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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 Thompson
Interviewer's Signature

Date Agreement signed

11/15/04

Oral History number assigned

83.02(1-13-83); 83.03(1-24-83);
83.04(4-26-83); 83.05(4-29-83);
83.06(5-16-83); 83.07(5-17-83);
83.08(5-20-83); 83.09(5-23-83)

INTERVIEWEE: Robert Clark
INTERVIEWER: Alferdteen Harrison
DATE: April 29, 1983
O.H. 83.05

Harrison: Today is April 29, 1983. This is the fourth interview in a series with Robert Clark.

Clark: I graduated from high school and I expected to go to college. I didn't have any idea that I was coming back to Mississippi. My aunt had stop teaching school in 1944 because my grandmother had had a stroke. She asked me if I would come back home and carry on the family tradition. I was suprised she asked me because they knew how I felt about farming. But I gave her my promise that I would come back.

I had gone to Memphis to stay with my uncle and brother to make some money for the summer. I wanted to become a lawyer. I had no counseling or advice on what I should do to become a lawyer. I wrote a letter to Tougaloo and in their response they said that I would be a work-aid student and that it would take me eight years to graduate. So with that in mind, that eliminated Tougaloo. So I applied to Lormon College in Memphis. It was a sister college to Tougaloo. I was accepted at Lormon College, but I didn't want to be in that kind of an environment. So, I didn't go to Lormon.

When I came back home, my uncle who graduated from Alcorn was the principal. He got me a scholarship to go to the Vocational Agriculture program at Alcorn. I didn't really want to go to Alcorn because I thought it would mean teaching boys to make single trees and hammer handles. Today I know that a Vocational Agriculture school means more than that. My father who was attending Jackson State at the time wanted me to come there. My aunt who graduated from Rust College wanted me to attend Rust. They carried me down to the bus station in Picken and left me there. If the first bus had being going north, I would have gone to Rust College. Just so happen that the first bus that came was going south. So, I came to Jackson.

My father had told me where to get off the bus. And then catch the number 6 bus to Jackson State. The fare was 10¢. So I came on to Jackson State. After paying the fare, I didn't have any more money. When I got ready to enroll, they told me that I needed some money. I told them that I wanted to work my way through school. But they explained if I didn't have and money that I needed to go home. I told them that I didn't

Clark: have any money nor did we have a phone. They told me then to call a neighbor, but I explained that not any of our neighbors had phones either. They told me that they would put me up for the night, but that tomorrow I would have to leave campus. I got up early that next morning and got a newspaper and I went to the registrar office as soon as it opened. When the person got there, they told me that they were going to get rid of me. They said that they were going to take me to President Reddix's office. When we got to President Reddix's office, he asked me what was the problem. I told him that I didn't have a problem, I just wanted to go to school. President Reddix told me that they were going to give me a chance. He told the registrar to enroll me in school. The policy about work at that time was that you could only make half of your room and board which was \$26.00 per month. They put me on regular work schedule like the other students then on weekends I worked for .25¢ per hour. After I worked, Mr. Peters, and Mr. McDowell would check my time to see if I made enough additional money to pay my way.

In filling out the application, I put that I wanted to become a lawyer. Mrs. Waters, the Dean of Students, read my application and called me into her office the next day. She said, "Are you Robert G. Clark from Pickens, Mississippi? I see here where you want to become a lawyer." I told her that I did want to become a lawyer. She told me that Jackson State was strictly for training rural Negroes in becoming a teacher. She told me that they were not going to let me use that profession as a stepping stone in becoming a lawyer. She told me that I had until Monday morning to change my mind or pack my bags and get off campus. I had prepared myself to leave, but when I went back to her office she wasn't there, so I just went on to my class.

Jackson State didn't have a gym at that time so we had to play basketball beside the shop building and Johnson Hall. During the spring I went out for track. Joe L. King was the manager for the track team. I came out to the track field wearing my high school jacket. They tried to make me pull it off, but I wouldn't. They called me a bigot freshman. This incident caused them not to like me. I really didn't know too much about track. The only exposure I had with track events was at field day back in high school. The coach came up to me and asked me what did I run. I told him that I ran track. He said, "Nigger I asked you what

Clark: do you run?" I told him again that I run track. I really didn't want him to know I was that ignorant about track. The coach just made me run in every event. I won all the events except the 100 yard dash. The coach knew immediately that he had a track star. I participated during my freshman year. Some of the upper classment were jealous of me. They said that I wouldn't make it against the guys from Alcorn. That particular day, I participated in seven events. I won all except one. That was when I lost to a past champion of three years.

My second year, I received a track scholarship. This meant that I had to work during the time I wasn't running track or playing basketball. I would work during the morning and practice basketball in the evening. I got so exhausted that I had to go to the hospital before the first game during my sophomore year. The coach gave me some dirty clothes to play in. I gave the suit back to him and quit the team.

Harrison: Did you have to quit?

Clark: No, I quit because of the favoritism he showed to other players.

Harrison: Couldn't you have washed it yourself?

Clark: It was time for the game. I had just gotten out of the hospital and it was time for the game to start.

I didn't run track my senior year. I wasn't interested in playing anymore since I couldn't major in pre-law. I didn't want to be a teacher. I had changed my major to Health and Physical Education. I thought it would be an avenue so I could meet new people. They had just set up a program where we had to pass a comprehensive examination.

Harrison: Was this only for Health and Physical Education majors?

Clark: Yes. It was only four of us in the program. When it came time for us to do student teaching, only one of the four of us had made the qualifications for graduation. That person was me. The others had either not passed the senior comprehensive or didn't have the grade point average. They went and talked to Dean H. T. Sampson. So he came back and informed me that this program was designed for five years and that I couldn't graduate until the summer because they didn't want to make special arrangements just for one student. When I realized that I couldn't graduate due to no fault of my own, I dropped out of school my senior year in the Spring of 1950. I came back to summer school I took enough courses to graduate.

Harrison: What additional courses did you take?

Clark: I only took the courses necessary to graduate.

I was nominated for editor of the Blue & White Flash during my junior year. I withdrew my name because of the time it would have taken. I was captain of the track team for three years. Also I was president of the J-Club for two years. I didn't join any fraternities because I didn't believe in working in a group.

During my sophomore year, I had a literature class under Mrs. Blackburn. That first quarter I had Mrs. Blackburn and the second quarter I had this very rude teacher. She would walk in class and throw her hat on the table and say that she was mad. It was this one guy in class that never did anything, but the teacher favored him over the rest of the class. At the end of that quarter everyone except three students left her class and went to Mrs. Blackburn's class. Mrs. Blackburn ask some of us to go to another class, but we wanted to stay in her class. Dean Sampson came and informed us that we had to go back to the other teacher's class.

Harrison: What teacher are you talking about?

Clark: Mrs. X

Harrison: You are not going to give her name?

Clark: No. She came in one morning and pulled off her hat and threw it on the table and said that she was mad. I asked her to give me my class card, the card they called roll by. She asked me what was I going to do with it. I told her that I was going to take it to Dean Sampson and drop this class. I took the card to Dean Sampson and asked to drop the class. Dean Sampson told me that I either had to back to her class or leave school. So, I called Rust College and made arrangements to go there. I went back to Dean Sampson and he pleaded with me to stay and graduate.

Harrison: What was so wrong with Mrs. X.

Clark: She was hell. I encountered other problems before graduating. During the summer months I would stay and work on campus. I would also help a lot of in-service teachers with their work. A lot of those

Clark: in-service teachers would take me to lunch and carry me to the movies. It so happen that this instructor was interested in this in-service teacher. He thought I was interested in her. God knows that I wasn't. The only thing I did was helped her with her lesson. This instructor saw me with her one day and he told me that if I didn't stop hanging around her that I was going to fail every science course I took. When I got ready to do my senior project in science, every subject I selected, he would accept it. He told me to either make a motor or a radio. If I made a motor, it would have to run or if I made a radio, it would have to play. Everytime I would go down there for him to help me on the motor, he wasn't there. So the next morning he would scold me saying he was there.

So, after taking the final exam, Mr. X sent for me. He told me, "Clark, you are going to fail this course because you don't have any batteries for this motor. There were plenty of batteries in the school. It was time for school to close and he told me that he wasn't going to wait. Mrs. Gladys Hardy overheard what he said for me to take her key to get back in the building after I had purchased a battery for my motor.

Harrison: What class did she teach?

Clark: Biology. I went to graduate school at another university. I realized that Jackson State had done an excellent job in teaching me the basic. The only difference between Jackson State and the other school is that I had more information.

My track coach, Mr. Morris, is the uncle of Atty. Jack Young and the brother of Mrs. Rita Young.

Harrison: What is his first name?

Clark: E. P. Norris. He was the track coach during my junior year.

Mr. Jones, a graduate of Jackson State was a missionary in Africa. At one time I had aspired to become a missionary. Mr. Jones told us that Bilbo wasn't a racist and that we didn't understand politics. He also said that Bilbo had black children.

Harrison: What experiences did you have in the community while attending Jackson State.

Clark: My only experience was during my junior year when I was taking sociology. We had to do a community project. My project dealt with coaching at Jim Hill.

Harrison: How much family support did you get while attending Jackson State?

Clark: I didn't worry my people about money. My father's salary was \$90.00 a month while he was in Holmes County, but when he came to Madison his salary was \$120.00 a month. I didn't really trouble my family about money because I knew they had other obligations.

When I was in school I had to hustle for the money I made. Today they have BEOG's, etc. I am not against it, but I think students would get more results if they worked for it than somebody giving them the money. Because when they get out in the world, they are going to have to compete.

Harrison: Did your family expect you to go to college?

Clark: I had to go or run away from home.

Harrison: How many of your high school classmates went to college?

Clark: Out of twenty-four, two went to Tougaloo, Bobby Till and Mr. Durant, one girl went to Tuskegee, Alice Sullivan and I went to Jackson State.

Harrison: Who was the young lady.

Clark: Alice Sullivan was the principal's daughter. Going to college wasn't a prevalent thing. People thought if you went to college that you weren't going to plow or whatever because you would think you were too much.

People would ask me how much it cost to go to school. I would tell them \$315.00. They would respond by saying that I could be home plowing rather than spend that much money on me.

Harrison: Did you go home in the summer?

Clark: Sometimes I would go home and other times I would stay and work. During my last year in school I worked at Primose. One year I worked in a factory making boxes to ship ammunition over seas. There was this very dark guy working there that was suppose to break in all the new guys. Every peice of lumber I would throw him, he would say that it wasn't the right peice. I worked :

- Clark: there for two days and quit. That is when I started working at Primose. I was working as a pot washer. Sometimes I would work as the chef, waiter or whatever they wanted me to do. Upon graduation Mr. Primose offered me a job.
- Harrison: Doning what?
- Clark: He wanted me eventually to become head of food operations. I thanked him for the job, but I told him that being in the kitchen wasn't my calling.
- Harrison: What was his response?
- Clark: He said that he would give me some time to think it over.
- Harrison: What was the attitude of the church when you went to college?
- Clark: Everyone expected that my family would go to college. Being educated at that time was being looked upon as being anti-church. It was just expected, if you were a Clark, you were going to college.
- Harrison: Were there other families that had the same kind of attitude?
- Clark: Not in that community.
- Harrison: You mentioned that you had aspirations of becoming a missionary in Africa.
- Clark: That's right. I didn't know that I could have gone to Howard University with my degree, I thought I had to have a pre-law degree. I just wanted to do something, so I thought about going to Africa as a missionary.
- Harrison: Were you going to any particular church at the time?
- Clark: No.
- Harrison: What impression did you think people had about what you were capable of doing while you were at Jackson State?
- Clark: I told you that I graduated in 1953, but not with my class. Mr. Marshall offered me a job at Jim Hill. So, evidently someone thought well of me. That was a lucrative job at that time. When I was working at McDalton, I was making \$1,285.00 a year. Mr. Marshall offered me \$2,400.00 but I didn't

Clark: accept it.

Harrison: I think you have just about summarized your experiences at Jackson State. Out of all of those experiences, which one is the most memorable?

Clark: I can't say at this time. But if I just had to chose one, I would think it was when I couldn't get in school and President Reddix told them to let me in school, that they were going to give me a chance.

Harrison: I guess that will round it odd for today. Thank you very much for the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW