

ORAL HISTORY T-0276
INTERVIEW WITH DR. OLIVER W.H. TYLER
INTERVIEWED BY GEORGE PETERS
BLACK COMMUNITY LEADERS PROJECT
SEPTEMBER 25, 1972

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Today's date is September 25, 1972. This interview is being conducted in St. Charles, Missouri, and the interviewer is George Peters. Dr. Oliver W. H. Tyler is the interviewee.

PETERS: Doctor, will you please begin by stating your full name and occupation?

TYLER: Oliver Wendell Holmes Tyler. Physician-Surgeon.

PETERS: Will you give us your date of birth and the place?

TYLER: I was born August 30, 1888, in a town called Cadiz, Kentucky. I had two brothers and four sisters.

PETERS: I believe you said that you were the second oldest.

TYLER: I was the second oldest, yes.

PETERS: Could we have the names of your parents?

TYLER: My father's name was Cyrus Lou Tyler. My mother's maiden name was Mary Perkins Waddington.

PETERS: Would you happen to know their dates of birth?

TYLER: Not off hand, no.

PETERS: Could we have...

TYLER: Not my father. My mother's...I can. My mother was born the first year of freedom, March 16. About him...he was about four years older than my mother. My mother was born the first year of freedom, see?

PETERS: 1865?

TYLER: 1866.

PETERS: Now...your education?

TYLER: Date and place of birth. Now, my father and mother were both school teachers.

PETERS: Do you happen to recall where they were born?

TYLER: Cadiz, Kentucky.

PETERS: Cadiz?

TYLER: Yes.

PETERS: Now, what about your own family, Doctor?

TYLER: I have three children, two boys and one girl. Both boys are school teachers, and my daughter is a nurse at Malcolm Bliss Hospital.

PETERS: And your wife's name?

TYLER: My wife is dead. She's been dead seven years. Her name was Nora Irene Hall Tyler.

PETERS: Now, about your formal education. Would you tell us about that, please?

TYLER: I was one year old when I first came to St. Louis. My formal education was in St. Louis. I was a graduate of Dunbar school first. I was a graduate from L'Ouverture grade school and from Sumner High School. From Sumner High School, I entered Howard University. At that time, you didn't have to have a degree...

PETERS: A college degree?

TYLER:...at least from Sumner. Sumner had a high rating. And there, at that particular time, there were about thirty-two entering. Out of the thirty-two, there were two of us from Sumner High School. We did not have to take the entrance examination. They said, "You from Sumner? All right." But the rest of them had to take an entrance examination, and some of them had A.B.'s from smaller colleges.

PETERS: Sumner had a good reputation.

TYLER: A very excellent education. Because my roommate had an A.B. Degree from Benedict College, and I had had as much mathematics, history, etc. that he had! (laughter)

PETERS: And I believe you said that you had graduated from Sumner in 1908.

TYLER: 1908, yes.

PETERS: And that then you went on to Howard University. Do you have any idea about how many medical schools there were at that time for Negroes?

TYLER: Two. Meharry and Howard.

PETERS: And why did you select Howard?

TYLER: My friend, a doctor, was a Howard graduate, and he influenced me to go to

Howard. At first, I wanted to be a school teacher. I wanted to be a Latin teacher. But my father insisted upon me being a doctor. In those days, children minded their parents...different from what they do nowadays.' And he said that the only way he would help me was for me to be a doctor. If I'd take medicine, see?

PETERS: I was to ask you if you needed any financial help while you were in school...beyond the family. Did you have any assistance?

TYLER: I worked previous to going. All the time I was in high school, I worked at a grocery store and I saved my money. I had a sum of over \$300 which was a lot of money in those days. My father and my older sister helped me. My oldest sister was a school teacher. She's living now. She will be eighty-six this February. And she was teaching school and anything I wanted, I asked her. I never would write home for nothing.

PETERS: You said you came to St. Louis when you were...

TYLER: About a year old.

PETERS: ...about a year old. And then you returned after you had graduated from college. Is there any particular reason why you returned to St. Louis? Why didn't you practice medicine elsewhere?

TYLER: Persuasion of my parents. My roommate was from Columbia, South Carolina. His parents had money. My folks didn't have any. I wasn't even able to buy my books. I didn't even have an overcoat. His parents had money; he was a bricklayer, and he tried to entice me to come and start practice with him. But after I wrote home and told my mother and father that I wasn't coming home, I was going to Columbia, South Carolina to practice medicine, my mother was like to have a fit. I was the only boy. And she said, "We've always got some bread and meats here. Come home." So I came back to St. Louis.

PETERS: Could you briefly give me some of your impressions of early St. Louis? That is, as a boy, before you went to Howard...and even after you returned and began practicing? Does anything stand out in your mind?

TYLER: There was quite a bit of prejudice in the city. Well, at that particular time, it was so that you could go to the theater, but you had to go into the gallery...a certain section...but, otherwise, you knew that you were a Negro, and things used to...well, I lived in slum areas, see?

PETERS: You lived in the Negro section?

TYLER: Yes.

PETERS: Roughly, where was that located in St. Louis?

TYLER: Where the Municipal Court building is now, there was a street called Sunny Street and pretty near all the people from Cadiz, Kentucky, landed and resided there with one another until they got located, you understand? Because there was a little colony of them that came from Cadiz, you understand? Then I moved into various places. Oh, we moved quite a

bit. I lived on Chestnut and Randolph Street, 2600 block, and Market...Oh, I don't know how many places I lived.

PETERS: Could I ask what groups or organizations that you belonged to...or church, professional organizations?

TYLER: I'm a Catholic by religion, and I belonged to the Mound City Medical Society and the Tri Delta Medical Fraternity, the NAACP. I'm a life member of the NAACP and the American Medical Association.

PETERS: Was there a Negro branch?

TYLER: The Negro branch, yes.

PETERS: Separate and apart?

TYLER: Yes.

PETERS: Have you joined any other Negro-oriented groups in the St. Louis area? I'm thinking of the Urban League or NAACP.

TYLER: I'm a life member of the NAACP, and I belong to the Urban League, too.

PETERS: Could you relate...

TYLER: The Y.M.C.A., too.

PETERS: You're quite active, then?

TYLER: Well, I've been out here some forty years.

PETERS: Well, I mean while you were in St. Louis.

TYLER: Yes.

PETERS: Would you care to relate any of the experiences you might have had as a NAACP member or an Urban League member?

TYLER: I had none that I could mention, because I was just a member and paid dues and not an active participant.

PETERS: Have you been active in any political groups in St. Louis or St. Charles?

TYLER: No, none. I'm not a politician. I always vote for the man I think would do the masses the most good, whether he's a Democrat or a Republican. I have never identified myself with any political group.

PETERS: Did the ideology of any of the national Negro leaders influence you at all? People like Booker T. Washington or DuBois [Jacob], Garvey, or A. Philip Randolph?

TYLER: No, I'm a very particular individual... funny individual, I would call it. I was always a man of my own, see? Booker T. Washington...some of his ideas I liked and same way with DuBois...and what's his name...with the NAACP?

PETERS: Wilkins?

TYLER: Wilkins. And some I did not like, see? I was never a follower, you understand? I had certain standards myself that I believed in, and I didn't care what the other one thought.

PETERS: You didn't give blind allegiance to any of them?

TYLER: No.

PETERS: Can you name any of the people that might come to mind that were outstanding political or social leaders in the Negro community of St. Louis?

TYLER: Well, there was Ralph Turner, I believe his name was. He was quite an active political man at that time. But, otherwise, no. The majority of these individuals now are all for their own selves, you understand? I figured that out. No, none that I could mention.

PETERS: I have several names here.

TYLER: Who?

PETERS: Sweets, Mitchell, Redman...

TYLER: Now, Redman is an outstanding man, but he would have...but he's a lawyer and a highly intelligent man. He's a Harvard graduate, see? And Redman would be more my ideal than either Mitchell or Sweets, of course. Theodore McNeal...I just never cared for much. Well, most of them, I figured, like Mitchell or Sweets or Theodore McNeal...they are "yes-sir-mans", see?

PETERS: Bowing down...

TYLER: Bowing down...

PETERS: Bowing down to bigger politicians?

TYLER: Yes, but Sydney Redman, I consider him a high-class man.

PETERS: A strong individual?

TYLER: Yes, a strong individual, yes.

PETERS: Do you remember anything particular about Redman that stands out in your mind? Things he may have said or done?

TYLER: No, not particularly. You see, Redman came to St. Louis after...I've been out here for forty-some years, and I'm not so familiar with things that happened...politics, or anything

else in St. Louis.

PETERS: Yes, I understand. You mentioned Dr. McClelland...was he a Negro?

TYLER: He was a Negro doctor, and he was very nice to me. When I finished, a young Negro doctor had a heck of a hard time. They always expect you to be an old man. The majority of our groups did not have much confidence in a Negro doctor. The same thing existed among the white physicians when they felt...They thought we were all dumb and didn't have no sense, you understand? They said, "This looks like a diploma," and throw it at you.'

PETERS: You mean that even in a Negro community a Howard graduate wasn't...

TYLER: Well, a Howard graduate was always considered outstanding,-you understand, but now Meharry has built up a good one, too. Now, I can tell you some instances that happened...they wanted to staff...the first Negro hospital that we had was an old building at Beaumont and Morgan, an old residence...was the first hospital that I can remember...

PETERS: Exclusively for Negroes?

TYLER: Oh, yes, exclusively...the next one...just here in the last few years that Negroes could go into any hospital. They didn't want them on the staff even. Didn't want me on the staff. I couldn't go in the building.

PETERS: St. Joseph's?

TYLER: Yes, St. Joseph's. So, the next hospital was all-Negro. Ran and manned by Negroes was Peoples' Hospital on 2800 Locust...or 28000 Lawton...and the next one was Theresa and Pine, and the last one 2200 Locust...that one was closed because of finances. St. Mary's down on _____ Street, which was all-Negro, but we had...ran by the White Sisters.

PETERS: I understand that when Homer G. [Phillips] Hospital was started back in the 30's, I believe, that there was some difficulty there...though it was a Negro hospital, there were whites who wanted to be chief administrators. Is that right?

TYLER: Well, let me tell you what happened. When that hospital was first started, I was elected as one of the main superintendents... the one who did accept it, I was at his funeral on Saturday...he was ninety years old.

PETERS: That would be who?

TYLER: Dr. Roscoe Chester Haskell. There was a nurse who was superintendent of the nurses who really ran the hospital in those days. And I was never the type of an individual who would take orders from a nurse, you understand. I refused the job...they were paying \$150 a month. At that time, \$150 was a lot of money, see? So, I would not accept it, because I knew I couldn't get along if a nurse told me how to run my business, you understand? (laughter)

PETERS: This would be in the 1930's?

TYLER: Yes, I think it was about 1930 when they opened that hospital...you know, the hospital was named after Homer Phillips. It was called "City Hospital, Number 2." It was 2900 and Lawton Avenue at that particular time. In order to maintain the staff, so many of us Negro doctors accepted to be heads of certain departments...like medicine, surgery, orthopedics, etc. You had to have so many under those branches to have a hospital, you understand? I took Orthopedics. I wasn't very particular about it, but I accepted in order to fill out the quota, you understand, for Negro doctors. And Homer Phillips Hospital was named after a lawyer, a very big Negro lawyer, a Howard graduate. He was killed by gangsters, see? He evidently...they wanted to get rid of him. Something was to be in his court, and they had to kill him. He was waiting for a streetcar at Boyle and Olive and that's where they shot him. I'll show you how things were. I was on the staff there in orthopedics, and so about this time, there was a Dr. Stone who was the head of Orthopedics from Washington University, and I'd go in and scrub up, and go in and put a towel on and stand there, and he'd go ahead and do the work...never ask you to sponge or clamp a blood vessel or nothing. All right. The second one...the same dumb thing. So, then, the third one came, and I said to him, "Dr. Stone, how many operations have you done?" He said that he was under some other doctor, so he said, "This is my third." So, I said, "I'm down here to learn just like you are. I came in and I was scrubbed up and observed...that's all I've done! And I'm down here to learn just like you are, see?" Then I got put to work. Then when we were down to doing something, he was calling me, see? So...now what else do you want to know about hospitals?

PETERS: You mentioned to me earlier an incident about Dr. McMillan and his operative patients.

TYLER: Dr. McClelland.

PETERS: Going back to McClelland. It was about East St. Louis. Do you want to mention that?

TYLER: We used to go to East St. Louis, Alton, and... I can't think of it.

PETERS: Wentzville?

TYLER: No. But, anyhow, we operated around in a circle like that.

PETERS: You worked as an assistant?

PETERS: I was an anesthetist. For years, I lived off anesthesia, practically.

PETERS: From what I had gathered, I thought you were a general practitioner.

TYLER: I am a general practitioner.

PETERS: But isn't an anesthetist a specialized...

TYLER: I had to. I took x-ray work at Northwestern and...

PETERS: Do you want to tell us the reason why?

TYLER: Well, we had a hospital at Theresa and Pine. At the other hospital, we had no x-ray. So we got an x-ray machine through the Community Chest...they bought it. They gave me ten lessons...free lessons...on how to take the pictures, see, and I thought after I had done that...that summer, I took six weeks of x-ray interpretation. So when I came out here, I had my office girl, and I taught her how to take the pictures. But the interpretation is the main thing, see. So, I took six weeks of x-ray interpretation. And so, I also had to do my own laboratory work here. See, I couldn't go to the hospital here. One good thing...I came from a good school, and I had a good background, see?

PETERS: And you had to rely on yourself because the hospitals often would not allow you to use their services.

TYLER: I wasn't admitted.

PETERS: Couldn't practice there?

TYLER: No.

PETERS: Couldn't get your patients in?

TYLER: I had to send them to a white doctor and they didn't want no Negro patients in there, 90% of my work is white now, you understand.

PETERS: Were you ever allowed in the hospitals back then to treat your patients?

TYLER: No. On one occasion, I put a patient to sleep for a white doctor, and that's the only time until I was on the staff of the hospital.

PETERS: In St. Joseph's, in St. Charles?

TYLER: Oh, this town was as prejudiced as the devil.

PETERS: You could say the same thing, I gather, about St. Louis, too.

TYLER: Well, from being in a small town and being grown, too, and knowing and could feel it more so than as a young man, see, and being more experienced in my profession, you understand, see...

PETERS: Made it very difficult.

TYLER: Made it very difficult for me to take all this stuff. So, consequently, I did my own x-ray work, I did my own laboratory work, filled my own prescriptions, see. The Jackson's who proceeded me...two brothers...had difficulty in getting their prescriptions filled properly.

PETERS: This was after you moved to St. Charles?

TYLER: In St. Charles... they were here.

PETERS: They were here first?

TYLER: They were here and they died, and that's when I came out.

PETERS: To move into their...

TYLER: Well, the tornado destroyed my office, and I was doing nothing in 1927. Sarah and Hodiamont, I was doing nothing. I had three children. I started to go on the railroad. I went down to the Missouri-Pacific yards there, and I was about twenty in line there one day. My mother used to give me a quarter for carfare. I'd usually spend it for something and wouldn't look for nothing. So, I went down to the Missouri-Pacific yards, and I was twenty in line, a man picked me out to report back at two o'clock in the afternoon, see, and so I didn't go back. I went home and I told my mother about it...she said, "Oh, you don't want to do that. You'll get along some way." Well, there were... The Red Cross was very nice. They came in and paid my rent for a place down on Vandeventer, gave me some instruments, etc., and tried to rehabilitate me.

PETERS: Following the tornado?

TYLER: Following the tornado, yes. But I'd made up my mind that I was going to work. I couldn't let my three kids starve there. You see, I had three small children.

PETERS: And it was shortly thereafter that you moved to St. Charles?

TYLER: I came out here in 1927.

PETERS: Was there anything else that you wanted to mention possibly about Homer Phillips or anything else back then?

TYLER: Back then? No. Homer Phillips has been an outstanding hospital. For a while I was on the tubercular staff out there and I quit. I had a cough, and I was scared because I was already underweight, etc. And my wife said, "Are you going to go to the hospital?" And I said, "No, I think I'll quit." That was on a Tuesday...we had the men, and women on Wednesday. They were very careless in their coughing. So I quit.

PETERS: You didn't feel that was the environment...

TYLER: I wasn't getting nothing. I was just filling in, see.

PETERS: Could you briefly describe for me. Doctor, the working and living conditions in St. Louis for Negroes during the teens and twenties where you were practicing?

TYLER: Working... The best jobs that Negroes had were working in the post office. Otherwise, it was porters, menial jobs, chauffeurs, and before cars, it was a coachman. My father was a coachman.

PETERS: On the railroad...or with horses...horse drawn?

TYLER: When he was first here, he railroaded. And then he got a job with a family by the

name of F. M. Johnson. He was a rich lawyer for Pulitzer, Post-Dispatch. And he drove a horse and buggy for them. There wasn't much work for...

PETERS: Most of the work...

TYLER: Well, menial work...service. The thing that used to gripe me when my kids were small, we'd get in the car and go out and they would see a sign by a big theater, and they'd say, "Dad, come on, let's go into the theater." And it would hurt me to my heart that I couldn't take them in there, because I was a Negro.

PETERS: What about living conditions in the Negro community?

TYLER: Living conditions were very poor. I tell you what. Fifty years ago, they opened up Enright. I moved on Enright. Enright was one of the most popular streets...for Negroes at that particular time. I bought a house at 4142 Enright. I still live there. If you lived on Enright, you were something, you understand?

PETERS: Oh, you commute each day?

TYLER: Yes, I still commute.

PETERS: Were there any other problems that you faced as a Negro doctor that you might want to mention...either then or now?

TYLER: The greatest problems that I had were the lack of hospitalization. Going into hospitals. The, of course, when I was in St. Louis, my work was entirely Negro practice, see. And after I moved out here, my work was mostly white, and I had problems entering the hospitals, getting in the hospitals...

PETERS: Trying to get established.

TYLER: To take my patients. Let's see...I wish I had kept track of the number of deliveries I have made. And often, so many people...my white patients that I waited on and delivered...didn't know that such prejudice existed.

PETERS: Until...

TYLER: Until when I came out here. They thought that I was everything but a Negro. They didn't think I was a Negro. Well, I guess it's hard to tell what any race is now they are so doggone mixed up now! My grandfather was a Jew, now what the hell am I? And so, they...the boy that worked for me...oh, if you ever saw this girl...she looked just like an Indian. She was my brother's girl...she's got Indian blood in her, you can see that. And they just came up...they didn't know who we were. And the Jackson brothers who preceded me had Indian blood in them. So, they called me everything but a Negro, at first.

PETERS: And your patients, then, didn't...some hadn't discovered the prejudice until they found out that you couldn't come to the hospital or use the facilities.

TYLER: That's right. Well, at that particular time, you used to deliver the babies in their

home. Of course, you take them, it didn't make much difference. But now, they all deliver in the hospitals.

PETERS: I might mention here that you are the oldest practicing physician in St. Charles County. Very commendable.

TYLER: Yes, one time I came to my office in the evening... oh, I guess there were fifteen or twenty there. I'd say. Who's first?" And it so happened that a Negro was first. I waited on him. The next one was a woman, and when she came in, she said, "Doctor, I didn't know you waited on Negroes." (laughter) I said, "Yes, I wait on anybody. Negroes, Chinamen, anybody, Indians. At night when I ring that cash register, I can't tell the black dollars from the white ones." I made a good patient out of her, see? She still comes in here. Another instance about the same party. She came in here and she had two young girls. She married into one of the richest families out here that I been waiting on for years. They used to have a race track out here. And she brought the two little girls in and they looked at me like this. Their eyes just kept moving, and their mother says, "Uncle ain't going to hurt you." [You know, we called the men "uncle" and the women "aunties."!] I said, "I wouldn't say anything to you if you was a seventy or eighty year old, but it's an awful thing for a young mother like you to rear your children up like this. You know what "uncle" and "auntie" means? That means blood relationship." And I said, "God knows, I am not related to you in any way." (laughter)

PETERS: You mentioned residing on Enright now. Have you always resided in St. Louis since you returned from Howard?

TYLER: On Enright?

PETERS: Well, in St. Louis somewhere? You've been a lifelong resident of St. Louis?

TYLER: Yes.

PETERS: That being the case, can you recall over the years of any white owned businesses in St. Louis that you know that...of any real size...that treated Negro customers properly at all? We hear so much about how there was discrimination outside of the black community. I wondered if there were any exceptions to those.

TYLER: I don't know. The only thing that I know is from hearsay. That is, now like you take women. They wouldn't let them try on hats. Some of them wouldn't let them try on shoes, so they say, but lots of those big stores...Because at that time, most Negro women had lots of grease on their hair...on their head, you understand. Otherwise, I don't know. What little I had to buy, there was no discrimination, you understand.

PETERS: I understand that it was a job even for Negroes to be served in lunch counters at Famous-Barr.

TYLER: Oh, no, you couldn't go in any of those places. That was out. Although my children used to go in there. They didn't know who or what in hell they were! (laughter) I'll show you a picture of my children. They could go into a white barbershop, too, you know. They didn't know what they were...This is my boy. He teaches retarded children in Minneapolis. This is

my daughter. She is the head nurse on the third floor of Malcolm Bliss Hospital now. This is my wife. Now, she is of French descent. She came from a town called Sparta, Illinois. Now, you couldn't tell whether they were white or colored. And...this is my mother...this is my oldest son who teaches history and economics at Soldan High School in St. Louis.

PETERS: He is presently there?

TYLER: He is presently there. This is my mother. After I got to making money... At first, it was a struggle, I mean, you know. But after I got to making money, they [the children] didn't know a bad day. They went to the best schools, dressed good, and everything else. All right, what else would you like to know?

PETERS: I was going to ask you if you could recall any particular occasions when life seemed extra hard for St. Louis area Negroes. Or did it seem to be a strand that runs all through?

TYLER: Well, the strand that existed, except about going to restaurants...you can go in to any restaurant or eating place, any store, any theater in St. Louis. But, otherwise, the conditions, of course, you know...up until just a few years ago, there were only certain localities that you could live in. And, of course, nowadays...what was that law that was passed...

PETERS: Fair housing?

TYLER: Fair housing, etc. Why, there's a Negro doctor building a \$150,000 house out on Des Peres and Lindell Blvd. But back years ago, the blacks wouldn't think about living out there. See, he's building a \$150,000 home out there.

PETERS: That's quite a contrast from when you had to live in the Negro community and your only patients were Negro.

TYLER: Oh, yes.

PETERS: Do you have any memories or recollections at all concerning the East St. Louis race riots?

TYLER: Oh, yes, I remember well. I was a young boy.

PETERS: 1917, I believe.

TYLER: Yes, I was a youngster. At that particular time, there was a Dr. Bundy, who was a big dentist over in East St. Louis.

PETERS: Negro or white?

TYLER: Negro. And they had funerals going back and forth to St. Louis over to East St. Louis. Coffins were nothing but arms...guns and ammunition. There was a funeral one after another going across Eads Bridge to East St. Louis ... supplying men...the free bridge, rather...with ammunition. They run him of East St. Louis. He had a lucrative practice in East

St. Louis, and he went to Cleveland, Ohio, where he finally died. And a brother-in-law of his just died a week or so ago. I think his wife is still living, but I think she is incompetent, see.

PETERS: He was sanctioning working with the arms? A roadrunner?

TYLER: Oh, yes, he was instrumental in getting all this ammunition there. Man, there was one funeral after another going to East St. Louis and there was nothing in the coffin but ammunition. Yes, I remember that very well.

PETERS: I understand that during the riot, many Negroes fleeing the riot came to St. Louis.

TYLER: Oh, yes, lots of them came into St. Louis and they never did give a correct estimate of the number of whites who were killed. There were many a white. They said many more Negroes than whites were killed, but that's a lie. There were many more whites than Negroes killed during that time.

PETERS: Any other recollections on the riot?

TYLER: No.

PETERS: Did it affect you in any way?

TYLER: No.

PETERS: Negroes in St. Louis?

TYLER: No, except for the influx of Negroes that we had at that time. I guess some of them had a hard time getting what jobs there were obtainable and a place to live.

PETERS: So many coming in at one time.

TYLER: Yes, so many coming in at one time.

PETERS: In your mind, what precipitated or caused it?

TYLER: I really don't know what precipitated that riot.

PETERS: Do you recall any other racial incidents in St. Louis or in this area?

TYLER: No, not of any importance. I think not. In this area, I don't know of any. Moving on, I would like to ask you if you have any outstanding thoughts regarding the movement of Southern Negroes into St. Louis...the migration that began during World War I and that continued into the 20's and 30's. Did you feel any of this?

TYLER: No, I didn't. But my sisters were school teachers, and they noticed that the little children entering school from the South could be disciplined better than those in St. Louis.

PETERS: Is that right?

TYLER: Yes, I heard them both say that.

PETERS: You didn't have some of these people become your patients?

TYLER: Not that I know of.

PETERS: I understand that when many of them came up they really had no place to go to other than to those areas where earlier Negroes had arrived from their home towns. Did you notice anything like that?

TYLER: You mean, in East St. Louis?

PETERS: No, coming up from the South...

TYLER: I mean, from the South?

PETERS: Yes.

TYLER: Well, there was no place... There were just certain localities where the Negroes could live in, that's all.

PETERS: Would they try to seek out people who had come earlier from their areas of the South?

TYLER: Oh, yes, more or less. They would send for them to come up from the South. Like with me, like with my, family...When my family came to St. Louis. Some older individuals moved up here and was living on Center Street, you understand, and they influenced my parents to come up here, see. Which existed all over.

PETERS: Did the Negro community seem to be stable during the 20's and 30's when these people were coming in? There seemed to be such large numbers.

TYLER: It wasn't that many comin' in. You mean...

PETERS: From the South.

TYLER: Well, there had been a great influx of Negroes, but they were more or less stable, yes.

PETERS: I mean...what the community stable?

TYLER: Yes, the community was stable. You see, when you are penned in a place where you can't move, you just lay there and kind of live on air and, well, you're stable then.

PETERS: You were restricted?

TYLER: Restricted, yes.

PETERS: What impressions do you have regarding the 1930's, the depression, and the Negroes? I might put it this way. How did the depression affect you as a professional?

TYLER: The depression affected me like this. I had an office... Well, in 1930,...I came out here in 1927. I didn't notice any difference, you know. I came to make money, and I had a more lucrative practice when I first came out here. And...but...before the 30's, it was a different story. Why, when I first... Long before I came out here...after the tornado, see, I came out here shortly after the tornado. Why, that kind of wrecked things in St. Louis. I was waiting table at the Board of Education Building at noon. I'd get \$3.50 for a meal, and then I'd come to my office to practice.

PETERS: When was this?

TYLER: About 19...right after the tornado, around, 1929...1927 when I married. And you might... Of course, if you collected \$10 a day, you had a pretty good day, you understand, see? And I knew I was going to make this \$3.50 by going down to this... serving this noonday meal at the Board of Education Building luncheon.

PETERS: I have heard that during the 1930's because of the scarcity of money that many Negro professionals had to, at least temporarily, give up their practice of medicine or law, but it appears that you...

TYLER: Not so many gave up. They moonlighted, they called it. They worked other places. They waited on tables at beer gardens and things like that, see. And would moonlight...work at night...

PETERS: Subsidize...subsidize.

TYLER: Yes, not many of us gave up our practices.

PETERS: What would you recall about the 1930's New Deal programs?

TYLER: Well, I don't recall very much about it. I happened to be out here. I was doing fairly well myself, you understand, but they had Negroes working on the New Deal...they wasn't getting much...whites suffered just as much as the Negroes...lot of them were on the riverbank down here. I went down there to see a sick person one time, and there was even a dead horse. And for cooking, they had bricks raised up with wires across it, cooking cornbread made out of just pure water and cornmeal. They were in just as bad a fix as the Negro.

PETERS: Generally, how did St. Louis Negroes seem to react to the New Deal? What were their sentiments? Do you think that they felt it was a success...that they wanted a part of...and that they were accepted into?

TYLER: I was out here, and I never did dabble in politics much, you see. That's the thing. The majority, I think, during that time...that's...previous to that time, most Negroes were Republicans, see? But after Roosevelt started with the New Deal, that's when most of the Negroes became Democrats, if you remember. The Republicans thought that they had them in the bag...oh, they'd do this and that...but they [the Negroes] turned.

PETERS: Before we leave St. Louis altogether, I'd like to ask just a bit further about the Negro migration from the South. Do you recall how most of these people came? By

automobile, bus, train, or what?

TYLER: By train.

PETERS: Most of them then came into Union Station?

TYLER: To Union Station by train, yes. They didn't have any automobiles.

PETERS: Did any area of the South seem to send more Negroes to St. Louis than any other?

TYLER: I don't think any of them sent Negroes to St. Louis.

PETERS: Well...the areas from which they migrated.

TYLER: And if you remember at that time...previous to that time...there were a few notorious lynchings. And they were fleeing from that, you see. There were several lynchings...that they never...a young boy from Chicago was killed and found in a mud hole down there... Of course, that was before your time. How old a man are you?

PETERS: I'm forty.

TYLER: Well, I don't know if you would have heard of that or not.

PETERS: Are you referring to Emmett Till?

TYLER: Emmett Till. Do you know about that? You don't remember anything about that, do you? You were too young.

PETERS: Yes, I remember.

TYLER: Yes, that was the boy's name, Emmett Till.

PETERS: From your professional and personal experiences in St. Louis and St. Charles, what changes do you feel that have taken place in race relations are the most important? Assuming that there have been improvements.

TYLER: Well, I think that there have been great improvements. I don't like the idea of...of course, in St. Louis, the school system isn't up to par on account of the districts...you are segregated on account of your districts...you understand? It's a forced segregation, and I did not approve of the bussing, you understand.

PETERS: Keeping the Negroes strictly in certain schools?

TYLER: In certain schools. Well, now out here...of course, it's a hotbed out here, too, now. You couldn't go into this place and you couldn't go to the dime store or go get a soda water or lunch...you'd have to stand up there, bus stops or anything like that. But I could go into any of them. They'd serve me, but I wouldn't accept it, you understand? I could go in any place on Main Street and be waited on.

PETERS: Doctor, you've mentioned that you much prefer that the term "Negro," be used as opposed to "black" Americans. Would you mind telling us why?

TYLER: Get your dictionary...unabridged...do you ever see anything complimentary about black?

PETERS: No. They talk about "blackballing" and that's bad.

TYLER: Yes...

PETERS: And a "black" lie.

TYLER: Yes, just get your unabridged dictionary, any dictionary. If you ever see anything complimentary about being "black," I'd like to know about it. A black Cadillac is a nice thing...I'd like to own one!

PETERS: That's the only thing?

TYLER: Yes, I'd like to have a black Cadillac, see? Otherwise, anything black, I don't want.

PETERS: Who would you consider the influential force in the black community in St. Louis? I'm thinking of either a person, or a group, or even maybe a newspaper. Who tends to set, over the years, the tone...the thinking...the attitudes of the black community?

TYLER: The NAACP and the Young Men's Christian Association.

PETERS: So, their leadership in the various things...

TYLER: Their leadership and their...

PETERS: They had a bigger following than anything else. As a Negro, could I ask you for a quick characterization or a thumbnail impression of St. Louis? Over the years? How do you think that blacks consider St. Louis compared to other metropolitan centers?

TYLER: I think that the blacks consider St. Louis a very, very nice place to live, see. That is, they get along here very well...more so than in other cities. Like in New Jersey, East St. Louis...

PETERS: There's more harmony between the races?

TYLER: More harmony, etc.

PETERS: You know, along that line, I might ask this. You know over the past few years, we have had these riots in Watts and Harlem, but not in St. Louis.

TYLER: Not in St. Louis.

PETERS: What would you attribute that to?

TYLER: I would think to a good understanding between the races, you understand. And the

right kind of people, both black and white, at the head of the city.

PETERS: Could you name anybody that you think...it doesn't matter, white or black...who has done a truly outstanding job or helping?

TYLER: Race relations?

PETERS: Yes, sir.

TYLER: None that I could...no, I can't truthfully. You see, I've been out here so long, I don't know much about St. Louis. Now, I go in there at nine o'clock at night...leave at 8:30 in the morning. Sundays, I go to church, and that's all I do.

PETERS: Your contacts are rather restricted, then, or limited.

TYLER: Yes.

PETERS: Can you recall any Negro performer in the past who you felt gave a good accounting of themselves as really good representatives of the race?

TYLER: Well, there was a prizefighter...

PETERS: Joe Louis?

TYLER: No, he's not from St. Louis. Archie Moore. Do you remember Archie Moore?

PETERS: I think Henry Armstrong, too.

TYLER: Yes, that's one I was thinking about most...Henry Armstrong. In preference to Moore...and, see, he got; real religious afterwards...fighting...and he was quite influential with boys...boys' clubs and so forth. Oh, what's his name...Dick Gregory...

PETERS: Do you think he was.. .

TYLER: Well...

PETERS: ...a good spokesman for the black community.

TYLER: Yes, he was a good spokesman for the black community. Dick Gregory came up under very difficult circumstances, as a boy. Now, lots of these other fellows, like Cosby...he talks about his boyhood...he didn't have it near as hard as Dick Gregory...

PETERS: Yes, I was going to say...he was a St. Louis boy and you might have known his family.

TYLER: Yes, I know of his family. And there was a bunch of them...quite a number of 'em...I don't know how many brothers and sisters he had...they were just down...sometimes hungry...when he says this, you know, it's the truth.

PETERS: Well, do you have any other reflections regarding St. Louis and the Negroes in it

before we close?

TYLER: What musicians...I think the fellow that wrote the "Make Believe Rag" was under...

PETERS: Scott Joplin?

TYLER: Yes; no, he wasn't from St. Louis, was he?

PETERS: No, he was from Joplin.

TYLER: Joplin, Missouri, I believe, wasn't he?

PETERS: I believe so.

TYLER: No, but he's from Missouri...

PETERS: Yes, down in the other corner.

TYLER: Yes, yes, right.

PETERS: I don't know if he ever even lived in St. Louis.

TYLER: I don't think so. What else?

PETERS: That's about it...other than any conclusions or final thoughts you might care to make regarding St. Louis, your practice, or things that stand out in your mind that you would like to mention.

TYLER: Well, I had a struggle in St. Louis. I practically made a living off from anesthesia, see? Any operation that was to be performed among our group, I was called in to give the anesthetic, especially if it was a difficult operation to be performed. Of course, there were others who did anesthesia, but I put the majority of patients to sleep during my tenure there in St. Louis when I was...

PETERS: Well, you worked in a total of three or four different hospitals then, I guess, over the years.

TYLER: Two.

PETERS: Oh, two...that preceded Homer Phillips. All right, then. Doctor, I think that will do it. Thank you very much.

TYLER: All right. I'm glad I could be of some assistance.