



# JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

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## Interviewee Agreement

You have been asked for information to be used in connection with the Oral History program at the Margaret Walker Alexander National Research Center at Jackson State University. This information is being gathered and preserved for historical and scholarly use.

A tape recording of the interview will be made by your interviewer. The goal of the project is to transcribe each interview. In the interim, we will provide you with a copy of the audiocassette.

The final version of this information will be used by Jackson State University in a variety of ways. Its uses can include radio, television, internet and other forms of electronic media. This information will also be placed in the oral history collection at Jackson State University.

I, Georgia Ross have read the above information and in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, I knowingly and voluntarily permit Jackson State University to allow students and researches access to this interview. I give Jackson State University all of my rights in relation to this information whether they are known or unknown.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee's Signature  
Date of Birth 10-5-49

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's Signature  
3-28-05  
Date

Oral History Number Assigned \_\_\_\_\_

Revised 03/05

Interview with Mrs. Georgia Ross

McCroy: Today is March 28, 2005 and I am interviewing Mrs. Georgia Ross here at her home in Vicksburg, MS. Mrs. Ross was an educator here in Mississippi for--

Ross: Twenty-nine years

McCroy: Twenty-nine years. Okay, now we are going to focus on her experiences in education and see what input she can give me on Robert Clark and education. First of all, Mrs. Ross, can you tell me a little about yourself?

Ross: Okay, I am a native Mississippian. I was born and raised here in Warren County. I am a product of the Vicksburg Public School system. I am a graduate of Alcorn State University. I hold both a B.S. and a Master's of education degree. Right now I am retired. I taught in the public school systems for twenty-nine years. I taught grades 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup>.

McCroy: It was Alcorn State University then?

Ross: During that time no, it was Alcorn College. I graduated in 1970.

McCroy: I know those were early times for an African American woman as yourself to go to college and actually graduate and everything. How was the schooling back then?

Ross: Schools were very segregated back then. When I finished high school, which was in 1967, the integration process was just beginning and during that time when I enrolled at Alcorn, well, what is Alcorn State University now, there weren't any white students. It was very, very segregated. We had our school's, and that was just it. Even during the time when I started teaching back in 1971, I began teaching in Rolling Fork, Mississippi and they were very segregated--.

McCroy: Did you have any white students--

Ross: No. Well, at first white students went to the academies. The students who were able to financially, they went to the academies in the Delta. This was in order not to integrate or go to integrated systems they would start academies for the white children. They would not go to public schools.

McCroy: What were your feelings toward integration at the time? I mean, did you--

Ross: Well, uh, to be perfectly honest, I could see a need to change, but back then the schools were so, uh--we taught our children. We taught our, you know we had all black students, and we were basically all black teachers and we taught our students. And to me, the students learned more back then when we had our schools. And we did not have all the fancy equipment and things of this nature, but what we did have, we put it to good use and our students learned. And that was basically it. Now that the students, to me students are not learning as much as they did back then,

we did not have a lot the technology that schools have now a days, but what we had we put to good use and students learned. And it was a given that those who could would go to college and get an education and that's what they would strive to do. But now, that we have more dropouts— to me we have more dropouts and students just don't care about an education. We were taught at an early age that the way out poverty was to get an education and to become an educator, a teacher, or a lawyer, or whatever we could become because back then, being a teacher was something looked up to. To be a teacher, a principal, or something of that nature, you know you could get a good job and of course now they didn't pay very much. Because, uh, I think my first contract was for \$6,000. But back in the day, that was a lot of money. But, to become a teacher was to be successful and that's what we strived to be. You know, back then, we wanted to be successful.

McCroy: Okay, you said that uh, you think it was like, I guess a closeness or something because with—

Ross: Certainly, certainly, we were able to. With our students we could build a report where, the students knew what they were in school for and times were so hard back then they didn't waste time. When they would come to school, they came ready to learn. They were motivated. We didn't have to worry about that much motivating because students were motivated when they came to learn. When they came to school, they were motivated to learn.

McCroy: What about the classroom size? Was it about like it is today?

Ross: Oh no. We had thirty-five, forty students in one classroom. They didn't worry much about class size. That was included in the Education Reform Act where, this is when they lowered the pupil- teacher ratio where you probably couldn't have over twenty-five students—well, thirty, uh, twenty-five to thirty students and then they even lowered in lower grades. You couldn't have any more than maybe twenty students. An ideal situation would probably be eighteen to twenty students. And that was one of the things the Reform act did for us. And another one, they put teacher assistants in the K- 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. These were people that were, these were paraprofessional that were put into the schools to assist the teachers. And kindergarten was another area, another thing that was included in the education reform act. And as I said, I worked in the Delta, and some of the things that they would do to help the pupil achievement was to have summer school every summer. Of course this was federal, this was the Title I Act. This was federal funds that they would use to have summer school for the students to enhance their learning.

McCroy: Okay. I read something where Robert Clark was trying to do the same thing. He tried to pass a bill about that, but it failed. It was, uh, something about one of the schools—MVSU. It was a bill that was suppose to help people out people of, I guess low income families that I guess could not get to and from school and what they would do is let those students go to school at Valley and they would have the students there as mentor. Do you think that would have been a good bill to pass?

Ross: Certainly, anything that would enhance student learning, and help students engage in an educational process would have been a good thing. Now, Robert Clark was a very forward

thinking individual. We were so proud when he was elected to represent that district in Jackson and he did a tremendous job. He was one of the very first people to take office from the Delta and back in those days, for a black person to be admitted to any position was a milestone. But, I think he was a little bit before his time. Because I know he had a hard time when he went to Jackson. You know, trying to do anything to help the black people during that era. I know it was a struggle for him. He enacted a lot of legislation that did help the poor people, the Delta. If you realize, the Delta area was a very depressed area economically back in those days.