

[Mr. H. J. Pinkett]

[?] Dup

FORM A CIRCUMSTANCES OF INTERVIEW

NAME OF WORKER Fred D. Dixon ADDRESS 2889 Ohio St.

DATE Nov. 14, 1938 SUBJECT Negro History.

1. Name and address of informant, - Mr. H. J. Pinkett— 2118 N. 25 St.
2. Date and time of interview - Nov. 11, 1938 - 4:00 to 6:30.
3. Place of interview - In the home of Mr. Pinkett
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. Mr. B. E. Squires —2918 N. 28 st.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you No. one.
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. - The home of Mr. Pinkett is far above the average Negro home. It is well equipped with all of the furnishings that make a home comfortable. He lives in a very nice neighborhood, and has very friendly neighbors. He has a modern library, with over 1500 volumes. The interview took place on the sun-porch of the home and it was equipped with a small library. [???

FORM B PERSONAL HISTORY OF INFORMANT

NAME OF WORKER Fred D. Dixon ADDRESS 2889 Ohio st.

DATE Nov. 14, 1938 SUBJECT Negro History

Library of Congress

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Mr. H. J. Pinkett, 2118 No. 25. st.

1. Ancestry - Mr. Pinkett's mother was white and his father Indian and Negro.
2. Place and date of birth - He was born in South Carolina in the Shannandoah valley.
3. Family -
4. Place lived in, with dates - Mr. Pinkett has lived in his present home since 1916. He came to Omaha in 1909 from Washington D. C.
5. Education, with dates. -Mr. Pinkett graduated from Howard University in 1907. He is a graduate of law school. Howard is one of the largest Negro University.
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates. - Mr. Pinkett is a practicing Attorney. He was first admitted to the Bar in 1907. He is the first Negro to be admitted to the Bar of the Supreme Court of Nebraska.
7. Special skills and interests - Mr. Pinkett is interested in writing and has a book that is being published at the present time. He has for a number of years devoted his extra time to writing and is often consulted on Negro history, both locally and Nationally.
8. Community and religious activities. - Mr. Pinkett has always devoted himself to his community and has performed many deeds that are noteworthy. Perhaps the outstanding one was his part played in establishing harmony after the riot of 1919.
9. Description of informant - Mr. Pinkett is light complexioned, tall, well built physically and very intelligent looking. He is bald and slightly gray about the temples. He speaks with self assurance, and very good diction.
10. Other points gained in interview.

Library of Congress

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

NAME OF WORKER Fred D. Dixon ADDRESS 2889 Ohio st.

Date November 14, 1938 SUBJECT Negro History

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Mr. H. J. Pinkett

Mr. Pinkett has been practicing law in Omaha since 1909. He was the first Negro lawyer in Omaha who was a graduate of a law school. Prior to him there were several lawyers but they were not law school graduates. The first Negro attorney in Omaha was Atty. Silas Robbins. His son is yet living in Omaha. Mr. Pinkett has been very active in Negro life in Omaha and has helped in many ways. Probably the one that is most noteworthy is when he went to the Chamber of Commerce and asked that this organization help in restoring peace and order after the riot of 1919. He received able support and with the help of the newspapers a feeling of friendliness was restored. Mr. Pinkett was one of fifteen children seven of whom died in early youth. He is very proud of his family record. He said that of the eight children that lived two finished Howard University, two others attended Howard, one sister finished at Storer College and the other three finished grade school. Many of his [nieves?] and nephews are school teachers, lawyers, and other professional people. Mr. Pinkett is one of two Negroes that ever ran for the office of city commissioner. He was not successful. That was in 1931. He is also one of Omaha's eldest Negro Politicians, and has fought for many of the things he felt were essential to the Negro for his welfare and progress. Another pioneer Negro Attorney that has Mr. Pinkett spoke of is Atty. Scruggs. Mr. Scruggs is living in Chicago and is a corporation lawyer.

2

There are six law firms in Omaha employing nine Negro lawyers. The most successful one at the present time is Adams & Adams. John Adams Jr. is at the present time a state Senator having been successful in serving three terms in the legislature. Another firm that

Library of Congress

is quite popular is Williams law firm. This firm is owned and operated by Ray L. Williams. Other firms are Pegg & Pegg; operated by John and [Gaitha?] Pegg; Hutton; by Jess Hutton; Bryant by W. B. Bryant; Davis by Chas. Davis; and the Pinkett law firm. Most of the business of these firms are centered around Real Estate and Criminal cases.

Mr. Pinkett, as stated before, has written many articles about the history of the Negro in Omaha. In the August issue of the Harpers Monthly is a story of Omaha. Also in this article is an account of the riot that has a lot of Mr. Pinkett's own writing, as he worked with the author. This story is part of the interview as he asked the worker to copy it and use it in the survey.

3

TAKEN FROM HARPERS MONTHLY MAGAZINE AUGUST ISSUE AN ARTICLE

TITLED OMAHA NEBRASKA "THE GLORY IS DEPARTED" Geo. R. Leighton.

The attacks multiplied, scorching the administration for its laxity in dealing with Negro attacks on White women. Stranger still, these rape cases collapsed upon investigation. A Negro railroad workman was accused and denied the charge. It was necessary to bring the payroll time books all the way from Chicago to prove that he has been over a hundred miles away at the time the assault was supposed to have been committed.

All through the hot summer of 1919 the campaign continued. In the town were soldiers, just home from the war, looking for jobs and finding none. The world, had been saved for democracy— hadn't the local papers said so? but earning a living was something else. And the teamsters, crying the strikebreakers were boiling. Then on the 11th of Sept. two detectives making a "morals raid" on a hotel, shot a Negro bellhop and killed him. Now if the administration, which had inherited a police department which had been built up and staffed in the Dennison days, should by any chance make a misstep at this juncture who

Library of Congress

could tell what might happen? And what would happen to reform and the forces of virtue at the next election.

On the night of Sept 25th a girl named Agnes [Lobeck?] called the police in great distress. She had been walking with a crippled acquaintance Millard Hoffman, when suddenly a Negro appeared who beat up Mr. Hoffman and then attacked Miss [Lobeck?]. The next night police picked up a Negro packing house worker named Will Brown. Miss [Lobeck?] identified him.

4

No sooner was Brown in a cell than the extras were on the street. Another assault. When will the outrages cease. And that night and through the next day the tension grew. Business men shook their heads; it was a God-damned shame. What was Smith up to? Why his law firm has actually been retained—just a few days ago to defend another Negro on a similar charge. Housewives discussed the case across their porch rails. A lawyer examined Brown in jail; he found the man badly twisted with rheumatism and wondered how anyone in such a condition could have assaulted anybody. Humm!

Saturday night the town was full to overflowing, the bars were busy, the farmers from roundabout were in town, doing their buying. "It is known that at least one party on Saturday night went about to various pool halls on the south part of the city and announced that a crowd would gather at Bancroft school, and from there would march to the courthouse (the jail was on the upper floor) for the purpose of lynching this colored man. Those reports were current about the city and were known in certain official circles and just why this prisoner was not moved to the State Penitentiary or some other suitable place for safe-keeping has never been satisfactorily explained, nor why these officials did not appraise Mayor Smith.

The next day was Sunday. Shortly after noon a crowd began to gather around the courthouse, hooting and yelling, talking in groups on the corners. Police kept them on the

Library of Congress

move occasionally, but nothing further was done. "Shortly after dark,—older and more determined men were observed to take places with the boys. They were composed of the most vicious elements in the city— those men seemed to have definite work to do. That these were leaders instructed in their part is borne out by the 5 testimony and the events. Some led the way to sporting goods houses, the pawn shops, and the wholesale hardware stores for guns and ammunitions. Others gathered up a crowd to gather gasoline for the burning of the courthouse.

Now the firing began. Men hooting and yelling, wearing pistols and discharging them in the air. On the fringe of the crowd— at a safe distance— the curious gathered to wait the fascinating horror. A man was going to be done to death and anybody could watch. A boy on a horse rode back and forth through in the crowd, with a rope laid across his saddle horn. By eight o'clock the screams of "Give us the nigger" had commenced and the mob was in the lower floor of the courthouse. Snatching open the drawers of the filing cases, they deluged them with gasoline and set them afire. At [9:50?] the mob seized a fire ladder and raised it toward the jail windows on the top floor. The prisoners screamed to the guards for help demanding that Brown be surrendered to the mob. He was, and then at ten o'clock down the courthouse stairs and out to meet the mob came the mayor,—alone! The strikebreaking, vice purging, righteousmouthed mayor, leaving behind police and guards, who lost their nerve, faced the screaming crowd and demanded that they disperse.

"Lynch the mayor". In an instant a rope was found, a noose made and the helpless Ed. dragged along pavement and then hoisted off the ground. Like magic, an automobile shot into the crowd and who but Detective Danbaum rescued the unconscious Mayor and got him into the automobile and away. A miraculous thing! At once the frustrated mob turned back to the surrendered Negro and strung him to a trolley wire.

Library of Congress

A horrified sophomore, who was leaving the next day for school, stood on the corner and watched the mob as they milled about the dead and mutilated body and finally flung it in a bonfire.

Then with a thunder clap, the storm which had gathered all evening long broke. The rain fell in torrents, flooding the gutters, washing down the hill toward the old third ward, the embers and relics of this corn belt [auto-da-fe?]. At three o'clock in the morning, when all was over 700 troops from nearby Fort Omaha arrived.

But the terrible rumor grew this mob had been planned, that the men who went about that Saturday night spreading the word for the lynching were acting under order.

Mr. Pinkett was the lawyer that examined Will Brown and he definitely states that it would have been impossible for him to have attacked any one. He states that it was merely an administration fight and Tom Dennison's way of fighting Mayor Ed. Smith and his administration.