



Interview with Rainette Holimon

Under the Auspices of the
Monmouth County Library Headquarters
125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator

Date of Interview: May 17, 2000

Name of Interviewer: June West

Premises of Interview: Ms. Holimon's home, Neptune Township, NJ

Birthdate of Subject: April 3, 1926



Rainette Holimon

Ms. Holimon: I was born in Asbury Park, New Jersey on April 3, 1926. I was born at home, 3 Charles Street, which is now in the area known as the Asbury Park Village. I am the youngest of six children. I was delivered without medical help. My mother delivered me herself. There were six children; three are still living - my oldest sister, Ruth Bannister Sampson, another sister Estelle Bannister Smallwood, and myself. There was one boy, John Bannister. He and my sister Dora and my sister Elizabeth are all deceased. I attended the local elementary school which at that time was Bangs Avenue South, a segregated school with the Black students attending the south side of the building. The White students attended the north side of the building. However, we did share the same toilet facilities. Use of these facilities was scheduled. In other words, the Blacks used it at one specified time, and the Whites used it at another specified time. All of our teachers of Bangs Avenue South were well educated Black teachers from all parts of the country. The education at that time was very, very good. The teachers were excellent. I believe they had a very strong influence on me because we were well taught. After graduating from elementary school, I attended the Asbury Park High School, which at that time was predominantly White. All of the teachers were White. It was quite a traumatic experience leaving the Bangs Avenue South School and being immediately thrown into the

predominantly White environment of the Asbury Park High School. Quite a few of the students who graduated from Bangs Avenue South did not do well in this new environment, and many of them dropped out after maybe the first year. I remained at Asbury High and graduated from there in 1943. As a student in the grammar school, my grades were excellent. Going into the new environment, I think, affected me as it did other students, and my grades were just average with the exception of the business courses of typing and shorthand. World War II started in 1941, which was my year to graduate, and the government requested secretaries and typists to work at the local federal agency at Fort Monmouth. Eleven of us were tested in April and we were permitted to come out of school in April; we did not have to wait for the June graduation because seemingly they had an urgent need for clerical support. So we were tested, and out of eleven students I made the highest grades in the shorthand examination and the average grade in the typing exam. We were all released from school and hired at Fort Monmouth. I was hired as a secretary, but unfortunately, due to the noticeable racism at that time, I was never given this opportunity to perform as a secretary. I was given a typist position and over the years various clerical positions at Fort Monmouth. I never really utilized my skills to the highest mainly because they were not accepting me as a secretary at that time. Over the years I did move up to a couple of administrative positions, but nothing that was comparable to my skills and to my education. I remained employed at Fort Monmouth in various positions for twenty years, and in 1960, I decided to resign, and I enrolled in college, which at that time was Monmouth College.

Ms. West: Where was Fort Monmouth located?

Ms. Holimon: Well, it's right outside of Eatontown, but the mailing address is Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. It's one of the largest federal agencies in Monmouth County. I attended Monmouth College for one year full-time and then the following year I decided to go back to work.

Ms. West: What year was that?

Ms. Holimon: 1964. And while attending Monmouth College, I entered into a conversation with a young man who was in class with me by the name of Wilbert Russell; he is now the city manager in Asbury Park. At that time Mr. Russell was very active in the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. At that time, this organization was very active in trying to get companies and organizations to employ more Blacks, more minorities. Mr. Russell told me that there was a company by the name of Bell Laboratories located in Holmdel, New Jersey, and he suggested that I go out there and file for employment as a secretary. At the time I scoffed at the idea, telling him that I didn't think that they would hire any Black people, but he told me to go, so I went. I went out and was tested, and within a few weeks was hired as a secretary. At the time I started working there, out of an employment force of over a thousand people, there might have been maybe six to ten Blacks. There was one Black

secretary at the time. And when I came on board I was the second. But I was well received, and spent another twenty years with the Bell system.

Ms. West: What year did you start there?

Ms. Holimon: I started in 1964. After ten years with Bell Laboratories I got the urge to join the United States Peace Corps. I just felt that I wanted to do something more meaningful, even though I had a very good job at the time. In fact, by 1974, I was training secretaries and typists at Bell Laboratories. I asked the company to give me a leave of absence, an educational leave of absence, to join the Peace Corps, and this they did. And in August of 1974, I joined the United States Peace Corps.

Ms. West: You mentioned that you were working for Bell Labs, where is Bell Labs located?

Ms. Holimon: Bell Laboratories is located in Holmdel, New Jersey, I guess it's about fourteen miles from Asbury Park. I joined the Peace Corps in 1974 and was sent to Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa. My assignment at that time was to take over a project involving the setting up of a secretarial school for Kenyan woman. I was assigned principal of the school and also performed teaching duties. I was accompanied by a staff of four Americans, all of whom were White. The school was organized by the Kenya government. The Kenya government has an organization call the National Youth Service. This National Youth Service was established soon after Kenya received its independence. I believe it was established in 1963. The purpose of the Youth Service was to teach male and female young people, how to work in an environment where they were not under the jurisdiction of the colonialists, which they had been prior to their independence. It was to teach them all kinds of skills:; driving, agriculture, sewing and road building. The age range was from about sixteen to maybe twenty-three.

Ms. West: Was your life experience growing up here in Monmouth County one of the reasons you chose to join the Peace Corps, to go into that particular part of the world?

Ms. Holimon: Well, my life experiences did not push me towards Africa. When I applied, I asked for an African country. You don't necessarily get what you ask for. I did not ask for Nairobi, Kenya, I was just assigned to that particular country. I did have a memorable conversation with my mother, oh, many years prior to going into the Peace Corps, when she told me that her family, her father's people, had come from a country which is now Madagascar. At that time she said, "Papa's people came from Malagasy (now Madagascar)." But I didn't pay any attention to this remark. We weren't into searching for our roots at the time she told me this. But it just stayed in my mind, I guess, maybe in the back of my mind that we did have a direct connection with Africa. However, this was really not the force that drove me into the Peace Corps. I think working in the corporate world for so long I

had just become a little bit -- I'm not sure of the word I want, I just felt like I could be doing a little bit more. And I had been teaching at Bell Laboratories, I was involved in what they called an Upward Mobility program, which involved mostly minorities, helping them to progress in the corporate world. What the strong force was that drove me to Africa, I can't really give a definite answer. I did stress though, when I went into the Peace Corps, I said I would like an African country, and it didn't matter where.

Ms. West: You mentioned that some of the teachers in the school motivated you and might have had an influence upon you. Did this have any connection with this area that you went to? Did these teachers help you decide that this is where you wanted to go?

Ms. Holimon: No, these were the teachers in elementary school. No, it's just that I was so impressed with the teaching, and in fact, I didn't realize how good these teachers were until I went to the Asbury Park High School. The elementary school teachers were all Black teachers and to me they surpassed the teachers that we had in high school. Of course, another fact or could have been that I felt that the teachers at the high school did not welcome us. The teachers really didn't go out of their way to teach the minority students. I don't think this was just my concept, I think a lot of us felt this way. But I guess I'm comparing the teachers at that time to some of the teachers that we have today. The teachers were more dedicated then. But at that time, you must remember that most of the female teachers were not married. Most of them never married, and maybe this was the reason why they put so much effort into teaching us. But I don't think that really had a bearing on my decision to go into the Peace Corps. I think I just felt that everything was just so materialistic, and I wanted to sort of get away from that for a while.

Ms. West: If you were to see some of these teachers who did influence you and apparently had a great interest in their students and a desire to teach, is there anything that you would like to say to them if you could?

Ms. Holimon: Oh, I wish I could just thank them for their dedication and their great teaching skills. Even today some of my peers and I often talk about how great these teachers were.

Ms. West: Was there any particular location in Monmouth County that has any special significance to you?

Ms. Holimon: I guess where I was born, Asbury Park. We were from a very poor family, and my mother and father separated when I was about two or three years old, so most of my memories are of my mother doing domestic work to take care of her six children. And even though we were on friendly terms with our father because he still lived in the community, most of my memories are of my mother and her hard work.

Ms. West: You mention your education and all here in Monmouth County. What kind of childhood did you have here in the County? What are your fondest memories ?

Ms. Holimon: I think I had a good childhood even though we were poor. My mother came from Pennsylvania originally and moved into this area. The area where she grew up, West Chester, Pennsylvania, was, I guess you would say, very high on education. And even though she did not finish high school, I was impressed that she seemed to be well educated. She read books when she was ten and twelve years old. She mentioned she had read *Les Miserables*, and other books of this caliber at an early age. The fact that she was educated I guess helped us, even though she didn't go very far in school.

Ms. West: Speaking of your mother reading books, did you have a favorite author as a youngster, or today?

Ms. Holimon: I think I tried to read some of the books that she told me that she had read, but I wondered, how did she ever read these books? I think when I was coming up, I was reading mostly mystery novels, and I wasn't really into high literature at that time. It wasn't until I went back to college that I really started reading some of the books that my mother had read as a child. I guess I forgot to mention that when I got the job at Bell Laboratories, I continued to go to college, but I went at night. So it took me six years to get my degree in psychology because I was going part-time, and I was thirty-five years old when I finally got my degree.

Ms. West: How has the county changed over the years? Was there an area where you grew up, just the county within itself, assuming you've traveled around in the county?

Ms. Holimon: Well, I didn't really do too much traveling before the Asbury Park Village was built. We moved there in 1941.

Ms. West: What is the Asbury Park Village?

Ms. Holimon: It's a housing project located right off of West Lake Avenue, right behind West Lake Avenue. It was one of the first housing projects that was built in the county. Prior to that, we lived one year in one little bungalow, and the next year we might be living in another bungalow. We went from place to place and I can always remember the rent was always due and we really didn't have balanced meals. We really were poor. We didn't have electricity until we moved into the housing project. So I was fifteen years old before we moved into what we thought was just great living. And as far as traveling around in Monmouth County, we really didn't do much traveling. At that time we didn't have a car in the family, we and most of my peers at that time were all just about on the same level. There were only just a few classmates who, as you'd say, lived comfortably. We

accepted it as our lifestyle. I can recall going to work in the summertime. At that time you could work at an early age, and at thirteen a girlfriend and I both started working in Ocean Grove. At that time Ocean Grove was an area that catered to the people coming from the city. It was like a resort. They had many hotels and lots of employment for minorities. Your waiters, your waitresses, your busboys, in fact, most of the employees in Ocean Grove were Black. We couldn't live in Ocean Grove, but we could work there. And this was a means of my getting money for my school clothes. And my girlfriend and I would go to Ocean Grove every summer.

Ms. West: Where is Ocean Grove located?

Ms. Holimon: Ocean Grove is considered a part of Neptune, New Jersey.

Ms. West: What type of resort was it?

Ms. Holimon: Really, a very religious area. There was a beachfront, and it was a religious area. In fact, at the time when we worked there, Ocean Grove did not allow cars to come into the community on Sundays; Saturday night the people had to bring their cars out. Of course there were no taverns or places like that in that community. There is a very strong Methodist affiliation there. And it has remained that way. But it was a means of providing employment. Many college students from the south would come up for the summer just to work in Ocean Grove. We worked from say early morning until maybe six o'clock in the evening. By six or seven o'clock we had to be out of Ocean Grove and we would come across the tracks to Asbury Park. That was, at the time, Springwood Avenue, which now has been changed to West Lake Avenue. But when we finished our work we would come across the bridge. There was a small bridge from Ocean Grove to Asbury, and we would cross that bridge and make it on the other side of town. Even though we were returning to our neighborhood, which in most cases was quite poor, we were just so happy to cross that track and get back on Springwood Avenue. Ocean Grove was really a means of survival. In fact, we had employment in Ocean Grove when we couldn't even get employment in Asbury Park. Some of the hotels would not hire us unless they hired some of us as chambermaids. They didn't hire minority waitresses or waiters in Asbury Park at that time.

Ms. West: Did you have a favorite radio program that you liked to listen to when you were coming up?

Ms. Holimon: We didn't have a radio until we went to the Village. Before we moved in the Village, our last residence, I can remember, was 1148 Madison Avenue in Asbury Park. Next door to us was a store owned by Italians, and I can remember listening to the Joe Louis fights. There was a little walkway between the store and our house, and when Joe Louis would fight, we would go put our ear up against the wall and listen to his fights. Other than that, I don't have any memories of any radio shows until after I was fifteen years old!

Ms. West: But you were happy!

Ms. Holimon: Oh, yes, yes, yes! Happy and didn't realize how happy we were.

Ms. West: Did you have any heroes or heroines when you were coming up?

Ms. Holimon: Only later on when, in 1947, Jackie Robinson came into baseball. Joe Louis was our first hero, and I guess the next hero was Jackie Robinson, who, to me, was just a wonderful, wonderful person. I guess most of our heroes were in sports. There was nothing really at that time in the movies, or in the theater that attracted me. We would go to the movies on Saturdays, but I was never a movie buff. At that time there was one theater called the Realto, and another called the Savoy. We, as Blacks, had to sit upstairs. We were not allowed to sit downstairs in the theatres. Downstairs was for Whites only.

Ms. West: Do you remember the first movie that you ever saw?

Ms. Holimon: I can't recall. I think it might have been a Jean Harlow movie, but I'm not sure. Every Saturday, most of my peers went to the theater and most of the movies were westerns, cowboys and Indians, and I was never impressed with that. My sister liked Shirley Temple, and she would go to the Shirley Temple movies. Even to this day, I'm just not a movie person. I guess I felt it was just too much make believe, and I was never really impressed with the movies.

Ms. West: Is there any newspaper headline that stands out in your mind over the years?

Ms. Holimon: Oh, I can remember the Lindbergh kidnapping. Also, the Hindenburg crash, which was, I think, just before we moved into the projects. I can recall seeing the Hindenburg go over by our home and, of course, the headlines the next day about the crash.

Ms. West: What was the Hindenburg?

Ms. Holimon: That was the German zeppelin aircraft that was making its first visit to the United States, and it crashed right here in Lakehurst, New Jersey. Later on, much, much later (I was married then), I can remember when Malcolm X was assassinated and seeing this horrible picture on the front page of the Daily News. I don't remember exactly what the headline was, but the White people were rejoicing that this man was dead. It showed him lying there, and the headlines were written in such a way that it was like it was a good thing that the White media was glad this had happened.

Ms. West: Who was Malcolm X?

Ms. Holimon: Malcolm X was a Black activist who preached about the inequality

between the Blacks and the Whites. At one time he even preached almost a hate of the White race, but as he matured and moved on in the world, he had changed in his views about his hatred considerably. To me he's a hero to the Black community.

Ms. West: Where was he killed?

Ms. Holimon: He was killed in New York, in Harlem. They were having a rally at the time in one of the local buildings.

Ms. West: When did you get a television?

Ms. Holimon: When did we get television? You know, I'm not even sure now when we got television. I don't remember, but I remember when the first television came into the Black neighborhood. It was at the home of Dr. Carter, a Black medical doctor, who was very popular, and was very friendly. He had a huge basement, and whenever one of the Joe Louis fights occurred, he opened his doors to the people in the community. We just flocked to his house, those who could get in, just to see this television. Then, later on, we got a Black and White television at my home in the projects.

Ms. West: Speaking of Dr. Carter makes me think of medicine. How were medical facilities and things here in the area?

Ms. Holimon: The doctors made house calls at that time. Dr. Carter, Dr. Robinson, and Dr. Harris were the Black doctors in the community, but at least fifty percent of the Black people used the services of a Dr. Sebastian Vaccaro, who was an Italian. He would come to your house no matter what time it was. It could be two, three, four o'clock in the morning, and he would come from the East side of town to take care of the people in the Black community. At that time, when he would come, he was friendly, but also sort of like a braggart. He knew he was good. Sometimes the Whites think they are saying the right thing. It's like, "I'm good to you Black people." At that time it didn't please us much as being said in a negative way. When he came to town he always had a great big bankroll of money. He'd maybe charge two or three dollars, whatever, but he became a millionaire. But what was so impressive was, at that time, he could come to any part of the west side with this bankroll, and it would never occur to anyone to try and rob him. I guess he was never afraid. His wife was a nurse, and she came with him. He was just really dedicated. In fact, he was assigned to Jersey Shore Hospital, which, at that time, was Fitkin Hospital, and also to the Long Branch Hospital. He would perform so much at Fitkin Hospital, protesting the way that the Blacks were treated. Finally, he was barred from the hospital because of this. They took him off of the staff there. He really did fight for us. He is well remembered, and some people have named their children after him. Sebastian Villa, a senior housing facility here in Neptune, is named after Dr. Vaccaro. He would come anytime. I can recall my mother getting sick one time, and I couldn't

reach him, so I had to call another White doctor. When Dr. Vaccaro came to the house around two o'clock in the morning, he was so angry with me. "Why did you call him?" I said, "I couldn't get you." He was just furious. You were only supposed to call him, you know. He died very young. He was, I think, fifty-one years old. He had a heart attack while sleeping. My mother was very sick during her later years, but I can remember Dr. Vaccaro coming two, three, four o'clock in the morning with his wife. The medical facilities at Fitkin Hospital were pretty rough. The emergency room was always crowded with minorities who had no money. At that time we didn't have hospitalization benefits like we have today, and we just had to wait, and wait, and wait. Sometimes we were treated well at Fitkin Hospital; sometimes we were not. Even today, some things have not changed that much at the Jersey Shore Hospital in the treatment of minority patients.

Ms. West: When you were growing up, what were the fads in your day?

Ms. Holimon: We danced a lot. We had our little dance hall on Springwood Avenue, and on the weekends we would go. They had little local bands. The young fellows in the community had their bands. We had quite a bit of talent between Asbury and Neptune. I guess that was it. Of course they had basketball, which was very popular. They had basketball clubs at that time - they don't seem to have them anymore. There were at least three or four teams in the Asbury/Neptune area, and then in Long Branch/Red Bank area, and they would compete. On Friday nights there were the basketball games at the Bangs Avenue School.

Ms. West: Did you have a favorite singer, or singers?

Ms. Holimon: Well, locally we had a lot of talent. As far as when we were coming up, I guess I was in the Ella Fitzgerald, Lionel Hampton era, and these people used to come to Asbury Park. But of course I wasn't old enough to go to these dances. My older sisters attended. We had a ballroom on Springwood Avenue, and Ella Fitzgerald, Lionel Hampton, Count Basie, Chick Webb, and others came and performed in Asbury Park.

Ms. West: Did you have any hobbies then?

Ms. Holimon: I guess I read a lot. I did mostly reading. And I say I did like to dance.

Ms. West: What would you say is your greatest achievement?

Ms. Holimon: I guess the work I did in Africa more than anything else. I consider that my greatest achievement was setting up the school and teaching there. But prior to that, when I worked at Bell Laboratories, I did instruct and guide many minority employees. I consider that quite significant also because some of them have done very well.

Ms. West: Since your tour with the Peace Corps have you been back to Africa?

Ms. Holimon: Yes, I came out of the Peace Corps in 1977. I retired from the Bell system in 1988. In 1990 I went back in the Peace Corps to Sierra Leone, West Africa. I was scheduled to serve two years, but Civil War broke out in 1991, and I was evacuated from that country and returned home. But I have continued to have ties with the people of Kenya and the people of Sierra Leone. I have been to Kenya seven times. I just recently returned from a trip to Kenya. That was my seventh trip.

Ms. West: And when was that?

Ms. Holimon: In February this year, 2000. I had the honor of seeing some of my students whom I had taught twenty-five years ago. We had sort of a reunion. Many of them are married with children, some have very good jobs in business. I recalled that at the time when I first met some of these young ladies they didn't even know what a typewriter looked like. It was good to see them. Some of them are even teaching now. So to me this was just a great accomplishment.

Ms. West: If you can describe your life as a road map, how would it be - uphill, downhill, sort of steady, rocky, whatever?

Ms. Holimon: When you come up in the poverty and struggle we did, and you see your mother struggling, at that time, things seemed to be rough. Then as you go along and become more educated, you see yourself accomplishing many things. When you look back you forget how rough it was. I guess now I can laugh at some of the things. However to a lot of people some of these things were tragic, or even insurmountable. I guess it was uphill, but, to me, the hill wasn't as high as I thought it was. I think one of the things that helped me adjust in Africa was the fact that I grew up with no electricity, no radio, and sometimes even no food, except for some bread and tea, which I often had three times a day. I think when I went to Africa, especially when I went in 1990 and lived in the bush area, where the conditions were very difficult, it didn't bother me that much, because I knew what it was like not have much food and some of the conveniences that we have here in our country.

Ms. West: What would you say is the most unusual thing about yourself?

Ms. Holimon: Maybe visiting Africa! I keep going back! I guess it's kind of unusual visiting so often, but I have formed a relationship with the people. Even though I know I'm not completely African, I know that Africa is part of my culture. It is where my roots began.

Ms. West: How different are things today then you thought they might have been when you were a child? When you were a youngster, would you say, "I would want to be this, that, I want to see this or that." How different are things?

Ms. Holimon: Well, I'm originally from Asbury Park. When I walk down Springwood Avenue, which I do very often, and when I ride around and look at some of the homes and the conditions, I see that things aren't much better than they were years ago. In fact, in many cases, things are worse because we have the problem with the young people now that we didn't have when I was coming up. We weren't involved in drugs, we didn't go in the bars. We didn't have to worry about excessive crime. The crime rate was not like it is now. You could walk down Springwood Avenue unafraid. I call it Springwood Avenue, but now it is called West Lake Avenue. The riots in 1970 took the life away from Springwood Avenue, but I still walk there. I think I do it mainly to remind myself, you know, how far I have come and just how great the street was. People often see me walking down the street and say, "You're crazy. You're walking down the avenue. You could get mugged." I reply, "I'm not afraid. This is where I came from."

Ms. West: Is there anything that you think you would still like to accomplish, or do?

Ms. Holimon: Well, I'm trying to get a book published, and if I could get that done, I will be very happy.

Ms. West: Is it a book about Monmouth County?

Ms. Holimon: No, no. It's a book mostly about my experiences in Africa, and a short span in Iran, but it's mainly about my African experience.

Ms. West: So what would you consider the milestones in your life?

Ms. Holimon: Well, I guess the first one was getting that job at Fort Monmouth when I was seventeen. It was my entrance into the corporate world. I guess that was the first milestone. The second one, I guess, was graduating from Monmouth College at the age of thirty-five. And then I guess my marriage. Isn't marriage considered a milestone?! I haven't mentioned my marriage. I married Theodore Holimon, a local policeman, in 1948, and remain married. Although we separated in 1970, we remained friends. My husband visited me in Africa in 1976. We had reunited shortly before his death in 1987.

Ms. West: Do you have any children?

Ms. Holimon: No, we never had any children. When my husband died, he was a retired captain of the police force in Asbury Park. And one of the second highest ranking officers. He and Assemblyman Thomas Smith came along together at the same time. They both had a very rough time getting promotions because of racial discrimination, but they did overcome this. In fact, Assemblyman Smith became the Chief of Police and also the Mayor of Asbury Park. My husband did get as far as captain. However, he had to engage a lawyer before he was first hired as a patrolman. All because of the racial discrimination in the City of Asbury Park.

Assemblyman Smith and my husband always made the highest grades on the police exams. But of course, you know there's a level of choosing, and they can pick one out of three. It wasn't until after they couldn't ignore them anymore, that they were finally promoted to various ranks.

Ms. West: What important legacy do you think you will leave to your friends and family?

Ms. Holimon: I guess my stressing education. Even today I try to impress upon the young people the importance of education. So many of them have dropped out of school, or even when they finished high school, or some even college, they just never went any further. I try to impress upon them how important it is to continue their education. In Africa, the children have to pay to go to school from the time they are maybe five or six years of age. Some of them don't even start until they are ten years old because they have to pay school fees. The children and young people here don't seem to understand that. I don't know whether they don't believe me when I tell them that in Africa they have to pay to send a child to school. They have to pay the entire time from the very beginning, and also pay for uniforms. They wear uniforms to school in just about all African countries. The average family is about eight children; that's standard - eight or more. Some of those children never get to school because of the school fees. Here you start school at five or six and it's free. To me education is just so important. I don't understand really why, in the year 2000, our education efforts seem to have gone down the drain.

Ms. West: Maybe children take too much for granted.

Ms. Holimon: I think so. Very often the parents of these children have good jobs. They give their children so much. The children can't imagine not ever having a radio or television! Now they even have cell phones.

Ms. West: It's just a way of life. They just take it for granted. If you could relive your life, would there be any part of your life that you would like to live over?

Ms. Holimon: It's hard to say, I don't know. You say you never want to be poor, but then if I had come up with something, maybe I wouldn't have done as well as I have.

Ms. West: You didn't know you were poor!

Ms. Holimon: Oh, we knew we were poor. Maybe when we were five or six years old. I think I knew I was poor around six or seven. I'm sure I knew. We knew we were poor when we would wait for my mother to come home from her domestic job. We were waiting for her to bring us some food. The leftovers from the White people's kitchen. We knew we were poor!!

Ms. West: What major changes have you seen in your lifetime in this country?

Ms. Holimon: Well, I can see a lot of accomplishments over all by Blacks. They have positions that we never thought we would get. Within the communities of Asbury and Neptune, I don't like the idea that our public schools are now predominantly Black. The "White Flight" has been allowed in the communities. I think this has adversely affected education. When I went to Asbury Park High School, there were a handful of Blacks. The Ridge Avenue school in Neptune was always predominantly Black, but I believe Neptune High School was predominantly White. I don't think these changes in the public schools have helped the education of our surrounding communities. And this seems to be all over in Monmouth County: the Whites have been allowed to flee and go into other schools. At one time I think there was a written order that if you lived in a certain area, you went to that school. You were not allowed to go to another school, but now this has changed, and of course you have your private schools. Even the school in our Catholic Church now is mixed. I was amazed one day when I rode by and saw all these Black children at the Catholic school on Asbury Avenue. I was so surprised because at one time this was not permitted, or it just didn't happen. I think this has affected our education system. In Neptune the teachers are predominantly White, and I feel that they're not that interested in teaching the children, that it's just a job. I feel that they're just not that dedicated. When you listen to the students talking coming down the street, you'd think they weren't even going to school. The English that they use is horrific! So there's something wrong with the system. Most of the teachers in both the Asbury Park and Neptune Schools are not as skillful, dedicated, and proficient as the teachers we had many years ago.

Ms. West: What are your deepest values?

Ms. Holimon: I don't know if I know what you mean.

Ms. West: What are your values?

Ms. Holimon: I guess I would say respect for one another, not just my peers, but the young people, the older people.

Ms. West: What are your personal strengths?

Ms. Holimon: Hard work. Working hard is in all aspects, I guess. Not being afraid to take a challenge. I remember when my husband and I got our first home, we built it ourselves. We had a contractor who did the professional masonry work, but we literally built it ourselves. I can remember going out there and helping to dig the foundation on the corner of Bangs and Ridge Avenue. It took us four years, and we really only decided to build because we couldn't get a loan. My husband was a policeman at that time, and I was working at Fort Monmouth, but we still could not get a loan, or decent provisions because we were Black. So we decided,

the heck with it, we'll build our own house. Of course, once we got started, we thought, how did we ever think to do such a stupid thing! But we did it, and when we finished four years later, it was our home. That was one of the hardest challenges, I guess, in my life.

Ms. West: What advice would you give to the present generation?

Ms. Holimon: Learn, learn, learn. That's my biggest hang-up. Get your education. Get your education first. Go through college. Even though you might have to work for it, get to that college. Don't come out of high school and say, "Oh, I'm going to work and I'll go to college later on." Because in most cases you don't. Get the education. Once you get the education you know what's going on, or you have an idea anyway. When I went to Monmouth College as an adult, I really felt uncomfortable because I was so much older than the other students, even though a lot of my classes were at night. But it made me angry also, because I didn't even know what they were talking about in a lot of subjects. This was because they (the White students) had been exposed to the arts and to books and all these different things that we as Blacks had no idea of. These subjects had not been given to us. And of course so many of us didn't get to college. Even today they say the admission scores are so unfair because we as minorities cannot relate to a lot of these questions. I found this was true. To this day I don't know how I passed that admission test at Monmouth, because some of the areas I had never been exposed to and I had no idea what they were talking about. I guess I just did some good guessing and passed.

Ms. West: Now that we're into the twenty-first century, how would you like to see things in the future? What would you like to share? What would you like to see accomplished that seems to have been bypassed in the twentieth century?

Ms. Holimon: I would like to see more integration of the schools. The students and the faculty. I think that's the only way things are going to change. I think now our schools have become Black, our public schools are predominantly minority, but it's only with a small percentage of minority teachers, and I don't think things are going to work as long as it stays this way. There's another side of that, because I've been led to believe that the Black colleges help the minority more so than the White colleges as far as their social environment is concerned. I guess there are pros and cons to this. We have public schools that are supposed to be integrated, but they are not. I don't see how it's going to work if you're going to have a huge concentration of Blacks in a predominantly White environment because Asbury Park and Neptune are still a predominantly White environment. And I can't see it working if you're going to have your schools like this. In your Black colleges, which are predominantly in the south, of course your Black population is higher, and maybe a stronger force, so maybe it's why a lot of our students attend the Black colleges. They do well because socially they are together.

Ms. West: Thank you for sharing your experiences with us. Is there anything more that you'd like to tell us?

Ms. Holimon: I think I've said enough.

Ms. West: Well, there never is enough, remember you said education, and this is education.

Ms. Holimon: I said I'd just like to be able to reach out more to the young people in the areas and stress the importance of the education. I try to do things in some of my presentations, but I can't seem to even get that audience anymore that I used to be able to get with the young people. I will just keep on trying.

Ms. West: I guess all we can do is try. We've come to the end, and once again, I thank you.