54:54)
The Northern wealth imposed all of these hateful, kept the South down. But that's what Reconstruction was, was keeping the South down. That's kind of what we were taught. That's not really the story. Well, that's one way of seeing the story, I guess. But that's kind of what we were taught. In a way, it's a kind of, I didn't know this at the time, but it's a kind of Faulknerian view, you know, the defeated–.

The defeated region that cannot let go. And out of that rises all sorts of things. You can argue rises great literature, but also rises hate and what you see now, hate and all the various isms. But we were taught a kind of narrow view of the Civil War.

Linda (55:50)
Not even that it could be called a variety of different things. So that's what I remember.

Eleanor (56:01)

And you've talked to us before about attending the Civil War Centennial. What do you remember from that?

Linda (56:11)
The Civil War Centennial? Yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember sitting on the square, which is what it's called. It wasn't until I came to New England that I realized that it's greens here and squares in the South. Sitting on the square and watching the parade go around.

With the various Confederate, well, at the time I probably would have just said the soldiers in gray, but the Confederate, the rebels, reenacting. And I remember sitting there saying to my grandmother, okay, now explain this to me again. We're sitting here with this, but we fought for the North, right? And she would nod, yes, that's true. But again, there was the...

I'm not faulting her. I think I was trying to get her to explain, what are we celebrating here? And, you know, I didn't ask the question, it was clear that, and it's probably not a paradox that she had grappled with either. But that's what I remember. It was an enormous celebration of this kind of, I don't know that people called it the Lost Cause.

But probably that's what it was, know, the celebration of the valor, the glory. It was one of the bloodiest wars in American history.

Well, there was very little valor in that event in those five years. But that's what it was, a kind of reaching for lost glory, a kind of real life reenactment of *Gone with the Wind*. But yeah, that's what I remember.

Eleanor (58:14)
Well, I think we're just at about time. So I'm going to wrap up oral history session number one with Linda Mayes. Thank you so much for your time today, Linda, and for your insight.

Linda (58:21)
Sure. You're welcome. And let me know if you want to speak again. Let me know. OK. Alright. Take care. See you. Bye.

Eleanor (58:40)
Absolutely. Thank you so much.