

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

Jackson, Mississippi

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW AGREEMENT

You have been asked for information to be used in connection with the Oral History Program at Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi. The purpose of this program is to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use.

A tape recording of your interview will be made by the interviewer and a typescript of the tape will be made and submitted to you for editing. The final retyped and edited transcript, together with the tape of the interview will then be placed in the oral history collection at Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi. Other institutions or persons may obtain a copy. These materials may be used for purposes of research, for instructional use, for publication, or for other related purposes.

I, _____ have read the above, and in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, and in return for a final typed copy of the transcript, I knowingly and voluntarily permit Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi, the full use of this information. I hereby grant and assign all my rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized, or contemplated, to Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi.

Jerome Wyatt
Interviewee's Signature

Jerome Wyatt 3/3/47
Interviewee's Date of Birth

5/3/89
Date Agreement Signed

Oral History Number Assigned

O.H. 89.13

Interviewer: Lavaree Jones

Interviewee: Jermone Wyatt

Wyatt: Born 1927, in Chicago Ill., the oldest of four children parent were business oriented, educators. A graduate of Oak Parks High, Tennessee State a degree (in Tec. Arnotics) worked at MS. State Employment Service, a chemical Co. and then was employed by Head Start.

Jones: I am Lavaree Jones assisted by Rev. J.F. McRee. Mr. Watt, you will be asked questions about your involvement with Head Start in particular and how you see yourself serving the committee in your present position. When did you become employed by Head Start?

Wyatt: I was employed in 1972, at that time Head Start was running ads for positions. My parents were contacted of my whereabouts. I had always been concerned about the affairs of this community. I felt it was a golden opportunity for me to come back to where I was reared.

Jones: What was the purpose you found Head Start to be?

Wyatt: Frankly, I knew very little when I came in.

Jones: Tell me about Head Start in Jones County.

Wyatt: When I arrived there was quite a problem, the past director () had had management problems in particular dealing with how management suppose to take place.

The federal government was insisting on certain rules being followed. In terms of running the program. As a result of that people who were unfamiliar with participating at that level was overwhelmed with the responsibility. Not only were we receiving quite a bit of pressure from the outside. For example, State regulation from the idea of Head Start being in control by minorities in terms of the money and there seem to have been aⁿ up swell of the business community and white general population to get control of

funds. As a result of that it left the program cripple in trying to meet those regulations. Having very little backing from the state, local and federal to support it.

Jones County was definitely pledged because the centers were in churches, upstairs and some other problems that did not meet specification for Child Care Centers. My first year was spent raising and generating efforts in the community to provide adequate facilities to support the motion of Head Start.

- Jones: Who was the director of Jones County Head Start then?
- Wyatt: I was the director of the program.
- Jones: What was your position called?
- Wyatt: Area director, are you talking about the top person.
- Jones: No, the person who was when you were employed?
- Jones: Who employed you?
- Wyatt: The inter Area Council and Dave Rice, who interviewed and made recommendations hired me.
- Jones: Who were the inter Area Council persons?
- Wyatt: Some of them CE appleberry?
- Jones: These were local Jones County residents?
- Wyatt: Well, the way the program operated was that the position had the approval of at least the inter Area Council and sent to Jackson for confirmation. Some local inter Area Council men were people like Mrs. Emma Nick, Rev. A. Jorden, and Emmuel Fraizer.
- Jones: Where are they now?
- Wyatt: Emmuel Frazier retirement from the public School system, Rev. Jordan still here postering churches. School teachers were also on that board.

- Jones: Who hired the center staff?
- Wyatt: The whole program had an organizational structure they had it fixed so that parent had input at every level. The center employee, the local committee consisting of parent made recommendation to the center director for teachers, then to Area director for approval. I made recommendation to the central office for center directors and confirmed by the Area Council.
- Jones: How many centers did you have in Jones County?
- Wyatt: We had seven centers, one in the Manhattan Community Queens Ollive, Kevin Star, Ellisville, Mt. Issac, white oak, and southside (church).
- Jones: What was the attitudes of white about Head Start being in a white owned facility?
- Wyatt: When I first came these facilities were already in use. I did not have to interact with trying to locate a building. Basically I dealt with food purchasing of services. Their attitudes when I arrived seemed to have been not very intended on a local level as on the state level.
- Jones: Was Head Start under OEO when you come.
- Wyatt: No, it was under HEW?
- Jones: Was the guide lines rigid or refined.
- Wyatt: They had been refined considerably and yet there were some OEO guidelines we had to ad here to.
- Jones: Was the staff of the original head start program the same as when you become adimistrator?
- Wyatt: Most of them were, there was about 114 people. First there was about 800 children then 600. Most employees were women. I made a stern effort to hire black males, because the male image was very important. They had a tremendous impact on the babies.

Jones: How did they work out?

Wyatt: They worked pretty well. I had some young male teachers. I hired some to do menial jobs at the centers. I was concerned about those in the penal system under correction, rehabilitation. I did extensive interviews to get those who were _____? It was a great joy to see reenter society and become productive members of society. I got some criticism about that. I was prepared to accept and understand that these people who are incarcerated needed an opportunity to become productive members, so they accepted it.

Jones: How did churches react to Head Start in particular?

Wyatt: Churches again because of the movement of the program, and the amount of economic control lead to a lot of havoc, not understanding the process, it lead to people being confused. It also gave room for some identity which sometimes we acknowledge it this way. If we get a little status we lose our sense of where we come from. That was shown quite a bit on the negative side of the program. There seems also to be something they had against education. They felt that someone coming in with education resorted to saying that "You educated folk think you know everything. I got sense, I've got mother wit. I think that was alive at that time, because of the activism going on in the community."

The years of blackness tended to be a certain _____ just as important to the legacy of the times. That we should find in ourselves' acceptance for the educate as well as the uneducated and find away to chandle both energies into productive activities. It seem to have been an infight between the educated and uneducated.

Jones: What direction do you think the uneducated went as a result of the infight and interaction?

Wyatt: I really think that these notions were induced in a sense, I don't think there were any real concrete evidence _____ but once they got to working together, learning

each other, they could feel the sensitivity over flowing into ~~into~~ their problem, then it was O.K.

Jones: Do you think these attitudes were from the original inception of Head Start?

Wyatt: I think so.

Jones: What do you think created that attitude?

Wyatt: Well, first of all the regulations may not have been interrupted or least the execution of the regulation were base, with the ever increase of demand for efficiency and quality of the program there come a desire to employ those people in certain areas of the program that had to have some kinds of skills and education, the demand coming from the federal government that we had to upgrade the program. Not only do you have to upgrade in management, the teachers had to be upgraded too. So, right in the middle of the looseness come the _____ regulations.

The second line supervisors or directors were instructed from the top that these things had to be done. It was reflecting that. I had many teachers get involved in furthering their education. Not only teachers, cooks too were encouraged to get GED.

Jones: This part of education in the program concerning first employees of the program and those who were "Qualified", did that make a division between whether Head Start would ~~of~~ would not be continued.

Wyatt: There was a lot of things with optimizing the program. Who was in control of the economics, the idea of having _____ ? to your community, incorporate _____ serving on _____ board having an opportunity to hire and fire people direct policy in the program. I think all of this lead to some of the confusion. Even though all of that existed there was educated people who was on the Area Council. Actually had more influence so to speak. Depended on what their perception were of the program and the direction they wanted to see the program go within the guidelines, because of the great influence over their peers and what I found in

common was the director who worked with the other people had influence and knowledge with those people subsequent to having children in the program and not because of some expert area they were coming from; was more _____ ? whether or not this board influenced their parent. I also found that as time moved on the fears from both sides (inside and outside) seems to have subsided and more meaningful work started taking place. I guess that goes back to the frame of mind, do you know people?

I also discovered ^{there was} that a lot of deceit in the program because _____ educated people that set ^{at} the area council contrived ways to get teachers' children in the program. Where the most needed wasn't served. At least they didn't receive top priority. One could take the argument that if the real needed children were involved in the program, it might not survive because it would not have had the guidance of those people who had some knowledge of organizational structure and how things ought to function. I think funds could have come in on an expert level, but not enough because ^{they} they would have had to have a percentage of parent and at the Area level a certain number parent had to be there from the center level. Many of your Area Council people were educated. People who worked in industries, etc. truthfully they were not eligible because they were above the poverty level.

Jones: Tell me a little about economics in Jones County? What was the salary like for working parent in the early Head Start?

Wyatt: When I arrived Head Start brought me a great deal of confidence, many thing I couldn't see. I am deeply grateful to have worked in Head Start. It was my greatest educator outside my parent. I find the people working in Head Start. (My salary was \$129.00 a week was very difficult to make it on what they was getting.) They were very appreciative for that and grateful. This made me come to a conclusion that what they made as maids and custodial workers was nothing.

Jones: What kind of salaries were they making?

Wyatt: They were on an hourly work days. Something like _____ . Head Start teachers made from \$69 to \$79 per week, cooks \$59.

Jones: How did the Head Start salaries compare to other jobs in Jones County public school teachers in particular.

Wyatt: Not only public school, this is an industrial area in Jones County. Many mills, factories etc., they were making lower salaries in comparison. Laurel is one of the richest cities per capital in the state, because of the millionaires here.

Jones: How did the white element behave as a results of the economics of Head Start coming into the county?

Wyatt: I saw no real opposition, I could have been blinded seeing so many thing I wanted to happen. I could have blocked out somethings. On the contrass I saw cooperation. Although there were somethings not mapping out.

Jones: Were you attacked by any sources objectively?

Wyatt: I received some threatening phone calls . I wasn't physically attacked, but I caught most of the opposition from the parent of the Head Start program. Some of it was justified, being a new excited administrator _____ led to some difficulty for me. It was a year after I had left Head Start ^{at} the I really realized how resourceful those people were, and how I was in my wickedness felt a great deal of regret having that knowledge that I had after I left the program, that I couldn't have done that, because I had to go through that in order to understand it. But I do realize that those people were forever praised for the way I did things. We seem to be complimenting each other for what we did. I thought I was tough, they said I was not, (that tern very independent), (they had to do their work). *need a better statement*

Jones: What was the major growth process though bxt Head Start. Where did people grow most?

Wyatt: I think they grew in respect to the fact that there was a *need* , regulation grave disability the was involved in and in the *simplying* process of educating our children it was important that we

*Bad double
statement*

do the best job we can. It did ^kmade good sense not to serve the children well when the program was designed for that. We had conflict because guidelines, it really increased the level, which made it easier for people to get into Head Start program.

And yet I found that in some of the centers people had elaborated with the teacher or someone working at Masonite with influence some children were left out. All of this resorted in lowing the number of children we could serve. The money started getting cut so we had to cut the children.

Jones: In cutting the number of children served, did parent have to pay anything for the child in Head Start?

Wyatt: No, the cost was free.

Jones: Children who needed the program most was left out. Why?

Wyatt: Simply, because they didn't follow regulations.

Jones: Who was responsible for not following regulations?

Wyatt: Teachers in the centers, when they went to recruit children each year, they would go out and get the grandmother to sign the form. She had no income, but living in the same house. They would claim what they wanted as income. I seem there was a well thought out conspiracy because it became an economic boast for the teacher who had a child. It may have been that the teacher paid to get her children, ⁱⁿ so the child could learn from Head Start. Back then there was no kindergarden a vailable for these parent. I went to kindergarden, but later it ceased. Many of the kindergarden operators became a part of the Head Start programs. So there was no opportunity for young children to get a Head Start, so Head Start become an opportunity. They know that if they followered the regulation it would eleminate them getting into the program. So being a relative, friend on having influence in the community circumvented the procedures there by causing about thirty percent of the program to default. I noticed the discrepancy in that. I wrote letters to each parent, gave them a dead line. After

that the children would not be picked up. Of course that created an up stir in the community. Being a very young man, my superiors were able to lobby people to support their causes. Even my grandmother and relatives didn't understand why I had to adhere to the rules. A lot of that should promote fairness and sternness that should always be.

Jones: what about the compassion and responsibility to the people the program was designed for to have information always to give them knowledge of their rights in continuing the program.

Wyatt: They knew what their rights were, but also there was an element in there willing to circumvent it. I don't think they meant any harm to the program they want their child in.

Jones: There was an opportunity for Head Start being in a community to create a lasting economic base for blocks to be in control of.

Wyatt: Unfortunately it did not create the economic base that perhaps part of the language of the law legislated. Simply because I tried very hard to deal with minority business. The gentleman who was before me ordered from the white vender.

Jones: Who was he?

Wyatt: I can't call his name. I didn't go in and cut him right out (the white vender) I did construct an opportunity for black vender to get the business after several months. I thought Head Start should serve some economic base for black business. There is a man who own one of facilities we rent. There was no real efforts to have substantial building. We experienced run down schools, delabodated churches, and renovated houses. We had to really be inovative in fixing up those old buildings to use in Head Start.

Jones: Is this some of the most benefits being received from Head Start today?

Wyatt: I think that what they are doing now is trying to measure the impact of Head Start. If you finish your research you

will find out that Head Start have benefited tremendously. In my administration I have had four ladies to get their masters degree, which became a Doctor's. Several to get B.S. and B.A. Degrees now in public schools as teachers. Cooks advanced to better jobs. I am a product of the program.

Jones: Lets talk about your personal benefits from the Head Start program.

Wyatt: Certainly as a member of the Board of Supervisors can be contributed to Head Start. My experiences as an administrator got carried into being recommended for a supervisor. The relationship created that I thought was not prevelant, was support in my favor.

Jones: What do you think the future is for Head Start?

Wyatt: I think it depend a lot on the people like you who have taken an interest in recording the history. I think we did a poor job in documenting the success of the program. We have a rich history that has gone undocumented. I take pride in acknowledging, and complementing you all for doing something that was discussed four years ago. We talked about documenting the number of child graduated from high school their grades. I think it would be surprising. I did accured study my last year in Head Start. I wanted to see who made honors and were Head Start children.

Jones: What type of dependences are children being subjected to in terms of job opportunities, future goals etc.

Wyatt: Our communities has become in many instances rural, I don't see
 Jone County is an exception, especially from a black prospective. Our children are confused now. Intergration have not done what those who advocated it to do. Simply because (personally) parent allowed them to do it on their own, as apposed to being an active participant with the school. We are currantly having a disturbance over consolidation. I am an advocate for the consolidation of schools, for economic and educational opportunities. I firmly believe in black nationalism, not in America, but if you plan to move elsewhere yes, I don't think we can call it a separate state and do well. We don't have the resources. Take the

^{what}
 white man who owns the black and his son who has a friendly relationship. It also give them an opportunity to recognize that blocks can contribute not only to the well being of the owners but to themselves. I think that the whole process of interacting you dismiss fears, myths and the things that have kept you apart.

Jones: Do you think that the black community will ever be in control of any major industrial enterprise in Jones County?

Wyatt: If I said not to that, then I would base hope. Yes, I think there will come a time we'll have a black industrial leader in this county.

Jones: From a supervisors point of view what are you working on now? What are your plans for Jones County?

Wyatt: I am an advocate for economic development. Some blacks in the community feels that is strickly for whites. I tend to believe it is impossible for prosperity of people who live side by side one gain and the other don't. It is impossible for an entrepreneur like Billy Howard a local boy who went to general electric worked there for a while, came back and established a company, the second largest employer here.

Jones: What company is that?

Wyatt: Howard industries, the major employer is the county school system. Billy Howard is the largest industrial company in the county. He went of majored in industrial enernetic at Mississippi State. General electric came back and set up this ^{his} own company. I think that those kind of successer will breed other successes.

Jones: What is your role as a supervisor. How long have you been one?

Wyatt: This is my second term as supervisor. I am interested in economic development. Education proceding that even if we know our community like the back of our hand, we have not developed the full sense of community.

- Jones: What are you developing in terms of educational programs, involving local people?
- Wyatt: I have implemented somethings that could be questionable activities in my department. I have the opportunity to serve as a recreational counselor in college. Because of my great interest I used my power to employ fifth/or sixth/ black youth in the summer. So they could support their personal needs. I am the only supervisor to have a summer program. I also divided some of my _____ funds to the recreational program in my district. It was cut out last year. My department made me stop it. In the five years of my administrative, I've hired over 300 youth.
- Jones: How many supervisors are there in Jones County?
- Wyatt: Five.
- Jones: Comparing your beat to the others what would you say?
- Wyatt: My beat is predominately in the city, because of the redistricting making it a majority black district. When I took over this beat very little had been done since the supervisors were legislated to run county government. When I took over there were no recreation or community centers. Currenly, I have built four community centers, pored all the major three fares, created a resource center particularly geared to dealing with problem of blacks, like utilities telephone bills, welfare office to enable black citizens in this district to create what ever _____ it could. There was as many whites with problem as blacks. I tried to extend myself in my administration. I am being critized from a legal point for that. I am willing to accept, because I think what I did was valuable. Housing is a real serious problem in Jones County. My office serves as a contact ---- reaching out to the community. When ever the housing authority need something the refers to my office, we interact with the people.
- Jones: This has been an interesting interview, my ^{last} lost question is where did you get the strength to do so much? What part did Head Start play in all this?

Wyatt: God is the provider of everything. I am blessed to have had parent who also had the since to know that they could not provide what I needed and sent me to my grand parent who had the resources instructed and guided my life. They supported me then and now. They were instrumental helping me with the supervisors campayne. First of all they had created recognition for themselves in the community that was major in my identity. Using my past experience in Head Start which gave me a sense of community. The conflicts that accured in Head Start increased my conscienciness and made me know that if I run for this job and because of the interaction and sell yourself, you can win. Head Start is one of the most resourceful programs ever created. When I speak with people outside the rein of things I always refer to Head Start.

One of the keys to any man being successful is finding yourself and alining yourself with people who have intelligence, and will to share that. Who will not tell you no crap. Tell it like is. We don't need people to go salong to go along who will tell you your weakness as well as your strenghts. I had a very good director at the state level, whom I hirely respected. Dave Rice was instrumental in helping to make me. I thought he was tough, I was very energetic with my own ideas. It is very important at times he seem to be insensitive. Sometimes good leadership _____ those creative forces. But they don't destroy them. I guess that is what experts do, they define the peremeter, because of they way we were it created in me to give people more opportunity to express themselves.

I think the future of this and all other counties depend on how well people live together. There is a growing under currant of racial tension is a result of not recognizing whats going on in the community. At one time when we were very active and raising issues openly in the medias presence, there was no representation. Since that time the courts and legislation has provide opportunity for blacks to have representation. I feel strongly that in most communities, especially this one that since we have not been a part of the government process, there a tendence not to uterlize the people that they worked so hard for to get into the various offices. They tends to _____ in having full knowledge

of circumstances and rationale for some action. Your
rejectment and conscience will not allow you to take the
position that some of the activist want you to take.