

**Interview Records of Ray Pohlman  
Completed for the Black Lives Matter Oral History  
Project**



**Ray Pohlman was interviewed By Lawson Vaughan  
02/18/2024**

**Website:**

**[www.blmohp.sewanee.edu](http://www.blmohp.sewanee.edu)**

**Contact information:**

**[blmohp@gmail.com](mailto:blmohp@gmail.com)**

**Prepared by Andrew Quinonez**

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## **ABSTRACT - Ray Pohlman**

Narrator: Ray Pohlman

Interviewer: Lawson Vaughan

Interview Date: February 18th, 2024

Location: Sewanee, TN

Length: 14 minutes and 36 seconds

Ray Pohlman was born on May 31st, 1948 in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1962, Ray and his seven brothers moved to Memphis, Tennessee where he would attend Christian Brother High School, graduating in 1966. Before retiring, he was the Vice President of Government and Community Relations at Autozone Inc. Today, Ray enjoys retirement with his wife Anita while still remaining an active member of the Memphis community. Ray begins the interview by describing his journey to Memphis, and the cultural differences he noted upon arrival. Namely, the colored only and whites only divisions that permeated throughout the city at the time. The interview then moves into describing the ways in which Ray receives the news. When speaking about the Black Lives Matter Movement, Ray seems to remain impartial, though he does note the differences between the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Civil Rights Movement. Specifically, he cites the lack of organization within the Black Lives Matter Movement as a potential failure of the movement. The interview then moves into who was affected by the movement, stating that it is the younger generations who are most affected. This interview is part of the Sewanee Black Lives Matter Oral History Project.

## Field Notes – Ray Pohlman

(compiled February 18th, 2024)

Narrator: Ray Pohlman

Interviewer: Lawson Vaughan

Date: February 18, 2024

Location: Phone Call

NARRATOR: Ray Pohlman is a retired Vice President of Government and Community Relations at Autozone Inc. based in Memphis, TN. He is originally from Cincinnati, OH and moved to Memphis with his parents and seven brothers in 1962. Upon arriving in Memphis, Ray attended Christian Brothers High School where he was a member of many sports teams and clubs, graduating in 1966. He worked many jobs in and around the Memphis area including running a radio show out of Jackson, TN and as a weatherman for local news in Memphis before joining Autozone. Ray is happily married to his high school sweetheart Anita Pohlman and is father to two daughters, Carrie Vaughan and Courtney Ross. Ray is also grandfather to four children and known as “Uncle Ray” to all of his brothers’ children and grandchildren. Ray remains an active member of the Memphis community even in retirement.

THE INTERVIEWER: Lawson Vaughan is currently an undergraduate student at Sewanee: The University of the South studying American Studies. He is researching the effects of the Black Lives Matter Movement on the public.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: The interview was conducted over the phone. Lawson was at his house in Sewanee, TN and Ray was at his lake house in Counce, TN. He had his daughter Carrie and her husband David up for the weekend with his wife Anita. Upon finding a quiet spot in the house and after some technical difficulties involving Zoom, the interview commenced. The interview begins with Ray describing how he came to Memphis and what he saw when he arrived. Ray was very open to talk about the topic, especially since he could recall his time as a teenager during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Much of the interview focused on the comparison between the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

NOTE ON THE RECORDING: This was recorded off of a phone call using the Voice Memo app on an iPhone

Lawson Vaughan (00:00):

All right. This is Lawson Vaughn from Suwanee, the University of the South. It is Sunday, February 18th, 2024 at 7:30 PM and I'm with

Ray Pohlman (00:16):

Ray Pohlman, Memphis, Tennessee.

Lawson Vaughan (00:19):

Thank you. Where are you originally from?

Ray Pohlman (00:25):

I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and I moved to Memphis when I was 14.

Lawson Vaughan (00:33):

And how is that different now from when you grew up there?

Ray Pohlman (00:39):

Well, when I first moved to Memphis in 1962, the thing that struck me as a young teenager was the fact that there was visible segregation. In other words, there were bathrooms, restrooms that were for white only and colored only. There were drinking fountains that were for white only, colored only. There were entrances to public arenas like theaters and auditoriums and so on that had a colored entrance and a white entrance or a colored section or a white section. And those had a profound impact on me. I had not seen that, not that Cincinnati was any less racist than Memphis might've been, but I had not seen that growing up in Cincinnati.

Lawson Vaughan (01:44):

And when you were a kid growing up, where did you find community?

Ray Pohlman (01:49):

Where did I find community?

Lawson Vaughan (01:51):

Yeah, where did you, I guess you know, community

Ray Pohlman (01:59):

School, church, sports. I had long lasting relationships with high school classmates, long lasting relationships with teammates for various sports teams that I played with, and certainly long lasting relationships with church.

Lawson Vaughan (02:27):

And where do you find community now?

Ray Pohlman (02:32):

Well, community now. Community now is in old friends and new friends, neighborhoods, associations, business professional careers, I should say business associates is probably what I, that's kind of what community is to me now.

Lawson Vaughan (03:04):  
How do you receive the news?

Ray Pohlman (03:08):  
How do I receive the news? Well, I subscribe to a local online news service called Daily Memphian. I also read the online something called Morning Brew. I do watch some network news coverage, traditional network news coverage. I do get blurbs from the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times.

Lawson Vaughan (03:46):  
And do you have any experience with social media in terms of getting your news?

Ray Pohlman (03:56):  
I mean, yeah, I see it on Facebook if that's what you're talking about, but I don't necessarily count that as reliable.

Lawson Vaughan (04:09):  
How did you first hear about the Black Lives Matter movement,

Ray Pohlman (04:15):  
National news?

Lawson Vaughan (04:17):  
Did you see a lot of stuff about it on social media?

Ray Pohlman (04:22):  
Absolutely. If you want to have an impact. I mean, social media in today's world, although it's not the, doesn't supplant television, I don't think. But it has a significant following and a significant impact on attitude and slants and whatever. So yeah, there's national news, the coverage of when all this started several years ago with the abuse of the police on African-American suspects, African-American citizens. But I don't count it as impactful as I would traditional reporting by an established news organization.

Lawson Vaughan (05:31):  
What would you say the community reaction to the movement was?

Ray Pohlman (05:41):  
I think that most people, well, I think people were torn. I think that there were those who sided with police and had a hard time believing that the police officers who we trusted or trust as an institution to keep us safe and law abiding, would deliberately abuse the citizens that they were

sworn to protect and serve. I think there was a lot of that, and I think there was a lot of, these aren't my thoughts, but I think there was a lot of just outright distrust that this really could be happening in the United States.

Lawson Vaughan (06:41):

And how is that reaction different from the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties or even the Black Power Movement after that?

Ray Pohlman (06:50):

Well, the Civil Rights movement was obviously a different time and place, and you would think the Civil Rights Movement largely in the late fifties and sixties was what, 50 some years removed from the Black Lives Matter movement. You would think that we would have made some progress since then. But the interesting thing about the Black Lives Matter movement, it's not necessarily white on black. Some of it was African-American on African-American, and that could be really confusing for those who try to put people in, try to categorize people or stereotype people. The Civil Rights movement was much more of a sustained, I mean, when you look back at Civil Rights Movement, it actually began in 1862 or 63 with the emancipation population and moved on through several amendments to the United States Constitution, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1964, 1965, I'm not sure I got that date. And then you had organized national leadership and Dr. Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy and others. So it was a movement that was joined by leadership in the white community as well. Not that Black Lives Matter doesn't have that leadership from the white community, but it was just deeper, more encompassing and much more impactful as we look at it 50 years later than Black Lives Matter.

Lawson Vaughan (09:03):

So that being said, which generation do you think has been the most affected by the Black Lives Matter movement?

Ray Pohlman (09:10):

Which generation?

Lawson Vaughan (09:11):

Like people my age, or people like mom's age, or people your age?

Ray Pohlman (09:21):

Certainly. I think people more your age than anything else. I think there's a real fear, and when you hear African-American parents talk about their children and talk about what to do when they're pulled over by police officers and so on and so forth, and what not to do, there's a real fear there. But I would think that it's the younger generation that much should be much more concerned or affected by Black Lives Matter.

Lawson Vaughan (10:14):

How has it affected how you talk to other people?

Ray Pohlman (10:20):  
Black Lives Matter?

Lawson Vaughan (10:21):  
Yeah, I guess in terms of how you talk about some of the issues that were highlighted more during the movement.

Ray Pohlman (10:29):  
Well, I mean, personally, when I talk to people, it's all lives matter and we really shouldn't distinguish. I would hope that we have come a long, well, obviously we haven't, but I would hope that we have come a long way towards equality and respect for everybody, regardless of race or creed or origin or whatever. But that's probably unrealistic in today's world, but that's an ideal that we can all hope for.

Lawson Vaughan (11:19):  
How do you think it's succeeded?

Ray Pohlman (11:22):  
How do I think what

Lawson Vaughan (11:23):  
The Black Lives Matter movement?

Ray Pohlman (11:30):  
Oh, I think it has its place. I think people took advantage of an opportunity, and it's like everything today. I mean, it's a 24 hour news cycle. It's a 20 second elevator speech, people's attention to span. Since the advent of the worldwide web and all the devices we have, the phones and the iPads and computers and everything else, I think the attention span has- is very, very short. And so I think it's something that I haven't seen a Black Lives Matter piece in a national news, national news publication in a long, long, long, long time. So I don't know whether, frankly, I don't know whether it's fizzled or not. I do know that entities like the NFL or printing things on their football fields or remind us of that we were all equals and so on and so forth, but it's just not as organized as the Civil rights movement was back in the fifties and sixties.

Lawson Vaughan (13:03):  
So I guess the next question was how do you think that it's failed or fell short?

Ray Pohlman (13:14):  
I don't know that it has lost. And I would think that lack of leadership, lack of coordinated leadership, these campaigns have to be, well-funded, have to be organized, has to be recognized, leadership structure, grassroots activation, just like running any campaign, whether

political or not. And so I think the facilitation or the fractioning of those probably has led to less emphasis.

Lawson Vaughan (14:07):

So what would you say that the state of race relations in the United States is today?

Ray Pohlman (14:13):

Unfortunately, I don't think it's changed much. I think it's changed a great deal since I was a teenager, no question about that, but I think we got a long way to go.

Lawson Vaughan (14:31):

Yeah. Well, that's all the questions I have.

Ray Pohlman (14:36):

Okay. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity.