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Interview with Chuck Hogan

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Interview--
"Living Together"
African-American Community
Chuck Hogan
11/5/98
Interview by: Anne Smetak and Maggie Ahearn

Maggie: We're here with Chuck Hogan on November 5th, 1998, in his home in Gambier, Ohio. Basically we want to start by asking some biographical information, how long have you lived here in Knox County?

Mr. Hogan: Probably around thirty years.

Maggie: So you weren't born here?

Mr. Hogan: I was born here.

Maggie: Did you grow up in Mt. Vernon itself?

Mr. Hogan: Yes, grew up, graduated in Mt. Vernon, and then I moved to Detroit for a little while, went to Dayton for a little while, and came back to Mt. Vernon, raised a family.

Maggie: Where's your family now, are they in the area?

Mr. Hogan: I was married twice. My two oldest are out on their own, and my two youngest live with their mother, we're divorced.

Maggie: Do they live in the area?

Mr. Hogan: Yes, they live in Mt. Vernon.

Maggie: Do you like living here in Knox County?

Mr. Hogan: It's a nice place to raise kids, basically. It has its drawbacks but it's not bad.

Maggie: Would you like to talk a little bit about what some of those drawbacks are? *pause*
You don't have to if you don't want to.

Mr. Hogan: Nah. Not at the moment.

Anne: How long has your family been in the area?

Mr. Hogan: My grandfather was here...his family...my grandfather, his name was Bird. He was one of the first Indian families to live in the area. I think somewhere in the archives down at, what's the building, multi-cultural?

Maggie: The multi-cultural center?

Mr. Hogan: They have a history on the Bird family. And that was before the 1900's. I can't remember how long he's been here or his family's been in the area. But my father's, my grandfather's family was from Newark, Ohio.

Maggie: What do you do for a living?

Mr. Hogan: I'm a security officer.

Maggie: What would you say it means to you to be African-American?

Mr. Hogan: Ok...What does it mean to me to be African-American? I don't know. I've never really thought of it quite like that. I know that I come from a long line of people that are, basically proud. Then recently when, if you're not cool, than somehow you're not in with the rest of the group. And like, unfortunately the kids nowadays I don't think fully appreciate what their parents and their grandparents did to put them in the position where they are today. My son Jason (gets up to take photos off the wall), which I have to show off to everyone. This is my daughter Nicole, and this is my son Jason.

Anne: How old is he?

Mr. Hogan: He's twenty-one. He'll be twenty-two on the 29th. He is presently in college in Newark. His mother was Indian, was Ojibwa. I don't think that Jason really understands that people have gone through a lot so he can have the things that he has right now. I think Jason thinks that life is a looks thing. And Jason is a nice looking kid. So so far that's getting him through. But he's a pretty intelligent kid too. But I don't think he understands his history like I'd like him to. It's more of a bore to him to sit down and talk about that. Or if it doesn't bore him it makes him angry. Sometimes I don't think me and Jay relate too well. I know somewhere in the back of his mind he understands this. But right now life's a party, you know, life's fun, so... He will grow out of it I suppose one day. And I suppose I completely missed your question didn't I?

Maggie: No, that was good information. Do you feel like there is some kind of an African-American community here in Knox County?

Mr. Hogan: I don't think it's as tight as it once was, even ten years ago. I think it's gotten to the point where people really do believe it's "me". And whatever benefits me is alright. Where maybe twenty years ago, well even thirty years ago, my mom and her father, my grandfather started the first chapter of the NAACP here in Knox County. It flourished clear up until around 1980. And a lot of the community here in Kenyon, a lot of the professors were part of it. And for some strange reason, around 1980 everyone just started drifting apart. I think that people felt

like they had accomplished their goal. And like they really missed the boat. Unfortunately it fell apart. But anyhow, as far as, what was the question again? I just kind of go off sometimes.

Maggie: No that's great, that's what we're looking for. If you feel like there's an African-American community.

Mr. Hogan: Community here...nothing like it was. I mean, like I said people are basically concerned about themselves, and their families, and it's not anything like what I grew up with.

Maggie: What was it like when you were growing up?

Mr. Hogan: Well, when I was growing up, the black lady down on the corner could whip my butt, because she saw me doing something I wasn't supposed to be doing. Nowadays parents can't even whip their children's butts. It's quite different.

Maggie: Were there gathering places and places that people spent time together?

Mr. Hogan: I think that the church was probably the main thing here in Knox County, well, here in America. The black church was the gathering place for the black community. And like, even that nowadays is going the way of what's socially correct, or politically correct. A lot of morality, a lot of the things that I was brought up believing, was right and wrong, there's a lot more "right" nowadays.

Anne: Do you still attend church in the area?

Mr. Hogan: Not like I used to. Not like I used to. And even, as a matter of fact I was talking to the pastor today, and he was telling me how the attendance had fallen off so much. It's...when I was a kid there was just things you did and things you didn't do. There wasn't all this area of grey in between. And now the church has gotten to the point where it's willing to bend a lot of it's beliefs to attract more people in. And I don't feel comfortable with that setting.

Maggie: Have you noticed there's a difference in the community between those just moving in to the community and those that live here?

Mr. Hogan: You're talking about, probably the last eighteen years, last twenty years. A lot of people have moved into this area from cities. And I suppose that because they grew up in an environment where things were looser, or where you might not know your neighbors. I think that rubbed off a lot with their children and with their neighbors now. It's kind of weird to live out here...I grew up in a neighborhood where I knew everyone around the blocks, all four ways. Out here I probably know maybe four people out of sixteen, twenty different apartments. So, yeah. I think it has a lot to do with people not wanting to get involved with other people.

Maggie: Do you think that a lot of people moved out of the community within those eighteen or twenty years?

Mr. Hogan: Yeah. And the weird part about it is, most of them went to cities. And now their in the position that we at home are in because they no more know their neighbors than I do here. My niece was telling me that she bought one of these, I think five dollar homes where you fix it up, and she did a really nice job on it in Columbus. And she's been there around four years. And I doubt very much is she knows any more than the two people that live beside her. And she's been there for four years.

Maggie: So do you see this as not necessarily being something that's going on in the Knox County area?

Mr. Hogan: No, this is going on nationwide.

Anne: When the newcomers began to enter the community, was there a lot of interaction between them and the established community?

Mr. Hogan: If I remember right, and I'm not too sure because I didn't get out much anyhow. But I think around eighteen years ago I was on my way out so...and I didn't come back for a while. So it didn't seem like there was all that much interaction then. When I got back things were a little more distant. There was a lot of faces that I've never seen. And Mt. Vernon isn't that big. And when I moved up here...I'd worked up at the college anyhow and I knew some people...

[Section cut where a friend stops by...]

Maggie: Is there anything we haven't brought up that you think it would be important for us to know?

Mr. Hogan: Important for you to know...no. Other than never work at Kenyon college if you're black.

Maggie: Really, why is that?

Mr. Hogan: Because, it's not so bad I don't think if you're black in the academic departments. But I worked in the maintenance department. And every hick in Knox County worked in the maintenance department. And I put up with that for five years. I don't believe I did. But finally I said, no more! And I left. In the academic department and in the offices the people are usually pretty good, and if they're not sooner or later they show their true colors. But like the maintenance department was just so funny. Oh you just would not believe it. And I was blest because I got to work alone. And I think they thought it was a punishment. But it was really a blessing. So, other than that...and you, all you have to do is deal with people like Butch (King the friend). No he's an awfully good guy. I do like him. But I mean as far as...who do you have for professors that are black?

Maggie and Anne: Ric Sheffield, Prof. Mason, there's a visiting prof. named Marla Kohlman, she's new this year, there's a drama professor...

Mr. Hogan: Isn't there a heavy set guy? Is he gone?

Butch: McFarlene, he's psychology, he's a visiting professor.

Mr. Hogan: Is this the guy that I met...Now is Dr. Joyce, was she just a speaker for that night or...because I had met her last week when I had come over for a black students lecture, and they had around two or three professors, and I just wondered if they were just there for that night or...weren't you supposed to be there? (to Maggie)

Maggie: Well Butch was talking about it and I thought he was talking about something else and...no I'm serious! Ok, my bad. I heard it was really good though.

Mr. Hogan: It was. They didn't ask the questions I thought they'd ask. But...that's alright too. You graduated from Kenyon right? (To Butch)

Butch: Not quite two years ago...

Mr. Hogan: It's not that bad, I mean Kenyon's opening up. And it's doing it faster than anyplace else in this county, but that's not really saying much. A lot of people don't realize how far they haven't come. And this is 1998. So maybe by the next ten or twenty years they will have come as far as they really think they have come know. And with that ladies...that's my little bit of philosophy.

Maggie and Anne: Thank you...