

Tommie Jones

**Interviewed by Jamie Kellner, Kalamazoo College
and Traci Burton, Kalamazoo Central High School**

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On Race Relations Then

"Well, when I first moved here in 1945 this was a Dutch-German community, and they had set ideas about the way things should be done and where we should be. Mexicans or black individuals were on the Northside of Kalamazoo or the Eastside of Kalamazoo. As far as moving out into Portage or an area like I'm in now or the Southside of Kalamazoo -- you wouldn't see any of us there.

They had ideas about who should have what job, and who shouldn't, no matter how smart you were or whatever, they would disrespect you ... instead of Mr. or Mrs., they would just call you whatever. When we moved here my wife, she was teaching some of the kids that lived right here in this neighborhood, and if you look now you'll see some little BB holes in the windows and stuff from the kids coming by and shooting at our windows and stuff.

They had their areas and things, they had their little clubs, like out on West Main there ... used to be the Elk's Club, and black people weren't allowed on that golf course. You could cook, you could deliver stuff, but you had to bring it in through the back. There was just a lot of things that would let you know that you're not really a part of this community.

At that time, a lot of the teachers thought in terms of the students of color as being only able to be a janitor or doing menial -type jobs, and they didn't have any real involvement with us. They didn't really encourage us to do much of anything at that particular time, unless you had a lot of intestinal fortitude and unless you really had the drive to make yourself better, you just didn't do anything."

And Now

"The town is a lot more liberal now. At the time me and my family moved to Kalamazoo, housing was restricted through covenants. Restaurants discriminated. They would look at you like you weren't supposed to be there. They might serve you and they might avoid you. That was the case up to the early 60s."

On What Still Needs To Be Done

"More jobs. Back in the 60s, young people didn't have TV and video games, but they had Douglass Community Center, sock hops at school. They'd hang out on the corner and sing. Now they hang out to engage in gang activity, fighting, killing. We'd fight, but it wasn't like it is today. We weren't trying to kill each other. We didn't have the kind of drug problem they have now."