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Irma Lucas Interview, wife of Rev. George Lucas, Wright State University Board of Trustees

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Irma Lucas

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Profiles of African-Americans That Helped Shape Wright State University

Interview with Irma Lucas

Date of Interview: June 16, 1992

Interviewer: Alyce Earl Jenkins, College of Education and Human Services

Interviewee: Irma Lucas, wife of Rev. George Lucas (Deceased)

[Note: Video and audio begin perceptibly going out of sync after 8:00]

Alyce Earl Jenkins: Hello and welcome to another segment of my series about the profiles of African-Americans and their contributions to Wright State University. Today, my guest is Mrs. Irma Lucas, wife of the late-Reverend George W. Lucas who served on Wright State University’s first Board of Trustees. As a matter of fact, he served for about thirteen years on the Board of Trustees. He was also minister of Bethel Baptist Church for thirty-five years, and during that time he was quite active in the community. Mrs. Lucas, thank you so much for coming. Tell me a little bit about Reverend Lucas’ educational background.

Irma Lucas: Well, first of all you must know that he was born in Mississippi and, as you know, the educational opportunities there were quite slim. And his father and a group of other blacks in the community started their own school so that their children could finish high school there. Otherwise they would not have been permitted to go any farther than ninth to tenth grade. And they established their own schools. He entered the ministry at seventeen and went immediately to Jackson State College where he spent two years, and then he transferred to Tougaloo College because of what the college offered in his line of work. And he of course was a liberal arts major. And while he was there, he participated in drama, and being somewhat restricted socially being a minister, he found friendship among officials of the school and some teachers. And it was his privilege, he liked to tell, to come in contact with a lot of the outstanding visitors to the campus. For instance, when Langston Hughes and both Langston Hughes and George Washington Carver visited the school, he was privileged to be the monitor to carry them around.

AJ: That’s great.

IL: And he regarded that as a wonderful experience in his life.
AJ: That’s great, that is great. In reading the history of Wright State University, which was written by Charles Ingler, he made this statement about Reverend Lucas and I’ll read it to you. He said that “Reverend Lucas held extraordinary prestige in the black community and in the Dayton area generally.” How would you describe Reverend Lucas’ involvement in the Dayton community?

IL: Well first of all, he came here from Fort Wayne Indiana where he had been active in many community affairs and it was not new to him. So consequently, he was made the first black president of the Church Federation of Greater Dayton, which is now known as the Christian Dayton Council. He was one of the founders and president of the Dayton Urban League.

AJ: Who were the other founders of that?

IL: The founders were…Blanche Parsons, Lloyd Lewis…one of the rabbis…I cannot—Abe Saeks, and people of that caliber.

AJ: Okay; okay.

IL: It was strictly interracial.

AJ: That’s great; that’s good!

IL: I know the names of a lot of them but the slip me—

AJ: Yeah, I think Mr. McLin, Sr. was in that too.

IL: C.J. McLin, H.L. McNeil of the Zion Baptist Church, and Granville Reed of the Wayman AME Church.

AJ: I see.

IL: Thank you for prompting me.

AJ: Listen, so the Urban League Board was one of his involvements—

IL: Yes, yeah.

AJ: —for a while along with the Dayton City Schools. And he also served on Central State’s School Board?

IL: Well he later became active on the Central State Board. He was very ecumenical; he had so many friends in the AME Church, and the AME Zion Church, and the CME Church, he would sometimes forget that he was Baptist. And so he was involved in conciliatory activities between Central and Wilberforce during the time of the split.
AJ: Okay.

IL: And he, thereby, was given an honorary degree from both colleges—

AJ: Oh great!

IL: —Wilberforce and Central State.

AJ: Great. That’s nice; that’s very nice.

IL: And when it came time to decide which faction would wear the name Wilberforce University, he of course favored the church side because he felt that they had founded the institution and that they should keep their name.

AJ: That’s great. Now in March 3, I think it was on March 3, 1965, Senator Charles Whalen and Senator Max Dennis introduced I think it was Senate Bill 210 in the state legislature, which said that a campus could be established here at Wright State University and it would be operated by Miami University and Ohio State University. So that was in March of 1965. And then, as I read further, it indicated that in November they named the first advisory board for this new campus that was going to be here in this area. And it’s interesting that they call this new campus, this committee the Name Advisory Committee.

IL: Yes.

AJ: I thought that was an interesting name for that. And Reverend Lucas was appointed, that was his first appointment to a governing body at Wright State University. Do you remember that experience?

IL: Yes, it was for two years.

AJ: Two years.

IL: And then later he was put on the regular board, and then later he was given nine years up until 1978.

AJ: And so he—

IL: So he served thirteen years.

AJ: Thirteen years.

IL: Yes, uh-huh.

AJ: That’s the longest of any board member.

IL: And Dr. Kegerreis remembered that he never missed one meeting.
AJ: That’s great.

IL: And I thought that was in his favor. However their meetings were in the morning and he could do that and then come back to his office in the early afternoon, into the night.

AJ: Okay. Now I also read that the other members of that Advisory Committee were Robert Oelman, James Cox, “Boss” Kettering, Harry Jeffrey, and all of the movers and shakers in this area. What was that experience like when you and Reverend Lucas had to attend affairs with them and their wives and so forth.

IL: It was not too difficult. We were cautious that we were moving in a circle of people who had means and who had great control over the city and area, but they made it very pleasant for us and of course my husband felt like he had a little bit to bring to the group anyway because he had been on because he had been on the Chamber of Commerce too, so he knew some of them rather personally.

AJ: I see. So he was—

IL: So he did not shrink from it.

AJ: Okay. So he was chosen primarily because he had done all of these things—

IL: Experience.

AJ: —and they knew that he would be a good person.

IL: Yes.

AJ: What Mr. Ingler also said in his book that they knew when they were deciding who would be members of this advisory committee that they would have to go by Reverend Lucas because he was so prestigious in the community that he would be the one who would have to approve whomever they selected, so they did respect his position.

IL: Yes.

AJ: That’s great. I also read that Reverend Lucas, after he was appointed to the Advisory Board, then he later received his first two-year appointment to the Board of Trustees. And then the Board of Trustees has various committees and that Reverend Lucas was on the Academic Committee, that he was on the Buildings and Grounds Committee, and he also served on the Student Affairs Committee. Do you recall his feelings of what he said about his involvement with those committees?

IL: Somewhat. I can remember, so far as the Student Affairs Committee, I can remember students even calling the house concerning…

AJ: That’s great.
IL: Parking, some of their problems.

AJ: We still have problems with parking.

IL: And I can remember his—this must have been the Committee on Buildings and Grounds where they engaged in tours to other campuses. And that was a great experience for him, and I remember Brown University standing out in the experience. And I don’t quite remember Academic Com—I don’t know what they did in there.

AJ: Okay.

IL: I don’t know that it was a thing that you would talk about at the dinner table.

AJ: I see.

IL: You know, I think you’d just finish that while you’re there. I don’t remember.

AJ: Okay.

IL: Anyway, but I remember his talking about those two committees.

AJ: I think it’s really nice that he was so accessible to students that they felt comfortable enough—

IL: Yeah, to call him; yes they would.

AJ: —to call him at home and complain about parking.

IL: Yes, yes.

AJ: Yeah. One of the things that he did while he was at the University on the Academic Affairs Committee was that he helped them to draw up their plans for promotion and tenure for faculty and that’s quite important.

IL: Yes.

AJ: Now Reverend Lucas was also on the committee that selected the first president out there. And you recall that—

IL: Yes.

AJ: —that was Dr. Brage Golding?

IL: Yes.

AJ: And in the Board of Trustees minutes Reverend Lucas raised the question, it was indicated that he raised the question, “What kind of criteria do we want this person to
meet?” and the response was rather general: they wanted someone who was creative and someone who was up to speed on educational activities. And I got the feeling from the minutes that, the sense from the minutes, that Reverend Lucas wanted them to be a little more specific about the qualifications of this person. Was Reverend Lucas a person who believed in and established firm guidelines and being a detail person?

IL: Yes, yes. In other committees that he has served in the Church, you know, the National Baptist Convention where he was a secretary and all, he was referred to as a “detail man.”

AJ: That’s what I thought.

IL: And very specific. Sometimes you felt to a fault that he would, you know, deal with minor details that he felt important, and I think most of us would like to generalize and get it over with.

AJ: Get it over with, and that was—

IL: But he wanted to know about details—

AJ: —details specifically—

IL: —how shall this be done, yes.

AJ: That’s right. And to say that you’re bringing a person in to head up this new institution and you want someone creative, yes, but you also need someone who’s gonna have some other kinds of management skills and other kinds of things.

IL: And I think all of them were very cautious, that the school was growing so fast that there’re a lot of details—

AJ: That’s right.

IL: —you know, that they didn’t feel they had time to take care of, whereas he probably wanted to, being a detail man.

AJ: That’s right, and the other thing...I think because we had other universities in the area, University of Dayton and Central State and so forth, people had to be sensitive, they would need to have someone coming in who was sensitive to the feelings of the community about these other universities.

IL: That’s right.

AJ: Reverend Lucas, going back to the Academic Affairs Committee, one of the things that they did was to establish a statement of purpose. And this statement of purpose, and I’ll read here what it says, it says that, “The university shall seek a cosmopolitan
membership in its faculty, staff, and student body.” The statement also said, “The university shall not cause any person to suffer disadvantagement because of race, religion, national origin, or ancestry.” Do you have any feel for how Reverend Lucas, or do you recall anything that he said about the progress that the university was making toward increasing the number of black students out there and the number of black faculty?

IL: Yes, I think he was conscious that there was a need for it, that the Board of Trustees had spent so much time on buildings—you see, the growth was phenomenal—

AJ: Yes.

IL: —and they were overwhelmed, I think, with that sort of thing. And then…the person, the student, of course, is the most important thing—

AJ: That’s right.

IL: —but they had to prepare for them, so it did not…I don’t think he felt that they were giving enough attention to it, but I think he understood what the problem might have been, you know. So that’s why we have to work on it now so hard…

AJ: That’s true.

IL: …because you’ve got the facilities and you’ve got the students but you don’t have quite the balance you want—

AJ: That’s true.

IL: —with the white and the black students.

AJ: It’s really interesting; I think that statement was made maybe around 1968 or something like that—the statement of purpose was adopted then—and about nine years ago when our current president Paige Mulhollan came in, they developed a strategic plan and adopted a new statement and they referred to…start calling Wright State University a metropolitan university and that we had to deal with our metropolitan area, wherein earlier they talked about the cosmopolitan goals and needs. But in each instance, they were talking about bringing in more black students and more black faculty and representing everyone who’s in this particular area. So we have been kind of slow: this year I think we have a thousand black students but we have sixteen thousand nine hundred white students, so—

IL: We’re still not—

AJ: We’re still not—
IL: —but we’re improving.

AJ: —we’re improving; we're improving.

IL: I gathered from Dr. Mulhollan that that was one of his top priorities when he first came.

AJ: Yes! Yes, so…

IL: And I was glad that they had gotten that up to that point—

AJ: Yes.

IL: —where you could give more attention to it.

AJ: It’s gonna be interesting to see what happens one Dr. Mulhollan leaves and—

IL: Yeah.

AJ: —whether or not they’ll still try to have a representation of blacks out there at the university.

IL: I believe they will because that is a trend.

AJ: Yeah, I hope so. Then Reverend Lucas retired in when, 1978?

IL: Yes, yes.

AJ: 1978. What do you recall about his retirement party?

IL: It was a festive affair. It was held at the president’s home. And they had many gifts to give him, and it was a very jovial affair. They laughed over problems that they had solved and problems that they had not solved. That’s quite a while ago, but I remember how proud he was—

AJ: I’m sure.

IL: —because I think his health was beginning to fail a little bit then. And…that's about all I have to say about it. I'll never forget it; it was a wonderful affair.

AJ: Now when did Wright State University decide to call for a scholarship in his name? Was that in 1978?

IL: No no. It was set up at his funeral.

AJ: Oh I see.
IL: Dr. Kegerreis spoke at his funeral and told of the contributions that he had made to the campus and that that would be a memorial scholarship for him. And that was 1981, and it was in 1982 that it was set up and I believe 1983 was the first time we gave—

AJ: Oh I see.

IL: —to a Miss [Bonner], her name was [Bonner].

AJ: Oh, that’s nice.

IL: She’s in business, she works with citizens.

AJ: Oh, that’s great! So you’ve been in contact—

IL: Yes, uh huh.

AJ: —with the recipients through the years.

IL: Yes, some few of them write—

AJ: Uh huh.

IL: —to me.

AJ: That’s great.

IL: I contribute to the fund but sometimes they write as if though I’m giving all of the money.

AJ: Well we need to do something about that; we need to do something about that. When you think back on Reverend Lucas and his tenure at Wright State University, what would you think he would say his greatest accomplishment was?

IL: I think that is one of my greatest problems because I don’t really quite know what he…he dabbled in so many of them and he seemed happy over outcomes of things that he worked at and how some of his suggestions were taken and they worked out well. I think he appreciated that. He was so much for Fred White acting as president, and he was so proud that that went over well. It must have been in the mind of a lot of them too. But even so he was glad that he had the nerve to bring it up, and it did. And Dr. White wrought well.

AJ: Okay. Well very good then. I really do appreciate your talking with me about Reverend Lucas. I remember him as being a very quiet person but who got things done, and I think that’s how Dr. Spiegel—

IL: Yes.
AJ: —when I talk with him remembers him too.

IL: Yes.

AJ: Thank you so very much for talking with me today.

IL: It was my pleasure.