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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

You have been asked for information to be used in connection with historic African-American buildings in Mississippi. The purpose of this program is to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use.

The interviewer has made a tape recording of your interview. If Jackson State opts to transcribe your interview, you will have the option of reviewing that transcription. Do you want this option? —

The final retyped and edited transcript, together with the tape of the interview will be placed in the Oral History Collection at Jackson State University and the city of Jackson.

I, Robert H. Clark, have read the above, and in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, in return for a final typed copy of the transcript, I knowingly and voluntarily permit Jackson State University and the city of Jackson, Mississippi, the full use of this information. I hereby grant and assign all of 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 and the city of Jackson, Mississippi.

Robert H. Clark
Interviewee's Signature
Alfred Harrison
Interviewer's Signature

Date Agreement signed

11/15/04

Oral History number assigned

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INTERVIEWEE: Robert Clark
INTERVIEWER: Alferdteen Harrison
DATE OF INTERVIEW: May 20, 1983
O.H. 83.08

Harrison: Today is May 20, 1983. We are doing the seventh of a series of interviews with Robert Clark. Today I want to start out by having you go back and talk about some things we mentioned in the previous interviews. You mentioned that you were having some type of problem in the House.

Clark: There were threats made about me being put out of the House. This happen all through my campaign. So we contacted the police and the FBI, but they said that they couldn't do anything. So we called up a few folks and they came down to the polls during election, but nothing happen that night. The white folks just sat on the porch, but they didn't bother anything.

There were about 80 to 100 blacks out front. A lawyer from up north came up and told the blacks that he was there to observe the election. The blacks told him that he couldn't come in and he began reciting the law, that is when they knocked him down. A white fellow came out and started whipping this fellow. I heard a gun shot so I jumped up and asked them not to shot.

After this incident they called the sheriff. The sheriff came and tried to make all the blacks leave. I told the sheriff that the blacks were not going anywhere. The sheriff then placed all the blacks under arrest. The blacks jumped on the car and stated that if they had to leave, they would all leave together. There was a discussion and the sheriff agreed to let the blacks leave on their own and that about ten of them could stay behind.

My opponent, Mr. J. P. Love challenged that some of the persons that signed my petition couldn't have signed it because they couldn't write. He stated that they had had been hands on his place. He also challenged that I was not a citizen of Holmes County. After we moved to the Federal building, he didn't attempt to take my seat. I had heard he had said that if took the seat that John Jenkins would not appoint me to any committees.

Clark: As I stated earlier, that wasn't the case because I got choice committee assignments.

When I first came to the House, I couldn't go to the bathroom without a pass because there had been threats made on my life. Those particular individuals are still in politics today. Edgar Lloyd, whom I thought was a loyal supporter of me was thrown out of the Capitol that day because he was trying to do bodily harm to me. It was hell for black politician in Mississippi in 1967. It is a lot different from what it is today. I have no fear of traveling in any part of Mississippi and participating in political activities today. In earlier years when we went to political events, we had to have guards protecting the building. We never can repay persons like Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hammer, Aaron Henry, and Harmond Turner for their contribution.

Harrison: Who was Harmond Trumon?

Clark: He was one of the earlier civil rights leaders from Holmes County.

Harrison: How did he earn his living?

Clark: Farming.

Harrison: How old is he?

Clark: About 74 or 75 years old. He would be a good person to talk to about the movement in the 1950's and 60's up to the present day in Holmes County.

The black political power in Mississippi can never be what it ought to be until we learn how to work together.

Harrison: Did you have a campaign manager for your first campaign?

Clark: No. There was just certain things that I felt that I had to do myself. I didn't have an overall campaign manager, but I did have persons handling certain areas of the county. I went into this town one Saturday and found out that there were lots of people who wanted my campaign literature. In earlier years these people would have been afraid to get my literature. I just didn't have the funds to print that kind of literature. So I told those people in that town. They said that they would vote on the issue in Executive Board meeting on the 3rd Sunday. I really didn't want to wait that long so I got together some people and we started raffling off items. Before you knew it, we had raised the money.

- Clark: I took my campaign directly into the black community. My philosophy is, "If you believe in me, then vote for me." I was able to cross the racial lines and get some of the poorest whites votes. I was able to get their votes because they were able to identify with me as a minority because in fact they were a minority.
- Harrison: In 1968 after you were elected, there were some discussion about the project you were doing in Greenville. I think it was relative to the Mt. Beulah Project.
- Clark: The Mt. Beulah project as far as I know, was a part of the Delta Ministry with the national churches. It operated in the Southern Christian Institute. It is a sister college to Tougaloo College. It was later combined with Tougaloo College.
- Hubert Humphrey came in and made a statement to Aaron Henry that he had better take this or he wasn't going to get anything at all. After he left we tried to get in touch with Jack Young, Sr. , Fannie Hammer and Charles Evers, but we couldn't reach any of them. . . .
- Harrison: Can you tell me what family life meant from a dating basis?
- Clark: I was away from home a great deal. It took a special type of person to put up with the type of life I lived. It was very tough for me financially, trying to run a business and my wife working at several different agencies as a bookkeeper. We just had a tough time finding someone to run the business. We just decided that my wife would become totally responsible for the business.
- Harrison: How did you all manage having two children and a business?
- Clark: It was difficult, but we had to. I saw after the children a great deal also. She was also able to take the children to work with her.
- Harrison: What was her attitude toward child rearing?
- Clark: When they were small they went to a babysitter. When one got old enough they went to headstart. The other one was participating in an educational program in Lexington.
- Harrison: What was the most important thing you wanted your children to understand when they were small?
- Clark: I didn't want them to look at life fictitiously. We also wanted them to become business person.

Harrison: Earlier you had said that you wanted six children. How many children do your wife want?

Clark: Two or three. You must understand that I was quite young when I said that I wanted six children. I have two children now.

Harrison: You mentioned that you take your children hunting.

Clark: I started taking them with me at a very early age. I would take them out sometimes in the morning and it would be three or four hours before we got back.

Harrison: When your children were small, what were some of the things you looked forward to doing with them?

Clark: The happiest moment for us is when Robby took his first steps.

Harrison: How old was he then?

Clark: 9½ months old. He started walking at a early age. Our other son didn't start that early.

Harrison: I would like to talk about your wife's illness.

Clark: During that time we were having financial difficulties. I went into a furniture business with a group known as the Fine Furniture Enterprise. I was given a raw deal by the Small Business Administration. They coaxed me into signing a contract, that I shouldn't have signed. I was supposed to put up some up-front money that I wasn't aware of. We just couldn't compete in a small town like Lexington because we had to get our supplies from Tupelo. Eventually, the business went down the drain. Now I am left with a bill that I am still paying on. Probably my boys will still be paying on it after I am gone.

My wife's father got ill so we had to spend a lot of time in the hospital with him. This took my wife away from home and the business a great deal. After her father passed, she became ill. She had an operation for gall-stone. She never really got over that operation. She took sick again and had to go back to the hospital again. She stayed in the hospital from August of 1977 through October 1977 on and off. After getting out of the hospital, I brought her

Clark: to St. Dominic's hospital in Jackson. She stayed in there 17 days. On New Year's Day, 1978 the doctors told us that my wife had malignant of the liver and that she had about six months to live.

My children were attending the pre-school and Jackson State during the time my wife was in the hospital. I had this guy looking after my farm. One day he walked off. He said that we had been good to him, but that he was just leaving. I was staying on Lake Forest Circle at this time. When this fellow left, I had a 100 head of cattle, dogs, hofs, and chickens to be seen after. We had closed the store and opened it only when I was going to be there. I would have to drive to Holmes County at 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. to see after the store, come back in time to get the boys dressed for school, go to the hospital, and then picked the boys up in the afternoon and bring them to the hospital. This was a really busy time for me. My wife died on September 20, 1978.

Harrison: How would you like history to record her contributions to your life?

Clark: We were inseparable. It would have been impossible for me to do the things I did or come through the hardships that I came through without her.

When I started in politics I was making \$3,000 a year. We had no other income that we could depend on. A lot of time when I would go to meetings, people would ask were my wife was. She wasn't there because we couldn't afford to buy a pair of pantyhose or a decent pair of shoes. It took a remarkable person to put up with things like that.

Harrison: When were you were?

Clark: We got married January 3rd or 5th, 1971.

Harrison: So, you have been together quite a number of years. How many were was it?

Clark: Well, it wasn't too long because she passed in 1978.

Harrison: There was also another woman in your life and that is Dr. Malary.

Clark: Yes, Dr. Regency Malary. I worked with her in 1966. She was working with President Johnson's cabinet. She offered me a full-time job working with St. Junior College. I think that was the turning point in my life. I had previously decided to go back home so being offered this job gave me the opportunity to do so.

Harrison: Was she supportive of your political endeavors?

Clark: She was the type of individual you had to prove yourself to. She wouldn't allow you to do a poor job. She would stay on you until you could do it right.

Harrison: Did she agree that you go into politic?

Clark: Oh sure. She was the first black member of the school board. She was very supportive of me. Sometimes we would work on a project all night. She was just very supportive.

Harrison: We will bring to close this interview for today.

END OF INTERVIEW