

## **Early Childhood** <sup>[1]</sup>

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Rebecca Clark was born to a poor farming family in Orange County, North Carolina, and remembers her early years as a young girl during the Depression. As an African American woman working in the segregated South, she can tell many stories about how she was treated like a second-class citizen, even if she never saw herself that way. She is married, and has two sons, Doug and John. In 1955, when her son Doug Clark was a junior in high school, he formed a rhythm and blues band with his brother that remains popular today, especially amongst college fraternities.

Rebecca does not say when she was born, but it may have been around 1919. At the time of this interview, she was probably her eighties. You may hear her age in her voice or in the way she speaks. Despite her age, she is able to tell very vivid stories. We will hear several of them, from her memories of her childhood, to her work life, to her views on race relations, and finally her participation in politics. Before and after each segment of her life, we will discuss questions, and relate the details of her life to what we've been learning in class.

## **Preliminary questions**

1. If Rebecca Clark was born in 1919, what age would she have been around 1924?
2. If she and her family were already poor before the Depression, what kinds of troubles do you think her family might have had during that time?

## **The recording**

Running time: 2:05.

[About this recording.](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

## **Transcript**

And growing up in Chapel Hill then. The reason why I was here in 1932, me and my brothers and sisters became orphans in 1928. My mother died in 1924. My father died in 1928. By then we had a stepmother, then a baby sister. And my mother had one horse, one cow, one pig at that time. No monies coming in, and living in a log cabin just beyond University Lake. Then family and brothers over here, they would send us food and all. So she couldn't manage us so what she did was that she had to put us out for families that had to take care of us.

So, two families in Greensboro took me and my little sister. Two of my brothers stayed with my grandfather, John Harriston, who owned ninety-five acres adjacent to University Lake, that he sold twenty-eight acres to widen the lake. Then my daddy's brother took my other brother to raise. And my stepmother took her child to her brother and then with no money she went off to New York to live with a family and work to help provide help for her.

And from then, my little sister and I, first time we had ever been on a train, out from Carrboro. And they sent us on the train with a trunk - what few pieces we had - but we had a trunk. And in that trunk, my daddy had saved some of my mother's clothing. I thought they were pretty and I always wanted to keep them. Went to Greensboro, living with my family, and they were educators. They had a two-story house. And running up and down the steps of the two-story house, something we had never seen. And ten rooms - we thought we had turned rich overnight.

## **Follow-up questions**

1. Do you think that the Depression might have had anything to do with Mrs. Clark's parents dying? Why or why not?
2. How do you think losing her parents at an early age affected Mrs. Clark's life?
3. What happened to her family? Why weren't they able to stay together?
4. What is a positive story she tells about this time?
5. In your opinion, how rare is it to see a house with ten rooms and a staircase? Why might this have seemed "rich" at the time?

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