

O. H. 78, 15

JACKSON STATE COLLEGE  
Jackson, Mississippi

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, London Moffett, Jr., in view of the  
(Interviewer, please print)

historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the  
interview with A. R. E. Miller, 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.

London Moffett, Jr.  
Interviewer (signature)

2  
Interview Number

June 1978  
Date

## SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEW

On June 21, 1978 around 5:00 P. M. my wife and I arrived at the home of Dr. W. E. Miller at 2011 Robinson Street, Jackson, Mississippi. The interview lasted one and 1/2 hours.

While talking with Dr. Miller one could see that he is a christian and an active church worker and seems to enjoy helping people. He attended Smith Robinson School from 1908-1915.

To listen to the interviewee relate facts of his immediate family was stimulating and a great inspiration to the interview. For, all through life facts of only famous Anglo-Saxons, French, German and a few Black people had been read about. The family lineage of black people had become an important issue in todays society therefore, this paper is attempting to document one of the successful students of the early Smith Robinson School.

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY STUDY OFF

STUDENTS AT SMITH ROBINSON SCHOOL

Subject: Dr. W. E. Miller

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE INTERVIEW

Dr. W. E. Miller of 2011 Robinson Street, was born in Jackson, Mississippi in ~~1903 on the thirty-first day of~~ <sup>August 31, 1903</sup> August. He is 75 years old, is married and the father of three children. Dr. Miller is the second child of Dr. S. E. Miller and Dr. Lucile F. Miller. He had one brother <sup>sister</sup> ~~who was one and one half years older than he.~~ <sup>and no</sup> There were ~~no sisters in the family.~~ His early education was at Smith Robinson School.

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: Dr. W. E. Miller  
INTERVIEWER: Mr. London Moffett, Jr.  
SUBJ: Students at Smith Roberston School  
DATE: June 21, 1978

M: State your name, please

W.M: William E. Miller

M: What is your address?

W.M: 2011 Robinson Street, Jackson, Mississippi 39209.

M: What is your religion?

W.M: The Episcopal Faith.

M: Place of birth?

W.M: Jackson, Mississippi.

M: ~~About what age are you?~~ *How old are you?*

W.M: I am 75 years old.

M: What was your occupation?

W.M: Physician and ~~Surgeon~~ *Surgeon.*

M: Tell me a little about your family.

W.M: I am the second child of the late Dr. F.A. Miller and Dr. Lucille Miller.

I had one brother who was a year and a half older than I was who is a  
dentist. There were no girls in the family. I was born in Jackson in  
1903. My early education was at the Smith Roberston School located on  
Bloom Street in Jackson, Mississippi. ~~That school~~ *It* was the only ~~Black~~ *by*  
school in the City of Jackson. I finished there in the eight grade in  
~~the year of 1915~~ from there I went to school in Birmingham, Alabama,  
Central Alabama School. It was affiliated with the Methodist Church.  
~~From there I went to Fisk, I~~ *and* finished there in 1923.

M: While you were attending Smith Roberston School was there anything  
you didn't like about the school?

W.M: ~~Smith Roberston~~ *It* School was no better or no worse than any other school.  
As long as there is school, there is going to be something you don't like.

MILLER, Dr.  
June 21, 1978

W.M: Fighting, for instance, there were some bullies that would fight you and I didn't like that. If you had a larger boy that would take up for you, it wouldn't be any problem.

M: The fighting that went on <sup>lead it</sup> were they in gang fights or individual? *fight?*

W.M: More or less individuals. Some would use knives, stick rocks, *etc.*

M: What were their main weapons?

W.M: Their fists. It all depended on what part of town they were from. Some parts of Jackson were worse than others.

M: If you came from a certain part of town you would more than likely not get involved in a fight?

W.M: That is true. That part is called the Jungle.

M: The Jungle?

W.M: The Jungle was that part in between Hamilton on the south, Mill Street on the west, and Farish Street on the east.

M: That was called the Jungle?

W.M: Yes.

M: Do you know about the Red Lage?

W.M: I do not know anything about them, do you?

M: I just heard somebody talking about them. What did you most like about school?

W.M: ~~Most of all~~ I just liked school. You could listen to the teacher and socialize together. There was a <sup>class</sup> progress of learning going on whether you were in a English class, geography class or whether it was a literature class.

M: ~~About~~ how many students were there in each classroom?

W.M: ~~I would think there would probably be~~ about forty in each room. Each grade would have several sections. There would be about three or four groups in <sup>each</sup> ~~each room~~; probably about sixteen or seventeen <sup>students</sup> in each room. Smith Roberston was a large place. The school took in all of Jackson, Washington Addition, Doduleville, North Jackson and West Jackson. It was the only <sup>B</sup> Black school in town. There were no other school.

M: In what way do you think Smith Roberston helped you?

MILLER, Dr.  
June 21, 1978

W.M: Well, in numerous ways. We learned how to read. I learned to read at home, I knew the alphabets and I could stumble on a few words when I got there. Those things helped me. There were some children in Chicago that could not read. They couldn't even pass over to the next grade. I think the reading program helped some.

M: What kind of people lived in and around the Smith Roberston School?

W.M: ~~There were~~ all types of people living there, There were laborers, professionals, teachers, and almost every kind of person.

M: Did you live within that community?

W.M: No, I lived several blocks from there. I had some friends who lived in that community. Professor Lanier lived in that community. One of the first things that he did was to buy a house right across the street from Smith Roberston and that house still stand today. One block north of Bloom and Church Street you could find some of the first families of Jackson living in that area.

M: You mean the first families of Jackson?

W.M: Yes, the first families to live here and some of the richest families of power an political standing .

M: How far did this community extend, in other words, did they come from all over Jackson.

W.M: They came from as far north as Assylum Height, and as far south as Doudle-Ville and as far east as Silas Brown and as far west as Gowdy. You know where Gowdy is?

M: Yes.

W.M: As far west as Taylor's Additon. That was the only Black school to go to. I know the Keys that live out there in Assylum Heights. They walk to school every day from as far as from the University Medical Center and the Washington Additon. They walked from all parts of town because it was the only Black school. They built Jim Hill about 1910 or 1911 on Lynch Street next to the Masonic Temple.

M: Was that the first Jim Hill School?

W.M: Yes, ~~that was the first Jim Hill School.~~ It went as far as the fourth grade.

M: In and around Smith Roberston were there any businesses or was it all

MILLER, Dr.  
June 21, 1978

M: residential?

W.M: Largely residential. There were a few business on Farish Street. There were no businesses on Bloom Street. At the corner of Bloom and Hamilton Street there was a Prostitution house. It was run by a woman named Luogan(?) They would have a parrot in a cage out on the porch. It was a prostitution house for Colored women and white men. That was the only kind of house of prositution that could operate except on Oakley Street all the way to Mill Street. Every house in that block was built as a house for prositution. It stayed open until the Federal Government made them close up. ~~It was for White women and whitemen.~~ It was off limit for all Black men and mostly all Black women too. ~~Later on~~ in 1917 there was a Army camp opened here. Farish Street was all residential. On North Farish and on South Farish there were a few businesses. There were only a few businesses in Jackson anywhere during that time.

M: During that time can you remember one business along in there?

W.M: In the 100 block of Farish Street I can remember all of it. It was about the year 1910 or 1911 or 1912 they had a Negro Bank, a Negro Bakery, one or two restaurants, and two Drug Stores. This is on Farish Street, blocks away from Smith Roberston School. This is in the 100 block of Farish Street from Capital to Amite Street. There was pressing club, two barber shops, tailoring shops, about four or five lawyers, one picture show, and about a half dozen doctors and dentists. That was about it.

M: Can you think of the name of the show?

W.M: The Alamo Theatre.

M: Was the Alamo Theatre on Farish Street?

W.M: Yes, ~~the Alamo Theatre was on Farish Street.~~ At one time they attempted to open it up on Capital Street, but they would not let them. The White people didn't like the for the Negroes to be seen down there. The owner of the Alamo was White.

M: Who was the principal when you were attending Smith Roberston School?

W.M: When I first went there in 1908 or 1909 the principal of the School was Professor Martin. He went on to be elected president of Alcorn.

MILLER, Dr.  
June 21, 1978

5

- W.M: Professor Lanier was principal of Smith Robertson until I finished. Professor Martin came back to Jackson and was in poor health until he died. His youngest son and I were close friends and classmates. We are still friends, he is Richard Martin. He is the manufacturer of hair preparation and hair good, a new dye company of Jersey City, New Jersey.
- M: Mr. Miller, I have enjoyed the conversation with you. Would you care if I use this tape for our experiment, with your permission, at Jackson State?
- W.M: Not at all. Mr. Moffett, you have my permission to use it any way that you feel that would benefit your association in education.
- M: Thank you very much. I certainly everything. Is there anything else you would like to say.
- W.M: No, nothing but it has been a pleasure to talk with you about the old days. It brings back part of history of Jackson that is almost forgotten. Let's say it like this everytime you talk about Jackson there was only two paved street, Capital and Amite Street. None of the areas around Smith Roberston was anything but mud and more mud. There were a number of other settlements that may be around that I discuss in those days. They had the street car and buggies. The street cars didn't go anywhere that the Negroes wanted them to go. The street cars went into the white neighborhoods. You couldn't come from Farish Street out from your house on a street car. If you wanted to come, the closest you could get was Robinson and Hughes. If you wanted to go to Jackson College the closest they would come was up Robinson Street and Capital Street. They didn't serve the Black community. In fact, they weren't made for Blacks to ride on. Some of the people who I told you about that lived out in \_\_\_\_\_ and so forth they could ride the street cars. The street cars were put there largely for the white people who lived out in Belhaven neighborhood and out on North State Street. Incidentally if Blacks lived out in the country beyond that point, well, they could take advantage of the street cars. They weren't put there for them, but they could take advantage of them. With that I will just sign off here.
- M: Thank you very much for this interview and I really appreciate it.



## Dr. W. E. Miller

Address p-3  
 Place of birth p-3  
 Age -p-3  
 Occupation p-3  
 Family life p-3  
 Education p-3  
 Weapons used at school p-4  
 Where he lived in the  
 community -p-6  
 Assylum Hights p-6  
 The First families p6  
 Businesses on Farish  
 Street p-77

## Index:

The Jungle p-4  
 The Red Lagee p5  
 Likes and dislikes p-5  
 Rooms in the school p-5  
 Where the children came  
 from p-5  
 What he learned p-5  
 Dodule-Villee p-5  
 Taylor's Addition p-6  
 When other schools were  
 built p-6  
 Bloom St. p-7  
 Oakley Street p-7