

2012

## Interview of Wendell Reed

Wendell Reed

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## FIELD NOTES

**Interviewee:** Wendell Reed

**Interviewer:** Nadirah O'Conner

**Interview date:** Session 1 was conducted on March 11, 2012

Session 2 was conducted on March 17, 2012

**Interview Location:** LaSalle University, Connelly Library Study Room 106

Field notes written on April 4, 2012

### **The Interviewee:**

Wendell Reed was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on March 23, 1971. He was born at the naval hospital in South Philadelphia and was raised in James Weldon Johnson Homes, which is located between Ridge Avenue Diamond Street and between 25<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Streets in North Philadelphia. His father, Reginald Sterling Reed was a naval officer and his mother Joan Vernell, who was at one time a school teacher. He has one biological sister, Kathy and was raised with three "step-sisters", Cloria, Claudia, and Jamilla. He attended Catholic school as a youth and joined the military as a young man. He made several attempts to become a police officer. He took the police test in Philadelphia in 1989 but due to a freeze on hiring in the city was unable to get a position. He was hired as a police officer in Atlanta, Georgia in 2000 but eventually came back to Philadelphia because of the stress it was putting on his wife, who was still living in Philadelphia while he commuted between Atlanta and Philadelphia bi-weekly. Wendell also worked off and on as a school police officer in Philadelphia schools. He is presently retired from that job. Currently, Wendell is working as a Deputy Chief in the Borough of Colwyn, Pennsylvania. He is married to his wife Gennifer and has three children. They live in Philadelphia a few blocks away from LaSalle University, in the Germantown area.

### **The Interviewer:**

I, Nadirah O'Conner was born and raised in Philadelphia. My parents divorced when I was 12. My older brother and I were raised by my mom. I earned a B.A. in Political Science and a B.S. in Secondary Education Social Studies from Penn State University. I completed my student teaching in Pierre, SD at an all Native American boarding school. Upon graduating I returned to South Dakota, for 1 month, as a long-term substitute. When I returned home I took a job at Blair Christian Academy teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade. In 2004 I taught 10<sup>th</sup> grade at Hope Charter School. After one year I moved on teaching in the Philadelphia School District. I began at a school, which is now shut down called William Pierce Middle School. I later transferred to Bok. After a year I transferred to A. Philip Randolph Career and Technical High School, where I taught as a history teacher for 4 years. Due to budget cuts I was force transferred to Germantown High school for the 2011-2012 school year.

## **Background:**

I choose Wendell Reed for this interview because he is a very talkative person, full of information and great stories. About 2 or three years ago Wendell and I worked together at Randolph Career and Technical High School, located on Henry Avenue in North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I was a history teacher there and he was a school police officer. I recently saw him in Pathmark supermarket in Mount Airy (a Philadelphia neighborhood). There we began talking about what we were currently up to and we were at the lunchmeat counter for about two hours catching up. He was filled with stories and good advise. So, when I was faced with this project and my first choice, an officer from my current school, choose not to work with me I immediately thought of Wendell.

I explained the concept of this project to Wendell and he was very open to this type of interview. He had no concerns or apprehensions. He was just open and willing to do it.

I had fifty-four questions that I had created in preparation for the interview. I tried to around the questions into topics starting with Wendell's family background. The other questions were grouped according to neighborhood, early childhood, education, career and thoughts on education, in that order. Grouping my questions seemed to be a good idea to maintain some cohesion and to help the interview go along smoothly without jumping around too much. I also thought grouping them may help anyone who chose to listen to this interview for any reason.

## **Description of the Interview:**

Wendell and I met on March 11, 2012 for the first session of our interview. I check my recorder and turned it on. Our interview was going great for about the first half hour then I looked down at it and noticed that it was no longer on. I was very disturbed because I had no idea what happened. I let Wendell know that we had to start all over again. He was very agreeable to beginning again. We both could not believe it. When I began to record for the second time we were both kind of laughing. Wendell was very humorous about it and was making jokes in the background as I was recording the date and asking for permission for the second time that day. There is also a bit of annoyance in my voice as I say my name again, after such a great "lost" original. The only thing about starting over was that the richness he gave for the first set of questions was not there. Having to answer them a second time, his answers were stale for lack of better wording. He still gave the same basic answers but the spirit in which he gave them the first time was not there and it was not verbatim. The essence of the original taping was there but just not exactly like it was before. After we got passed the "lost questions" everything was fresh and full of life.

I had given Wendell a bottle of water before we began interviewing. Later, in the interview and at various times there is a noise in the background of Wendell tapping the bottle on the table. He at some point took out a pen and he began to click the pen while answering questions. Also there are a few times when the sound of a phone vibrating can be heard.

While transcribing I noticed my own memory. There were sections of the recording that when I listened to it I had remembered it one way but when listening to what was actually said I realized my memory was incorrect. I also noticed that there were complete sections I did not remember at all. Listening to it was like I was not even there when the recording took place. Wendell was talking about playing outside and he mentioned stealing his mothers broom to play with. When transcribing it was like I was listening for the first time but clearly I had heard it before because I conducted the interview. I thought that was strange why I had completely blocked that out. There were other times when I felt so close to his story that it brought back memories of my own childhood, like when he discussed Black Belt Theatre.

I felt that Wendell's reflection on play touched on imagination a lot. He made a statement that children need to play and be outside to get some things they need to develop properly. I agree with that statement but more importantly I think playing outside and play period helps children develop who they will be. How can a person know who they are if they have never explored who they want to be or things they like or pretend to be even what in reality they could never be, because of course no one shoots webs out of their wrists or could out run a speeding bullet but to pretend I could move water with my thoughts creates a feeling in me that just know I can not do it simple does not.

I asked a question about migration in and out of Philadelphia. At first Wendell said he could not respond intelligently but after I explained my question he discovered he had an answer. This made me think of something that a church Mother always says when I am in Sabbath School. "Your thoughts are important." This may not have been the case for Wendell but sometimes people do not feel their words have value, especially on things that seem outside of their expertise or knowledge base. But it is important to speak our thoughts because who knows what value they have if we keep them lock up inside of our minds. His response to the question was great and I think his response, his reflection, his shared experience is part of what makes each individuals life unique to history and part of the cloth of history not just the bold prints of the movers and shakers.

Wendell's discussion of the current state of education brought up many questions that should be recorded for history because it would be good to see if any of the issues are ever addressed or if they just get worse. Safety in schools was brought up when he was discussing families coming to fight with their students. It was not directly stated but it was implied in, why would a family member or a student feel that it was necessary to do that. Corruption in schools was also touched on. The corruption is linked to the safety. Both issues have to be addressed to make

education better. Where is education going? No one knows but the vision does not look good.

One of the last things that was very interesting to me was the distinction between school police and “regular” police. I never realized that it was a jurisdictional division. I also enjoyed and learned from the distinction between school police and school security. This is something that I could use in my teaching. If I ever teach social science again I would love to make a point of bring this out. I feel that it is truly fascinating and show the complexity of government and government services. My original perception of school police was they were more like slightly upgraded security. I also used school police and school security as synonyms in my mind because I have never heard of the term school security prior to this interview.

### **Note on recording:**

For recording, I used a Sony ICD-PX312 battery powered digital voice recorder. I did not use an additional microphone. After the interview was completed, I connected the Sony ICD-PX312 by USB cord to my MacBook laptop and uploaded the audio files. I burned them to a CD in MP3 format. I also copied my field notes and transcript to the same CD.

### **Editing the Transcript:**

My editing decisions included:

- 1) eliminating most repeated words, unless it provided emphasis
- 2) eliminating most false starts, unless it seemed significant
- 3) indicated pauses and laughter in brackets
- 4) placing a time indicator on or near the top of each page
- 5) indication of recording interrupted
- 6) using quotation marks to indicate reported speech
- 7) using a dash (-) to show where speaker simply faded in speech