

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

THE FARISH STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT PROJECT

BUSINESSWOMAN IN THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

O. H. 78.13

LAVERNE WHITE

Interviewed
by

LINDA A. McLAURIN

on

June 19, 1978

O. H. 78.13

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 made available for purposes of research, for instructional use, for publication, or for other related purposes.

I, Laven White, 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, 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 know, recognized, or contemplated, to Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi.

Laven White
Interviewee (Signature)

6/19/78
Date

Introduction

Mrs. Lavern White is the forty-one year old spouse of Jackson's Police Sargent, Robert White.

Mrs. White received her education from Lanier High School and Jackson State University. She was trained in floral designing by Mrs. Elizabeth Thames, and has been her employee for twenty-one years at Boot's Flower Shop, 817 North Farish Stree.

Mrs. White is a native of Holmes County, and has been a resident of Jackson since the age of nine.

In this interview Mrs. White talks about her education and how she came to work at Boot's Flower Shop. She discusses the deterioration of Farish Street businesses area. She talks about participating in the Civil Rights marches, the entertainment on Farish Street, the Red Light District and some of the problems caused by the prostitutes living in the area, drinking, gambling an etc.

She recalls how the "Y" was once very popular and some the problems that influenced the parents not to let their children attend the "Y."

INTERVIEWEE: Laverne White
INTERVIEWER: Linda A. McLaurin
DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 19, 1978
C.H. 78.13

McLaurin: This is an interview with Mrs. Laverne White, Assistant Manager of Boot's Flower Shop, 817 North Farish Street.

White: My name is Laverne White, Assistant Manager of Boot's Flower Shop, 817 North Farish Street. I have three daughters. One is fifteen, one is sixteen, and one is twenty.

McLaurin: Are you a native Jacksonian?

White: I have been here since I was nine years old. I was born in Holmes County. I lived there until I was nine and we then moved to Jackson. I have been here ever since.

McLaurin: How old are you?

White: Forty-one.

McLaurin: Why did you come to Jackson?

White: I came with my mother and father. Other than that, I probably wouldn't have been in Jackson.

McLaurin: What was your educational background?

White: I went to Jim Hill High School. I attended Jackson State for one year.

McLaurin: What was your life like before you entered the floral profession?

White: When I was in high school, I took the trade called diversified occupation. This was the job they sent me to first. It was my first and only job. I was here one year on the job training and the next year I was fully employed. This was in 1956.

McLaurin: What was Farish Street like in 1956?

White: Farish Street was very noisy, but not as dangerous as it is now. You could walk down the street and not be worried about being attacked. A lot of the businesses that were here are gone now.

McLaurin: Could you describe Farish Street during the 1960s?

- White: In the 1960s the freedom riders came. Farish Street was one of the main streets. We left Farish Street and went up to Lynch Street. When you left Lynch Street you came to Farish Street, one or the other. I marched in some of the marches from Farish Street to Capitol Street. We had people to come down and help with the Civil Rights Movement. During that time we marched together. Any person connected with the police would give you a ticket because they couldn't do anything else. I would go out making deliveries and the police would sometimes give me two tickets a day because they knew I was involved.
- McLaurin: Who were the people that traded with you?
- White: Black folk. We would have middle class people who have been on Farish Street about twenty years. We have a lot of customers on Farish Street. We sometimes get a higher class, but most of our business consist of middle class.
- McLaurin: What was your relationship with the other black business people in the area?
- White: I think we had a good working relationship. Whatever we needed done, we would ask.
- McLaurin: Has it been a constant relationship? Has it changed over the years?
- White: I think our relationship with the business people in this area has been the same since I have been here
- McLaurin: Can you explain your past experiences as a black business woman over the past twenty one years?
- White: I don't consider myself so much as a black business woman, I am in the business as an assistant manager. I have never considered myself as an assistant anything. I am just and employee. In dealing with the public, I guess I deal with it as much as the manager or more. I have always found people to be people regardless of who it is. I treat a person spending a little money the same as I would treat a person spending a lot of money. A little man never forgets that you are selling the same thing the white man is selling. If a person came in and didn't have but a little money, I would show them the best thing to buy for that amount of money.
- McLaurin: How was the business like when you first strated?
- White: It wasn't as big as it is now. I guess I can give myself a little credit for that.

McLaurin: Is it very successful?

White: Yes, I think so. I consider myself as a helper. I don't try to be the manager or try to take over. I want it to be a success. It takes hard work to make it successful. I think it has been successful because we worked so hard.

McLaurin: How has it been for you being employed by blacks?

White: It has been great for me. I have been able to do, go, and see whatever that has been necessary to do. The flowers come from the white folks and I would have to go there and pick them up. I don't regret any of my twenty-one years. I am happy to say, I plan to retire in the same business.

McLaurin: What are your future plans?

White: As I told you I am forty-one, I wouldn't want to start a business because this is hard work. I am not going to do anything when I leave here, but retire and enjoy my children. I hope by that time I will have some grandchildren.

McLaurin: Where is your home?

White: I live at 1102 Wiggin Street.

McLaurin: What are your outside activities other than Boot's Flower Shop?

White: I am a member of Pearl Stret A. M. E. Church where I served as Youth Director. I don't belong to any clubs. I go to church with my family and go to dinner. I am not a social person. We go to private parties. I am a firm believer that if I am a member of something, I just don't want to to be a member, I want to be a part of it. I work long hours and I have a family, when I go home I don't have time to socialize.

McLaurin: Do you have any political affiliations?

White: No. I don't participate in any of those activities.

McLaurin: When did the Civil Rights cool down?

White: 1969 or early 1970. After the cooling off period entered a group that was not necessarily a marching group, but a group who worked together with projects. Other than than, that was it.

McLaurin: What have the eight years of the 1970s been like for you?

White: Quite. You have noticed that we have three cafes in front of our business. We have fun on Saturday afternoon, as usual. They began to start having balls, drinking, fighting, and cutting up each other. Other than that, Farish Street is quiet.

They call me Mrs. White. They drink and do whatever to themselves, but they don't bother me. I am not afraid of Farish Street. I come down here anytime and they don't bother me. They also make sure that no one else bothers me.

A lot of folks ask why I have the door locked. I tell them that I am human. I am not afraid of anyone on Farish Street coming in and doing anything to me. I believe whatever is going to happen, it would be someone else not from around here that would rob me or whatever. Other than that, I am not afraid. People on Farish Street look out for us. We were here when they came and hopefully, I will be here when they leave.

McLaurin: Has it always been like that?

White: No indeed. It use to be that we didn't have to lock the door. If we left the door unlock, people would come by and shake it and if it was open they would call the lady who owned the shop and let her know that it was open.

McLaurin: When was that?

White: I can't tell you the exact year, but it has been at least three years. It was the time that Seals was killed. The day he was killed we put a lock on the door and it has been like that every since.

McLaurin: What redevelopment has occurred in the Farish Street District?

White: If someone was suppose to be taking care of the redevelopment, don't do it on Farish Street because it won't be anyone here. You have noticed that there are no buildings on Capitol Street on up. The ones that are on Farish Street are run down. If someone doesn't come along with a redevelopment plan, it won't be Farish Street. I am getting old and no one else is going to want to come into this area and start a business.

When you come to Jackson you are constantly "main dragging", Farish Street use to be the main drag. Nothing is growing, every thing is at a standstill. If they put in something

White: it will probably be something that is going to be owned by the white man. It will be just like we have never been here. The funeral home and some of the other businesses might be here, but that's not representing Farish Street. I consider us as some of the little people. The little grocery stores, cafes, and what have you are going down and out. Unless someone comes in with a re-development program we are going out.

In the last eight years it has gone down to nothing, as folks say, but to me it is just about the same as it was when I came here. When I came there use to be a house there, now it is a burger house or a service station. All those things are gone and new things are coming in which are not going to give you the feeling of Farish Street.

If they are going to do something to restore Farish Street, they need to hurry up or there won't be anything to restore. If they come along and move buildings down and move things out, it won't help any to say it use to be Farish Street.

McLaurin: Do you remember the Crystal Palace?

White: No. It might have been here when I came. I have never been the kind of person who went a lot of places that were off limit to me when I was at home. It could have been there, but I just don't remember.

McLaurin: Where did the red light district extend to? Did you have to deal with that kind of approachment?

White: No. When you say red light district, do you mean the swing part of Farish Street? At one time they were trying to get signatures to keep the prostitute off of the church steps. They got them off the church steps and they came and sat on our window ledge. They didn't bother us.

It was bad to see somebody that could be doing something different out there doing that. The white man has used us all of our lives. That's what it was all about. They are still using us. The girls would be trying to get to the white man because, I guess, that is where the money was. They didn't bother with the black man. One of them said that they needed money just like we did. That was just the way they earned their living.

McLaurin: What about the "Y" across the Street?

White: The YMCA was there when I came. It was under good management when I came. There were a lot of young men and women

White: . inspired by attending the various activities. The "Y" has gotten to be a place no one wants to go because it has gone down so bad. During our time, when there was no other place to go, and the swimming pools were closed, the "Y" was jammed packed.

I would like it to be where any parent wouldn't mind for their children to go over there. Now it is not under good management, therefore, it makes a lot of people not want to attend who would otherwise attend. They are afraid to let their children come out. They would be drinking and smoking dope both on the outside and inside.