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Elaine Ford-Sterling

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Bridges That Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

Elaine Ford-Sterling

Interviewer:

Unknown

Interview Date:

February 24, 2023

Interview Location:

San Bernardino, CA

Length:

00:04:31

Interview Summary completed by:

M. Camacho Nuno, 2024

Description:

In this interview, Elaine Ford-Sterling is the guest. She attended San Gorgonio High School from 1971 to 1973. Ford-Sterling recalls joining the Black Student Union in order to have a space where she feels comfortable. Then, she speaks of the Home of Neighborly Service, which was a sort of Black Student Union but out of school and in students' neighborhoods. The riots are something she mentions were a thing she will never forget and were terrible. Eventually, there was unity between schools due to sports and petty rivalry. To end the interview, Ford-Sterling then talks about needing to swim across the pool to graduate high school. To this day she cannot swim and to graduate she sort of only floated across.

Subject Topic:

- High School
- Black Student Union
- Student-Neighborhood Involvements
- Riots
- School Unity through Sports
- Swimming

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
California State University, San Bernardino	5500 University Pkwy, San Bernardino, CA 92407
San Gorgonio High School	2299 Pacific St, San Bernardino, CA 92404

Temporal Coverage:

1971 - 2023

Key Events:

- Going to San Geronio High School from 1971 to 1973.
- Being in the Black Student Union to have a space for the Black students.
- Memories of the riots.
- Pacific and San Geronio uniting through sports and petty rivalry.
- Having to swim to graduate but essentially just floating.

Key Organizations:

- Black Student Union
- Home of Neighborly Service

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:00:27 - 00:01:42	Ford-Sterling's reasoning for joining the BSU at San Geronio High School.
Digital Video	00:01:47 - 00:02:22	The riots that Sterling remembers during her time at San Geronio High School.
Digital Video	00:03:17 - 00:04:21	The high school memory of swimming across the pool, of sorts, in order to graduate.

Related Materials

Additional oral history interviews are available from the Bridges That Carried Us Over Project at CSUSB, <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/bridges/>

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

Q: So -- and your name is?

ELAINE STERLING: Elaine. Maiden name, Ford. Last name now, Sterling.

Q: And you went to high school from what year to what year?

ELAINE STERLING: From 1971 to 1973, I think, yeah.

Q: And what high school?

ELAINE STERLING: At San Geronimo.

Q: All right. And you were in the BSU?

ELAINE STERLING: Yes, I was.

Q: Do you have any -- why did you join the BSU? And do you have any memories from the BSU or high school that...?

ELAINE STERLING: I -- we had to form our BSU because that was the only thing that the Black students had at San G. And the Latinos had their MEChA, and we just wanted to be unique. And so [00:01:00] I don't remember doing anything that was significant there, but in our neighborhood, we had the Home of Neighborly Service. Oh, my God, and we used to go down there for drill team practice. We were Brownies, and they had a Girl Scout unit. (laughs)

Q: Oh, my goodness, wow. And that was from BSU, or --

ELAINE STERLING: No, it wasn't, but that was our neighborhood Black Student Union gathering.

Q: I get it. Yes, I understand. Was there anything in high school that happened that you have a memory of that you still carry with you?

ELAINE STERLING: The riots. Yeah, unfortunately, [00:02:00] we were -- they threw -- the white students threw rocks at our bus, and we had to be bussed

home. And, oh, it was kind of raunchy at one time, but it got better. It did get better. There became a thing of school unity through sports and whatnot. The unity became -- the differences became between the different schools. At one time, Pacific was our rival school, and Pacific tarred and feathered our spartan. And the San G people blew -- [00:03:00] buried their anchor. (laughter)

Q: Okay, so it was that kind of back --

ELAINE STERLING: Yeah, it was --

Q: -- and forth going on.

ELAINE STERLING: -- kind of a little petty rivalry.

Q: Yeah, so the sports kind of helped too for that.

ELAINE STERLING: Bringing people together, yes.

Q: Yes, okay. And from your high school experience, did -- was there anything that impacted you for the rest of your life, a good memory or a teacher or a --

ELAINE STERLING: Yes. The lady in here that's with us today, Evangeline [Lewis?], told me that I had to learn how to swim. I do not know how to swim to this day, but she told me that in order to graduate, I would have to swim across the pool. And when she said swim across the pool, I thought it meant lengthwise from 12 feet to three [00:04:00] feet. And she said, "No, Elaine, all you have to do is go the width of the pool." So I got in the pool, and I pushed off -- floated to the other side of the pool. So I never learned to swim, but I did graduate. (laughter)

Q: So you learned there's always another way around, okay. Well, beautiful, and that's it. That's --

ELAINE STERLING: Well, thank --

End of Interview:

[00:04:31]