

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

An interview was held with Rev. Wendell P. Taylor at his home at 137 Hillcrest Street, Jackson, Mississippi on the morning of June 24, 1978. Mr. Taylor , a retired Methodist minister of Central Methodist Church is a man that is 63 years of age. Mr. Taylor is a man of vitality and general good health, who is at the time in the process of renovating a house that he had recently moved into.

In the interview we discussed Farish street as he saw it in 1963 upon becoming minister at the Central Methodist Church. At that time he saw it as a prosperous Black Business District. He further points out that in recent years there has been a general decline of businesses in the area. Then he proceeds to give his view as to why this decline has taken place.

The churches, organizations such as the YWCA and YMCA he feels have had a positive stabilizing effect on the Farish Street area. Yet, he sees no answer to the salvation of the area as a historical district.

At several points in the interview he recalls in a somewhat fond way places such as barber shops, the drugs stores and other places that were meeting places for the neighborhood men for "jam" sessions.

JACKSON STATE COLLEGE
Jackson, Mississippi

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, Ada S. Anderson, in view of the
(Interviewer, please print)
historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the
interview with Rev. Wendell P. Taylor, knowingly and
(Interviewee, please print)
voluntarily permit Jackson State College, Jackson the full use of this
information, and hereby grant and assign to Jackson State College,
Jackson all rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information,
whether or not such rights are now known, recognized or contemplated.

Ada S. Anderson
Interviewer (signature)

O. H. 78.22
Interview Number

6/25/78
Date

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, Wendell P. Taylor, 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.

Wendell P. Taylor
Interviewee (Signature)

June 24, 1978
Date

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Farish Street Community

Jackson, Mississippi 39217

INTERVIEWEE: Rev. Wendell P. Taylor
INTERVIEWER: Ada Anderson
DATE: June 24, 1978 (Date of Interview)
137 ~~Hillcrest~~ Street, Jackson, Mississippi. Rev. Taylor's
Home → POB 239 - Janglor, MS 39174
OH 78.22

Today is Saturday, June 24, 1978, this is Ada Anderson
in the home of Rev. Wendell Taylor, 137 Hillcrest Street,
Jackson, Mississippi.

- A: Rev. Taylor, are you originally from Jackson?
T: No, I am not.
A: Can you tell us where you are from?
T: ~~Well, really~~ I was born in Rankin County and I've lived in many places
in South Mississippi during my early childhood because my father was
a Methodist Minister.
A: What about your date of birth?
T: I was born January 15, 1915.
A: Do you have any brothers and sisters?
T: I have seven sisters and three brothers living.
A: Do you mind giving us their names please?
T: My oldest sister is Mrs. Helen Millsaps, the next one is Mrs. Virgie
Bartee, Mrs. Wessy Brown, Bishop Prince A. Taylor, Juanita, James,
Mortil Watts, Walter Taylor, Chriceley Taylor, Grace Taylor, and
Susie. I believe that's all.
A: Do you have any children?
T: Just one, Mrs. Delores Bird.
A: Have you lived in any ~~other~~ place other than Mississippi?
T: Yes. I lived in New York City and Mobile, Alabama.
A: What about your educational background, your early education?

Cover letter mailed with a copy of transcript on 9-3-82. The cover letter is
a standard one - ~~because of failure~~ Xerox machine is out of order
H. M. D. = Clinton
Remailed 9-17-82

TAYLOR, Wendell P.
June 24, 1978
OH 78.22

- T: My elementary education was in the public schools in Mississippi. I completed my high school work at Southern Christian Institute, at Mount Beluah College in Edwards, Mississippi, both my high school and junior college. I graduated from Columbia University. I've also studied at the Union Theological Seminary, Garrett Theological Seminary School of Theology and I did some special work out at College Meghodont Evangelist in California.
- A: Are you married?
- T: Yes, I am.
- A: May I ask you some of the things that you enjoy doing, some of your hobbies?
- T: ~~Well~~, one of the things I love to do, ~~I'm~~^{is} a builder. Primarily I do building. I'm an architectural drawer and I like sports. When I was in college, I ~~was~~^{played} a basketball ~~player~~, baseball ~~player~~, ~~played~~ tennis and ran track. I was fairly good in most of them.
- A: Do you belong to any church?
- T: I'm the Minister of the United Methodist Church. I have been a member of a Methodist Church mostly all of my life.
- A: What holiday do you usually celebrate most?
- T: ~~Well~~, I don't know if you would call it a celebration. I suppose Christmas and Easter are primarily the days of celebration, which are preimarily in my calendar of celebration. That means taking time out and giving speical significance tothose days. Now the other days are holidays, but as far as celebrations like Labor Day, Fourth of July, Memorial Day, I don't particularly take time out in celebration. I know that there are days that people do celebrate like Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving, not necessarily Thanksgiving Day, but Thanksgiving Sunday.
- A: Since you have been a Methodist Minister have you been engaged in any other kind of work other than the Ministry?
- T: Oh yes. I've taught in the public schools in Mississippi. I conducted a day care center in New York City for school children. I've taught at Rust College at Hollysprings, Mississippi, I've taught at Mobile

TAYLOR, Wendell P.

June 24, 1978

OH 78.22

- T: Alabama. At the time I taught, it was the Alabama State College Branch, and I also taught at the Jackson College Extension, work both at Meridian and Louisville, Mississippi.
- A: So you've done some extensive traveling?
- T: Oh yes, I've traveled quite a bit in the United States.
- A: Is there anything about any of those trips, or being in any of those states that especially stand out in your mind?
- T: Well, especially New York City because I was studying there. I was there for nearly five years and at the time I was in New York. It was most fascinating City. At that time I said one of the best places in the world to study was New York City because it had library facilities, educational institutions, advantages of seminars and other educational events which one could participate in and along with that was just the excitement of the great city.
- A: May I ask you now why did you decide to come to Jackson eventually?
- T: Well, I'm a minister of the United Methodist Church and I was assigned so I came here under the Christian assignment and it was an opportunity which I thought that could be developed. I came to a simple Methodist Church in 1963 from the Hattiesburg District. I had previously served as District Superintendent on the Hattiesburg District and I came to Jackson. Why I came back to Mississippi and to the South was because I had a feeling that even back in the 1940's that the South was going to be the area which there would be the greatest development and opportunity for Black people. I have a poem I wrote with reference to why I came back to the South.
- A: Do you care to share that with us?
- T: I don't remember it. It is somewhere in my files here if I can find it I would be very glad if I can find it. I don't remember the words

TAYLOR, Wendell P.
June 24, 1978
OH 78.22

T: to it. I wrote it in 1948 when I came back to Mississippi, during the time of the 1948 Presidential Election. At that time I lived in Harlem. That's when Black people were saying they would rather be a lamp-post in Harlem than a millionaire in Mississippi. I didn't have that feeling because I didn't see that much difference in Harlem and Mississippi in my point of view.

T: Well, Farish Street and Jackson itself was in complete turmoil because that was the imte of the Civil Rights upsurge in Mississippi. I came here one week before Medger Evers was assisinated, no two weeks before he was assisinated. So we were in Jackson in the midst of complete upheaval. Farish street was the main center of demonstrations, marches, it was quite a center of Black activities. A simple church was one of the main focus points of assembly. It has been through the years.

A: What about the businesses on Farish Street?

T: Well, on Farish Street there was some pretty thriving businesses. You had the Steven's kitchen which was the main place the Black folks who ate out would eat. It was because at that time you could not go to the Holiday Inn and the Morrision and other places where prices was a struggle. So, Steven's Kitchen was the outstanding eating place in Jackson at that time on Farish Street. Right next to that was another place of kinda of get together. Then you had just below that a common drug store and there was Mosley's Shoe Shop and there was Sander's Place and the Alamo Theatre. Further down the street there were other businesses. Especially, we had Dr. McCoy, we had several buildings on the low end of North Farish Street. Dr. C. B. Christian was a physician practicing on Farish Street. Dr. . .I don't recall his name now, he's another dentist on Farish Street. We had quite a number of, not big businesses but they were small black businesses. . .pool rooms, barber shops, the like and shoe stores and other businesses on Farish Street. which Blacks patronized. Farish Street was the place like most Metropolitan Centers wehre you had an outstanding hsitoric Black Street. Farish Street was the street for Blacks in Jackson at that time.

TAYLOR, Wendell P.
June 24, 1978
OH 78.22

- A: What about other professional type people like lawyers? Do you know of any lawyers who are on Farish Street?
- T: Oh yes. Jack Young, who was at the time one of the chief counselors for the NAACP during the Civil Rights Struggle, R. Jess Brown, you had Attorney Tahrpe, Carsie Hall, who is still there on Farish Street. Those are primarily the only Black lawyers in Jackson at that time. I might have missed somebody. As I recall those are the lawyers I remember.
- A: What are your recollections about the successes or failures of these businesses at that time?
- T: Well, at that time in 1963, I don't recall any of the businesses experiencing failure. It's been in recent months when you had, especially the development of malls and shopping centers that your Black businesses on Farish Street began to show signs of decline. Also the whole downtown area as well. Farish Street is suffering the same kind of problems Capitol Street is suffering. Primarily shopping centers and any kind of designating business, especially small businesses, most Black businesses are small.
- A: In your opinion, are there any other factors that could possibly be leading to this decline in businesses on Farish Street as you see it now?
- T: Well, the only other thing I could see, you have. . .in the 1960's you had a greater degree of protection as far as police protection is concerned. Farish Street has deteriorated quite a bit in recent years. Safety on the streets is also a problem. I don't offer the fact that many of the citizens who were the old norm citizens that moved out from Farish Street. You take the Collins Funeral Home, Mrs. Collins and Collins family lived there at 450 North Farish Street for years and years. There were persons like Duke Williams who lived on Church Street and out at Valley North and many of the people especially those who were not renters, old norm families have moved out into the suburban areas and therefore you have primarily in the Farish Street

TAYLOR, Wendell P
June 24, 1978
OH 78.22

T: Community renters and transits. That would be one of the reasons for its decline because people just didn't come back to Farish Street. At one time, you take Church Street was one of your main streets for your, what you might call middle class or better class Blacks in and around that area but those people moved out and most of those houses are being rented. That would be one of the reasons for the decline.

A: In your opinion, can you see where organizations, such as the YWCA, and probably the YMCA has had any affect upon that particular area?

T: Well, I would say very definitely the YMCA and YWCA has been quite beneficial to the community because it has provided recreational outlet for children and youth and also activities that provide creative expressions. One of the definite drawbacks might be that the YMCA and YWCA, you have to have a membership fee and many kids just can't afford the memebership fee. I know at one time our church has provided membership for YWCA and YMCA for kids.

A: What about the influences of a church in the general FARSih Street area?

T: Well, that's a fact aht has bothered me quite a bit. Having served as Minister on Farish Street for 15 years, I had a bit of concern. When I came to Jackson I inquired of one of the outstanding citizens about the people in that community and the reply was, "We don't serve those people," and that's the kind of thing that you have. The major churches on Farish Street, the members of the churches are not members of the community. They are kind of commuters. That is true of Farish Street Baptist Church and also true of Central United Methodist Church and Mt. Helm Baptist Church, which is on Church Street, which is our general community. The churches have attempted to minister to them. Our church was the first church to open the Head Start Program. It was kind of a center, I felt that it was our church that saved the program for the City. If it had not had a place for the headstart program to operate out of that met the health requirements, the program would have been lost to the City and we opened our Church for the headstart

TAYLOR, Wendell P.
June 24, 1978
OH 78.22

T: program within ourselves. The headstart was operating at our church for almost two months before the opening for our own Church services. We had the classroom and everything completed but our Sancturay was not completed.

Central Church has somewhat been set up for community activities. It knows all of the controversial protest movements and that's essential. The Middle Public of Africa had its Annual Convention at Central. The Welfare Rights had its National meeting held at Central. The Black Postal Workers Alliance held their meeting at Central. So, our church has been a center for activities and even now any group that is trying to do something for the Community betterment and want a place for assembly, Central Church is open, has been for the last 15 years and even prior to that. It was somewhat of a community center. Central has a unique history in that relationship because when I was in high school all of the high school basketball games were played on Central's Court, and there was a tennis court in back of Central. It operated the Bethlehem Center which is now on Blair Street. The Central Church was responsible for initiating that. So, to a certain extent, the church has and I can only speak for Central now, and I'm sure that Farish Street Baptist Church and Mt. Helm both now have facilities for carrying community programs or serving the community.

A: You mentioned that most of the membership of the church are not people from the Farish Street Community. Have you any idea why there isn't an association?

T: Well, I remember it comes out of a kind of tradition. You see, this originally was a kind of, what you call "silk stocking" area historically. I don't know if you know what silk stockings is. That was the kind of professional people churches to which they belonged and that kind of stuck with the church even though there was no valid reason for this. People got an idea and I'm not welcome to that church and they could go to community activities, but they would not feel free in the ser-

TAYLOR, Wendell P.
June 24, 1978
OH 78.22

T: vices and the Sunday Activities because they felt that they didn't have the clothes because the Central people, historically, were what you called the "good dressers." Every city has that kind of church and when you get stigmatized with that it's hard to break away from it even though you might serve a community. One of the things which I attempted to do during the 15 years I was there was to let it be known that our church was not that kind of church. We tried to project a different image but there was still those who failed. One of our most successful programs in the Church was the Thursday afternoon program with community children. Now, most of them would not come to our Church school, but they would come for the community Thursday evening activities which they had a play and also we operated a Tutorial Program under the auspices of our general commission, religion, race, and we hired students from Millsaps and Jackson State to serve at tutors.

A: Do you feel that has an affect upon the realtionships of the community and the church?

T: Very definitely because when you are int in direct proximity with people and living among them you don't have the kind of concerns for problems. You see you live at Valley North, you're not affected day by day and you live out North and come to church once or twice a week, you're only involved in Church activities, not necessarily communities activities unless you can get people in programs and you don't get a whole lots of people, you get only a few dedicated persons to get involved in that kind of situation. Therefore, because of that, the people who belong to the Church do not have a real geniune concern for the community nor do they have contact with community people. So, it would naturally have an affect. Now you may have a minister who is concerned, but he's not the people, he's a minister.

A: Have you any ideas as to what kind of affect prostitution might be having on Farish Street? I understand that that might be getting to be a problem in that area.

TAYLOR, Wendell P.
June 24, 1978
OH 78.22

T: Well, I don't know right now. I know at one time it was quite a problem and it was quite blatant and brazen on Farish Street. You could see the prostitutes especially on Friday evenings, you know, its pay day, hailing cars, stopping men to solicit, you could see that, especially round Hamilton and Farish. They moved up when the officers began to pinpoint that area, then they moved up on Church and Farish, near the Farish Street Baptist Church, which Rev. Johnson is Pastor of. The Farish Street Baptist Church really highlighted that on television and you don't see it as much, as graciously as you use to. Of course, I'm not on Farish Street as much as I use to be either because I'm retired and I haven't been down there as much. I use to be constantly on Farish Street when my office was on Farish Street and my church. So, I could see and I would know what was going on there and prostitution was a problem on Farish Street, in that area.

A: What about Urban Renewal, have you any idea- how rapidly Urban Renewal is taking place in the downtown Jackson area?

T: Very, very slowly, the only evidence you can see of any real Urban Renewal is that which has lead to the Federal Building that will be built down on Farish Street. You see very little. There are plans on the drawing board for this whole area to be developed for a certain type of housing. There is also pleas by businesses on Farish Street for a kind of rejuvenation of Black businesses, but I don't know whether that will ever take place. Thus, there have been several businesses to move out from Farish Street because they felt there was no future for them.

A: In your opinion, if Urban Renewal was to reach Farish Street, what kind of affect do you think it would have on the Farish Street area?

T: Well, I don't know. I can summerize by what has taken place in areas like St.Louis and other areas I know. It has displaced Black people and it has not really benefited. Generally, people with money have always benefitted from Urban Renewal rather than the folk who live in

TAYLOR, Wendell P.
June 24, 1978
OH 78.22

- T: the community. Most times they're displaced and they never return. I think that's going to happen to Farish Street unless there is a different type of Renewal other than what's been going on in other cities. Now it is stated that the proposed plan for Jackson is not one to remove people but to upgrade the dwelling units there. Many times in upgrading the dwelling units, that makes it impossible for people with low income to come back and even rent them. Past experience, and like I say, I've seen Urban Renewal, it has been what is a classical Black time. It's been what they call Black removal. (Laughter)
- A: Do you have any suggestions or any opinions as to how Farish Street could probably be maintained as an historical Black area as it has been in the past?
- T: Well, I really don't. I have no ideas as to what could be done. You have the Smith Robertson Elementary School which is in that area. It's not on Farish Street, it's on Bloom Street (the next street from Farish) and it is completely deteriorated. There are those who contend that it be maintained. You have the Carver Library which is on Mill Street and is now the senior citizen's center that may be maintained. There is the old Crystal Palace Building which is where the Harmon's Drugstore is. The Crystal Palace use to be one of the entertainment centers of Farish Street. Now whether it can be maintained or not in the historical sight. . . then the other historic centers would be the churches. All of the lower North Farish Street has been completely demolished, you see, and the Urban Renewal area is there. So, I don't know as far as Farish Street is concerned how much can be maintained to preserve its historical setting other than you have Central Church on Farish Street and you have Farish Street Baptist Church on Farish Street, you have the YWCA on Farish Street, which is historic, and you have the YMCA on Farish Street. There's the old house right across from the YMCA, where the old YMCA use to be, an old two-story building that might could be maintained as historic. People's Funeral Home is still on Farish

TAYLOR, Wendell P.
June 24, 1978
OH 78.22

T: Street. Other buildings, establishments that may persist I don't know at what changes, how much erosion will come because of time, inflation, but that's about all I know of because the rest of it is just about gone. On Farish Street particularly now when you talk about Farish Street you're talking about the whole area?

A: Yes.

T: Yes, and you see most of the area is a series of rent homes now. You have Mt. Helm Church which is on Church Street, it moved from its original site to where it is now. It's one of the historic I think possibly the oldest church in that area.

A: If the Farish Street Community isn't preserved as a Historical Black Center, in your opinion would that have any affect upon the cohesiveness of the Black Jackson Community as a whole?

T: Well, I don't know that would depend upon other factors, it depends upon what happened down in that particular area, now as to whether you've had a particual cohesiveness of let us say Farish Street, I think Farish Street probably was historically up until to recent years a kind of a center but Jackson has developed many centers now you see, just like other cities. Therefore, you can't look for Farish Street to be the center for Black Unity or Black cohesiveness, you might have it as a small part of the community, but not as a whole in Jackson because you have the Lynch Street area which is developed, you got other suburban areas that have developed now. You got a kind of dispersion of Blacks in areas of the City. You see, historically they were Black areas because they had to. You understand what I mean because you didn't have other facilities for you. You have several redevelopments taking place in Jackson, what has taken place in every city.