



**Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey -  
Black Oral Histories  
1983/146**

Oral interview of  
Leonard Keene

November 21, 1983

**Conducted by Clarence Caesar**

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The following interview took place on November 21, 1983, at the home of Mr. Leonard Keene, of 4100 Warren Way, Sacramento, California. Mr. Keene is a native born Sacramentan. As a youth, he attended Lincoln Elementary School and Sacramento High School. While in Sacramento High School he was prominent in track and baseball. His baseball skills were developed on numerous sandlot and high school baseball fields throughout the Sacramento area in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1950, Mr. Keene became the first Black man from Sacramento to play in organized professional sports. He became a member of the Sacramento Solons in 1950. Mr. Keene's insights into the development of early Black athletics in Sacramento form the crux of this interview.

**Clarence:** Briefly, could you tell us something about yourself?

**Mr. Keene:** Well, this, in what ways did you want me to tell you about, because –

**Clarence:** Okay, basically, you know, where you were born, where you were raised, where you went to high school?

**Mr. Keene:** Okay, I was born in Sacramento, I went to Lincoln School down here on between on, 5<sup>th</sup>, or 6<sup>th</sup> Street and from there I went to Sacramento High School. Graduated from Sacramento High School. I played track and basketball. I hold records at the Sacramento High School from that year in the 40s until I graduated whatever, you know. I would have graduated in 45, 46, because at that time I was in the service and everything else okay? I hold the record in the hundred yard dash, 9.7, I think, and 220 in 22 flat, relay you go about different how you say

meters or whatever, you know. But then you just run around the track, but I don't know what time it was, but I broke three records in one day and so it was a real thrill for me to just, for that itself, you know. It took a lot of practice to really get down to where you had to do a good job. You had good, good runners then and all that stuff, but you had a lot of Black players, like who could play and could run. Silas, he was good, he had brothers who could run too. So we just had a good, good team. Everybody got out and do their best really. In those years you had good competition with McClatchy High School. It made it nice.

**Clarence:** What neighborhood did you grow up in?

**Mr. Keene:** I grew up in, by South Side Park. That's where most everybody grew up at that time. My mother and father were raised in the Oak Park area. So –

**Clarence:** So they lived, your mother and father lived in Oak Park?

**Mr. Keene:** Well my mother and father got divorced, but my father remarried and had, and so I was staying with my mother at the time. So, but my father lived in Oak Park area, with his new wife and kids. [hard to hear, counter 034] They used to come out and watch me play ball all the time. Out, out of nineteen kids that's pretty good.

**Clarence:** Nineteen children? [Mr. Keene laughs] Nineteen children! Where did you fit into that?

**Mr. Keene:** I was the oldest. But it was, my father was a very good baseball player himself in his day, you know. I used to go and watch him play down in South Side Park and they had this all Black team, garbage team from Sacramento, the Garbage Men Team from Sacramento, and they used to play all the White men's and some different teams they had here in Sacramento, and he was very good. I like to think I learned all of that from him.

**Clarence:** So this was during the 30's and 40's?

**Mr. Keene:** Uh, 30's actually 38, 39, and 40. But my brother he played too. I had a twin brother and he was good, but he didn't take that much interest in baseball, you know, but he was good too. There was a lot ball players I could name, you know. Walt Beady, let's see, you know Austin Brown?

**Clarence:** Not personally.

**Mr. Keene:** Okay, Austin Brown. My sister's husband, previous husband, he played. Roscoe Solomon. I could name you a lot of ball players that were really good that was good. It was just nice to be part of it.

**[Counter 50]**

**Mr. Keene:** We had a team called the Lincoln Christian Center for Sacramento, and that's an all Black organization and we used to get the guys together and play. Bob Reynolds, his son, played

for L.A. Dodgers, that's his son. His father was very good, he died last year. There was another fellow named Hughie Jackson and Stanley White. Him and I were very close. Him and I, Stanley White and I tried out for the Solon's together. At that year.

**Clarence:** So basically there was quite a few Black ball players in Sacramento?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh yeah, yeah, right.

**Clarence:** What types of restrictions did they come up against? I know that basically there were two different leagues, a Black league and a White league operating at the time. How did that effect ball players in Sacramento, coming up in the 30's and 40's?

**Mr. Keene:** Well, at that time, it effected them very well because there wasn't, they wasn't used to it at the time. It really, you had to get used to the way they, well let's put it in way that it was different. You had to prove to people how you are. You had to be better than anybody else, no matter where you went, or what you do, or where you went to, okay? So we had to prove to people, the other people on the field and off the field, okay? There was a lot of disagreements on everything else, you know. That's why, that's why they put a lot of pressure on us kids because they knew how we are and how good we are, but then again, we knew how good they were, okay? But we proved to them that we were better than they were, you know? And no matter where you went to, uptown or downtown, and you had a lot of prejudice here in Sacramento then. Quite a bit of it. But, I mean, sometime it effected a lot of people but, then again, you know, really you paid them no attention, you see? A lot of people got carried away with it really,

you know and they really disliked people calling you all kind of other things that you don't like, whatever. It would get nasty and you would get disturbed and all that stuff. That didn't really, I said "hey, I'm proud to sit here" but I just let it go, you know? It was just to prove that I was just as good as anybody else.

**Clarence:** So you think that Blacks as players and as athletes had to perform twice as good or –

**Mr. Keene:** Right, right.

**Clarence:** Then at the same time feel extra pressure to perform?

**Mr. Keene:** Right, you see? This is why that when I went into the National Division of Baseball and there were a lot of Black players could play in that division, but they didn't, they figured that they wasn't good enough to play in this division, because –

**Clarence:** Now the Blacks figured this or the Whites?

**Mr. Keene:** The Blacks. And there were a lot of Black players that were way better than some of the White played. But they just didn't want to go up to [hard to hear, counter 082], so I made my mind and I says "they ain't no better than I am, that they are" So when you play in the National Division, when I was playing, uh, you had to perform better, and I performed better, no matter off the field and on the field. I just made up my mind and I said "hey, I said I'm better

than you are, I could play just as well as you can.” So when you make that, when you had that attitude to do that, then you can really succeed at what you want to do.

**Clarence:** Did you feel that you got this attitude from Black people, the Black community as far as them encouraging you to try to be better –

**Mr. Keene:** Oh yeah.

**Clarence:** Or did you find that you were driven by the Whites that you played with to?

**Mr. Keene:** No, I didn't, I just found out that, I think that, I think the Whites didn't encourage me to do that, I think that the Blacks, I knew I had to show the Blacks what I had to do, what I was going to do. To the Whites I said “I could do better than they can.” You are going to have pressure on both sides, no matter how you look at it, okay? So what you do is you go out to show the both what you can do. I made my big step by showing the Whites how I could play, because the Blacks already know how I could play. So what I would do, I went out to make sure that both of them knew how I could play. You see? That's the, that's why you, a lot of Blacks get envious or jealous of what you do, okay? Because it seems like a lot of Blacks they're good, but they won't really go out and show what they could do. I mean want to.

**[Counter 100]**

**Clarence:** So you feel that you are kind of a pioneer or an adventurer for this area?

**Mr. Keene:** Right, right.

**Clarence:** I noticed in your picture, in your photo albums and your picture collection that you were the only Black on a lot of White teams?

**Mr. Keene:** Right.

**Clarence:** How was it that you came to be in that position?

**Mr. Keene:** Well, that position is because I used to play for a Black team here, the Lincoln Christian Center, and I played with them and I played hardball with them, I played softball with them, and everything else, and in my opinion they were good but they, let's put it this way, that um, in my opinion they were lazy, in a way. That they felt that they were not good enough, okay? They wasn't good enough to get into that White area to play ball, okay? But I made up my mind myself, that I'm just as good as they are. If they could do it, I could do it, okay? The pressure didn't bother me, like the Blacks figured well they would put a lot of pressure on them. But that's really it was true, okay? But I figured that if I could do what I want to do, I should go do it. Even if pressure or no pressure. So I went out there and showed them what I could do, in all kinds of sports, I didn't care what it was. So I just had made up my mind, I said "hey, that's the way it is", you see?

**Clarence:** Did Blacks in Sacramento keep up with the old Negro League? As far as knowing who they were?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh yeah, oh yeah, you, there were the Monarchs and to see the Monarchs and there was another one, I forgot the name of it –

**Clarence:** Oh, the Birmingham Black Barons?

**Mr. Keene:** Yeah, that's one, like that you know. They were always together at all that time. To a large following, and like that you know.

**Clarence:** Did they ever come to Sacramento to play?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh yeah, we watched them play. They were very good, very good.

**Clarence:** Did they play each other or did they play any White teams?

**Mr. Keene:** While they played, oh, they played both, okay, they played both. It didn't make no difference, you know, and but you played most of the games down at South Side Park and down on Front Street, but never Edmonds Field because the Solons were playing there games or whatever. So, but they'd come in and try a little bit and go out again, see.

**Clarence:** Was this a yearly affair?

**Mr. Keene:** Uh, yeah, a yearly affair. But people were glad to see them come in to town. I was a young guy. I would go out and just watch them play and I said “hey, I can do it better than he can.” But it was a good experience really.

**Clarence:** Who would you say was the greatest ball player that you saw out of that league?

**Mr. Keene:** Well, there were a lot of them, but I can't really see the names, the names there was so many that I don't really remember. They were really good. It's really, Blacks had a hard time anyway, you know, because the Whites wouldn't let them play here, and they wouldn't let them play there and all of that stuff, you know. So I figure that since I was going to be the first one in that National League of hardball, that's where it starts from. But you've got to start from like on the bottom, and then work yourself out, okay? You can't just go straight on into the division because you have to prove to yourself and prove to them that you can play, you see? So when I just started, I started from the C onto B and on up, you see? I had to show the people I could do it, you see? So when they had tryouts I was, I was there, you know? There were a few Blacks guys that were good players too and one of them made the team too. So I tried to encourage a lot of the Black players, said “hey, come on out, man, you know,” I said “if they can do it you can do it, you're good.” Like Walt Beady, I was really about the first, you see, I was at first man, he was the second player, you see, to get into professional ball, you see? So I was the one that encouraged Beady to play and some other guys that wanted to play in the division. Like, Jimmy Long, the Judge Jimmy Long, I taught him how to play too.

**[Counter 150]**

**Mr. Keene:** He was a good third baseman, he was very good. But there wasn't too many. I'd say before I got out of that division, I would say there were maybe about maybe, three or four, that's about all that played ball.

**Clarence:** As a child growing up in Sacramento how do you feel that helped you as far as being competitive?

**Mr. Keene:** Quite a bit, very good.

**Clarence:** Did you find that you, did you grow up in an integrated neighborhood basically? Or?

**Mr. Keene:** Well, I grew up with a lot of different nationalities. In those years it didn't mean nothing, okay? Because everybody got along with everybody else, you see. But when you got out to the South area, you know, that's a different story. My mother wouldn't allow me to go out to the South area like everybody else. But most everybody stayed around in the lower part of town, and there would be a lot of Italians and Portuguese people in there, Chinese, Japanese, and the Italians and like that. That's how I got my way of doing things. A lot of Spanish people, you know, that really helped quite a bit. When you grow up like that you really don't get a chance to go this far. Because your parents won't allow you to go that far, okay? There were no transportation but streetcars, and there was no buses, just streetcars, and you walked where you got to go, you see? Everything was downtown on K, L, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> and in that area, and it was

walking distance. But you really enjoyed everything that you did, you know. We had a lot of friends, we had a lot of people that you got along with. Me, I got along with everybody, you know? Even if I hate him or not, I still got along with him. So, it just makes you feel a lot better, you know. But then when I moved out here, uh, it was a little different, okay? But you had to get used to people out here, you know. You had to make friends all over again. But once you do that then, but they would remember how you play ball, and that was the biggest thing. So once they saw you play, then they would remember you when they'd see you, you see? They would say "this is good" [hard to hear, counter 178] "would you like to help for Little League" whatever, like that, see?

**Clarence:** So basically, you, in sports, you gained a high visibility throughout the community?

**Mr. Keene:** Right, right.

**Clarence:** People knew who you were and approached you and say, well I know you can do certain things because of what I saw you do on the field?

**Mr. Keene:** And even in school or anything like that, the same thing. I played basketball in high school, in say a couple of [hard to hear, counter 184] year. But mostly just track and I tried to play football, but that didn't go over very well. But, I tried, you know. But I liked to try anything. I just loved to run and I just loved it, you know? They called me, like I was fast, and Butch, but you get used to that, you would just come automatically, you know, some boys in our, got so good they do what they want to do, but they can't succeed, some have it, some don't. But

then you got to, so I tried to kinda help them, you know. Well, but that's good though. But they can do what they want to do, but they smoked. [hard to hear, counter 192]

**Clarence:** What kind of memories do you have of other areas of Sacramento, like Oak Park or Del Paso Heights, did you ever get out to any of those areas?

**Mr. Keene:** Well, yeah, I was, when I moved from, I used to live out in Del Paso Heights, years ago. It was, it's different. It really was different, you know.

**Clarence:** Did you play ball out there?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh yeah, I played in River Park and played Haggin-Grant and they were the only two places you could play, you know? But the people out there were nice. You would always have your, how you say, mixed emotions sometimes, you know, but it's big now. It used to be small, and now it's big. I wasn't, it's so run down now you would never believe.

[Counter 200]

**Clarence:** Back then you didn't perceive of it to be run down?

**Mr. Keene:** No, no, and it was a nice place to live, you know, but you had a lot of people, you could walk down the street and nobody would bother you or anything. But you can't do it now, you know. Saturday nights or Friday nights were big nights in there, you could shopping or

whatever. You used to go down the main street and you couldn't jaywalk, they would give you a ticket for jaywalking. You had movie houses, and you had all kinds of stores and things like that you know. But, everybody knew you. So, it was a nice place. Everything was within walking distance. Pardon me, but you had streetcars and buses at that time you could ride, but not too many cars around then. Very few, you know. Then in school where I lived, the school was only a, Grant Union High School was only about a couple of blocks from my house, within walking distance. You could play there too, before everything changed. We used to play out in front of the school. As you walk towards the entrance that's where the ball park was.

**Clarence:** This was on Grand Avenue?

**Mr. Keene:** Yeah, Grand Avenue. It was a nice place, but, I used to walk from my house, all the way downtown, you know, hitchhike or whatever, you know. You had your slums and like your run down places down there, but that's in everything. Anyways [hard to hear, counter 224]. All the fights shooting and all that other stuff. Friday nights were the big nights. I think anytime you never know what is going to happen [hard to hear, counter 227] day or night, you know. But once people knew you then things turned out all right.

**Clarence:** Did you notice any differences in the Black community, say before World War Two and after World War Two?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh yeah. It was just different. During World War Two there was a lot of different mixed families, okay, the Japanese, Chinese, Spanish people, Portuguese, Italians, and at that

time everybody got along with everybody else. We could, all the kids in the neighborhood knew other, okay? At nighttime, if your parents looked for you, they knew where you were, okay? You might be over at some friend's house, but they call you and they'd say "don't worry about your son, he's over here." Okay? You used to stay overnight at the house, you know?

**Clarence:** The different ethnic groups used to do that?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh yes, you know. You got along with everybody. It didn't mean that you could do what you wanted to, but everybody got along with each other. It was safer then. You could go out at midnight, and nobody would bother you at midnight to 6:00 o'clock in the morning and you could walk through the park at midnight if you wanted to and nobody would bother you. You could leave your door open at nighttime and nobody would bother you or walk on into the house. But everybody knew where each person was, you know. It didn't make a difference what nationality you were. But it was just nice you know. There were a very few fights, but there wasn't too many, because you might fight with, like yourself, your neighbor next door, but after that you were friends again. Most of the kids at that time, in those years we all went to the Lincoln School, that's where all the Japanese and Chinese, and everybody and all went to Lincoln School.

**[Counter 250]**

**Clarence:** Where was Lincoln School located?

**Mr. Keene:** Down on 3<sup>rd</sup>, between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> on, let's see, R railroad tracks, went to T to S, S and T or farther down.

**Clarence:** Oh, what about, was it P Street?

**Mr. Keene:** Yeah, or P on P you know where that park a [hard to hear, counter 260] just a block from there.

**Clarence:** Okay,

**Mr. Keene:** I could tell you where the [hard to hear, counter 262] was, I could tell you where everything was, it is different though, and the Ice House used to be down on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, and I could just imagine all of the things that you could see.

**Clarence:** When did you start to notice the change?

**Mr. Keene:** The change?

**Clarence:** Yes.

**Mr. Keene:** Well you started to notice change after the war was over, you know. You came back and people were the same, but they changed a little bit because of what happened and all of that stuff. But you got along better. But it was nice, you know, it was nice. But uh, I never did

have any trouble with, everybody got along with everybody. The Japanese got along with the Blacks and the Chinese got along with everybody else. The Chinese don't say too much to people, but they are nice people. I really respect the Japanese people very well. I think I got along more with them than the Chinese people, but once you knew a Chinese person, he was your friend.

**Clarence:** What about the internment, when they had to go out to the camps, did that change a lot of the relationships that you had with them?

**Mr. Keene:** Uh, not me, you know, but I knew quite a few families, okay, they went out. I wouldn't never suggest I talked to about it. But I knew them very well, they were very close to me.

**Clarence:** How were they treated when they came back?

**Mr. Keene:** That's funny, but not too well, you know. But I still say they shouldn't have even done it, okay. But you can't blame one from the other. So here you've got a Japanese that was born and raised here and then all of a sudden he goes over there, you know, then they blamed everybody else. So what you do is don't think about it. But it's a nice thing to get along with everybody. I think I got more really good, I respect them more, more than [hard to hear, counter 293]. I love older people. Because when you grew up around a lot of old people you respect them then [hard to hear, counter 295] –

**Clarence:** So there were a lot of senior citizens and stuff? Old timers in South Side Park?

**Mr. Keene:** Yeah.

**Clarence:** Did you notice any changes as far as the Black community was concerned when Blacks from the South moved to Sacramento? Did you notice anything?

**[Counter 300]**

**Mr. Keene:** Oh, yeah! Just you noticed quite a bit because it was a different environment around the people that you grew up with and the people that come from different areas, come back from the South. The way they talked, the way they acted, the way they got along, you know. It was just different completely you know, but you have to get used to that. It wasn't very [hard to hear, counter 308]. Very, very little. But when you have people coming in from back there, that's not used to coming from where they come from to Sacra—California, whatever, you get to hesitate a little bit, you know.

**Clarence:** So did you personally feel uncomfortable around a lot of them?

**Mr. Keene:** Well, it depends on if you didn't know the person. But as, it's always good to get along with a person, okay?

**[Tape one, Side one ends, counter 315]**

**[Tape one, Side two continues, counter 316]**

**Clarence:** Let's move onto another area. Tell me how you came about being drafted into the major leagues?

**Mr. Keene:** Okay, let's put it this way, when I started to play, to get drafted in that division, of playing ball, it's through playing in the National Division and winning it.

**Clarence:** Now the National Division involved what?

**Mr. Keene:** That involved, it was like playing Triple A, professional hardball. That's the tops. When you play you have to perform and play well and I figured there's always somebody better, okay? So we go out to succeed and play harder, and harder, and harder. To prove to people that you could really play good ball. I proved that to them that I could play just as well as they can. Once they found that out, then you keep playing, and keep playing and a lot of times when you go up to the ballgame and you never know who might be there, maybe a scout looking at you or whatever, okay? So they come out and watch you playing, how you run, how you bunt, how you hit, how you do all those other things. So I work hard at it, very hard at it because I had to, everyday, even when I wasn't playing. I worked hard on Saturdays and during the week and all of that that stuff. I would get some of my friends together and we'd practice and practice and practice, even some of the White players that I knew, that I grew up with, that I played on Sundays, with or against. We used to play together like on a Saturday everybody was free for all day, and then Sunday we would play against each other for real. You'd try to make a team, those

years there was the National Division was the highest team in Sacramento. There was about, I'd say eight teams. That's [hard to hear, counter 338] you've got a first division and the second division, okay? And you, all the players on the team were very good players, all of them, okay? So to make the team you had to do better than anybody else. I could play either position and play it well.

**Clarence:** How many positions could you play?

**Mr. Keene:** All positions.

**Clarence:** All of them, all nine?

**Mr. Keene:** All nine.

**Clarence:** That is being pretty versatile.

**Mr. Keene:** Yeah. I figured, hey, he could do it, I could do it. But my main, main position was first base. I could do anything well.

**Clarence:** What year did you get drafted?

**Mr. Keene:** 1950. [Mr. Keene looks through some papers]

**Clarence:** So 1950, now that five years after Jackie Robinson.

**Mr. Keene:** Right.

**Clarence:** Did you notice if there was a push to try to get Black ball players into the leagues?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh yeah, oh yeah.

**Clarence:** So they were actively looking for and recruiting Black ball players?

**[Counter 350]**

**Mr. Keene:** Right, pretty much. There were a lot of them here in Sacramento, okay, plenty that were good. But most of them played in the lower division. You start from the lowest division, then you play and go on straight up. Its because you were more relaxed, and you could play, you didn't have to have that pressure. So that's why a lot of Black players didn't go up to the higher division because they didn't want all that pressure. I figured, that they figured that they weren't good enough.

**Clarence:** You see this as a psychological hang-ups?

**Mr. Keene:** Yeah, right, in my opinion, yeah, okay.

**Clarence:** Now do you think also that there could have been say, like a quota that they were seeking to fill as far as –

**Mr. Keene:** No, no, no.

**Clarence:** In other words as many Blacks as could have made it, could have made it then?

**Mr. Keene:** It actually didn't make a difference, okay? If you were good, willing to play ball, it didn't mean nothing. So, if I wanted to stay in lower division I could have stayed in lower division if I wanted to, okay? But I figured that if I wanted to get there, okay, not fast enough but slow enough that they could watch me develop and do it and do it well, okay? A lot of players today can't play ball, and like I played ball. They don't have that drive, they don't have that get up and go, see? But when I was playing you had to, okay? To make a team whatever team you wanted to play on, what team you wanted to play on, you had say your at first, second, or third there might be ten guys in that one position, might be five guys for that position, or make the team, all you could have is maybe fifteen, okay, on one team. So when you get up there and play you've got to prove to yourself that you can play that position, and since I was the only Black of all the guys, that made that team, you had to be better, you had to play, to see what you could do, and if you didn't make it, you were gone. They could try somebody else, anything.

**Clarence:** So you didn't feel there was any prejudice –

**Mr. Keene:** Oh, no!

**Clarence:** Racism or

**Mr. Keene:** There were no prejudice, but there might be some, but then again, you knew a little bit of it was there, but, they knew, when you were good, they wanted you, okay? Even so you figured that you wasn't, but you were good enough to play, okay? You had to prove it to you that you could play ball because I, even when I made the team, okay, you still knew how to play better but that wasn't you playing, to see what you can do? You'd be surprised, you'd be surprised, that when you are out there playing how many are looking at you, they aren't looking at anybody else, they're looking at you because you do things.

**Clarence:** I would guess so if you were the only Black that attention would be focused on you more.

**Mr. Keene:** Right, right.

**Clarence:** What local figures in Sacramento gave you some, gave you any inspiration, like management or people like that?

**Mr. Keene:** Well there was quite a few, you had a lot of sponsors, okay? You had a lot of sponsors that wanted you, wanted you to play for them, that wanted you on their team, and when they find out how good you were, wanted you to play for them. That made you, they made you

feel good, okay? But you can't play for everybody, so you pick out the one you wanted to play with, okay? So the team Mets were the best in the National Division,

**Clarence:** Team Maps?

**Mr. Keene:** The team that I played against were named Max. After Max [hard to hear, counter 393], I forgot the last name but that's the top, all of your professional players playing. They were good, so when you played against them, that's how come we won the tournament, because we had to prove to them that, they and everybody else, but you had just as good a team in your lower division, than in the top of the division, you see? A lot of the teams from the lower division didn't want to go to the top division because they figured they weren't good enough. They didn't have that caliber of a team to play up there, you see?

**[Counter 400]**

**Mr. Keene:** So what you do is, I think there was better in the American Division than in the National Division, because you have better ball players. But when you play in the National Division you have all your big boys, you had all of these people come up to see you playing, put down what people you played with on Sunday. [Mr. Keene laughs] I said "hey, I like that!"

**Clarence:** Now you were drafted by the Saint Louis Browns?

**Mr. Keene:** Browns, Browns.

**Clarence:** Whatever happened to them as a team?

**Mr. Keene:** Well they, after about a couple of years, I guess they went to a different, Cleveland Indians is a different organization –

**Clarence:** Was the team disbanded or did you move to another city?

**Mr. Keene:** Well, the team didn't disband so we, they just moved to a different, different location like that. Under different management. But it was very, very nice, interesting. They had good clocks, very good wall clocks, and your farm system, that's where I went, the farm system, you know, that's where you are learning from. When you play good, you get to go up to the higher divisions, Triple A or whatever. And you play with the best, so you get to play well, meet people, and enjoy yourself. But the money didn't mean that much, just it was just the way you play.

**Clarence:** How much did you earn as a professional?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh, I say, at that time we were paid by the month, \$350 a month.

**Clarence:** \$350 a month? For 1950 that wasn't, that was nothing to sneeze at!

**Mr. Keene:** Okay, right. Plus you had to pay for your own spikes, you had to pay for your own, buy your own clothes, like socks, something like that, shirts, underneath sweat shirts, something like that you know.

**Mr. Keene:** They gave free meals all the time, you know, you didn't have to worry about that. But you had to be clean. I mean, I kept myself neat all the time. I had to. It was just like everything else, I kept my shoes shined, I kept, let me see, my spikes sharpened, everybody sharpened their spikes.

**Clarence:** You sharpened your spikes? What did you sharpen them with a file?

**Mr. Keene:** A file or something, oh yeah, you know, kept your glove all greased up and all that stuff. Iron your suit every night and washed it all the time. Make sure that everything is clean you know. Everything in place. You traveled a lot in buses. You go from one town to the next. That was good, you know. You get the biggest thrill just by going to different towns all the time, meeting strange people. Sometimes you go to a place where they won't serve Blacks, but then again, you go anyway. You may not like it but that is the way it is.

**Clarence:** Did you find that, I noticed you played for the Sacramento Solons, for a number of years –

**Mr. Keene:** Yes.

**Clarence:** Did you get a lot of support from the Sacramento Solons organization as far as them backing you, as far as segregation or anything like that?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh yes, oh yes. Once they knew that you could play and that you get along with people, you know. They're just all Americans. It's good and people would come out and watch you play. It made you feel good.

**Clarence:** You were the first Black to play for the Sacramento Solons?

**Mr. Keene:** Well at the time, at the time, I used to work out with them a lot. Me and Stanley White tried to make the team. In those years you could go out and try out with them. A lot of the Black players didn't want to try out with them. I said "Hey why not? You get an opportunity, get it, do it." A lot of the Black players that I played with at that time, they wasn't – they were scared or something, I don't know what it was, but they were good, but they didn't want to go out and do it.

**Clarence:** What kind of a reception did you get from the local fans when you started playing?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh, fantastic, oh yeah! Oh yeah! I could run, I could bat, I could catch, I could do anything, see? Because I could prove to myself that I could do that stuff. So what you do is you go out and show the people what you can do. That was the biggest part, that was the biggest thrill in my mind, that I could go show people what I could do. It was just like everything else, if

you don't show people what you can do, you don't have anything. So if you are going to succeed for what you are going to do, and do it well.

**[Counter 450]**

**Clarence:** How was Black attendance at most of these games?

**Mr. Keene:** Pretty good.

**Clarence:** Pretty good?

**Mr. Keene:** The biggest, the biggest attendance of playing when Black people played against Whites. Hey, it was just unbelievable.

**Clarence:** You're talking about the old Negro Leagues?

**Mr. Keene:** Yeah, plus, plus your hometown teams of Blacks. We had our own Black team here in Sacramento. Me and Reynolds and Austin that played in Sacramento itself, and we used to travel to different towns to play, we had our own team that we traveled with. We would go to San Francisco or a different place to play. And each player made \$20 a game. [Mr. Keene laughs]. That's what you got, before you do anything else. When you go to out of town, you called the management and said "I'll set the team up to play against you on Sunday." Just where I wanted to take my ball club for that one day for each man, you could get it.

**Clarence:** What towns did you usually go to outside of Sacramento?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh, we went to San Francisco, we went to Chico, we went to oh, Redding, we went up to, oh what was that town? Oh, I went up there to see the President, it was Roosevelt -- San Jose, all over, you know. But you had good attendance. Because they, when you played the Whites at that time, they didn't want the Whites to pitch Blacks. But then again, you played harder [Mr. Keene laughs]. You were going to get out there and play, play ball.

**Clarence:** So people were actually watching aside from what they considered to be a racial matter, get high on baseball?

**Mr. Keene:** Right, right.

**Clarence:** Which is what they probably would come to see.

**Mr. Keene:** Yeah, and you had good players on both sides, you know? They used to call your names and all of that stuff in the outfit, you don't pay that no attention, you know?

**Clarence:** Can you give us a run down of some of the awards that you have won and some of the honors that you had bestowed upon you by Sacramento since you've played?

**Mr. Keene:** I was, in that, Colored Ball and Fast Pitch Softball for instance, of being Outstanding Player on the Team, and Best Player on the Team, and The Best All Around Player. When you're playing World Series Play you get honored for being the Best First Baseman on your team. They picked outstanding players of all different teams, I was the Outstanding Player. Just by utilities and everything when somebody gets hurt when they play. So this plaque here is of all the successes that, and all of the awards that I earned and played, that would make up for it right there.

**Clarence:** For the record let me just read this, it says:

Sacramento Softball Hall of Fame Honor is Bestowed Upon the Recipient of  
This Award for Outstanding Ability as a Player in the Sacramento Area

Given the scope of Sacramento softball which is one of the probably one of the best softball cities in the country, I would say that is quite an honor.

**Mr. Keene:** Exactly. By that it means that I played with the best, okay? From different cities, different out of town players, like Florida, New York, Chicago, and other tournaments places, and tournaments and World Series play, this is just fantastic, you know? But I, by doing that I mean you play, I could play hardball on Sunday afternoon, and turn right around on the same day and play softball at night. So you've got two things the same day. Play hardball in the daytime and softball at night, and you played well.

**[Counter 500]**

**Clarence:** What type of legacy have you left for the younger ball players of Sacramento?

**Mr. Keene:** Well –

**Clarence:** Have you helped any develop?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh, yes, I have. A lot in the Little League, I taught my son how to play, when he was only eight, nine, ten years old. He, I learned, you have to learn the fundamentals of baseball. You've got to learn how to adjust to everything, how to do this, and how to do that, and you teach them the fundamentals. To me the fundamentals is the most important thing of baseball in the first place. If you don't have fundamentals you don't have anything. You have to teach the kids that. Some of the managers don't know what the fundamentals are, because, the reason is, because they haven't been taught that way. So, most of the trouble about Little League is your parents, because they are out there hollering and going on and everything else, and half of them don't know what is going on in the first place. [Clarence laughs quietly] And that's a bigger problem, okay. And you will run into that all the time. I think you put too much pressure on the kids when you have a father out there, letting out a holler out at your kids, "do this, do that" and he doesn't know what is going on. So you tell the parents that, if that is the case, your kid shouldn't be out here.

**Clarence:** Have any of the kids that you worked with gone on to bigger and better things?

**Mr. Keene:** Oh yes, oh yes.

**Clarence:** Could you name us some names?

**Mr. Keene:** Well, let's see. You take Harry Boyle.

**Clarence:** A big enough name.

**Mr. Keene:** I played his father, Francis. I knew him from a kid, I knew his father. I played before, Dusty Baker, for instance, but I didn't know him that well, because he was in the north area. But I played before him. But then you had a lot of -- John McNamara, for instance, I played ball with him. Along with Westlake, and Les Lawless, do you know Les Lawless, the umpire. And he's Black and he was the best Black in Sacramento, he played ball too, he was good. Oh I could mention so many names, that it would just blow your mind away.

**Clarence:** What about the Forest brothers?

**Mr. Keene:** That too, I played with them too. The McNamaras, and Westlake and Greens the Gordons, and my best friend, Bobby Gonsalves, and my next best friend is Pete Gonsalves, okay. Let's see, gee. There's so many, you know. I could go down a list of lines and there are so many. I think and my very close friend is Bob [hard to hear] that I grew up with and played with. And Sam Kanalos and I played him when we were rookies. There's really just beautiful when they're good players.

**Clarence:** It seems that Sacramento has become a major league town in the sense of the players that it has produced.

**Mr. Keene:** Yes it has, it is. To me I played with, let's see, Nick [hard to hear, counter 546] he's gone now. He was a pitcher. You played with the good players, like FitzGerald and Aaron and Haskells, and like that, so you just, when you played people like it was just really nice.

**[Counter 550]**

**Mr. Keene:** It's just a big honor to me. Just being part of it, you know. We have our picnic every year at McKinley Park and all the Old Timers will come to play. You get to play with them. And like I say, you kids today don't play like we used to. It's fun and you enjoy it see? Of all the years, I just loved the game. This is an honor just by being here tonight, gives me a thrill.

**Clarence:** Mr. Keene, thank you for your time.

**Mr. Keene:** Hey, anytime, it's a pleasure.

**[Tape One, Side Two Ends, Interview Ends, Counter 574]**