

"Jackson State University
Oral History Project"

ADVANCE PROJECT IN ORAL
HISTORY "1997"

CLASS PROJECT: INTERVIEWING
SENIOR CITIZENS
ORAL HISTORY 1977-4

Mrs. Velma Willis
INTERVIEWED BY
Lickey Jones
3/12/77

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

I, Velma Willis 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 known, recognized, or contemplated, to Jackson State University, Jackson, Mississippi.

Velma Willis
Interviewee (Signature)

3/12/77
Date

"Bibliography"

OH-1977-4

Willis Velma - Born February 15, 1906
In Newton County, Mississippi.

Life Experiences: As A Child; As
An Instructor In Rural Mississippi
Schools; Voting & Poll Taxes In Jackson
(Class Project: Oral History 301, Jackson
State University Oral History Program)

Date of Interview: 3-12-77

Interviewed: R Jones

Status: Open

Length: 48 min.

Place: Her Home

TAPE: Cassette

OH-1977-7

Cable, Willie - Born April 15, 1894
In Madison County, Mississippi.

Recollections of Her Life In Madison
County; The State Fairs; The Land Tenure
System; WWI & II & The Food Shortages.
(Class Project: Oral History 301, ~~Q~~
Jackson State University Oral History)

Mrs. Velma Willis, Born February 15, 1906, Is Now 71 Years Old. She Is At Present Quite Active. She Still Drives Her Own Car Wherever She Wants To Go. She Spends A Great Deal Of Time Busy At The Senior Citizen Center, And At Church Related Activities.

Born Velma Atkins, In Newton County, Mississippi, She Was An Only Child. She Started School At Age Five.

When She Had Finished The Eight Grade, She Took A Test And Became A Certified Teacher. For The Next Thirty-Four Years She Taught School In The Following Counties; Newton, Scott, Hinds, And Rankin. During This Time She Also Went To School And Finally In 1958, She Received, From Jackson State College, A B.S. Degree In Elementary Education.

In 1943, After Moving To Jackson, She Met And Married ^{The Late} Jimmy Willis.

In This Interview We Discussed The Many Facets Of Her Life, Ranging From Her Early Childhood, To Her Employment, To Her Views On Race Relations In Newton County.

According to Mrs. Willis, The Race Relations In Newton County Were Not As Bad As One Would Think The Blacks Knew Their Place And The Whites Knew Their's.

She Recalls The Events Of Her Teaching Career, And Other Jobs She Held Such As A Domestic, And An Attendant At Whitfield.

When She Moved To Jackson She Did Register To Vote And Pay Poll Taxes But She Never Voted. Before Moving To Jackson She Knew Nothing Of Voting.

Her Father Being A Minister, The Church Has Played A Great Role In Her Life. She Recalls The Conventions Held, He Meeting Friends, Etc., As A Result Of Her Church Participation.

" Jackson State University
Oral History Project "

Class Project: INTERVIEWING
SENIOR CITIZENS OH 1977-4

INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Velma Willis

INTERVIEWER: Rickey Jones

SUBJECT : Her Life AND Her Views On Race
Relations In Newton County, Ms.

DATE : 3/12/77

R.J. - GOOD EVENING Mrs. Willis, How Are You This
EVENING?

U.W. - Oh, I'm Fine Thank You, How Are You?

R.J. - IN DISCUSSING YOUR FAMILY, HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE THERE
IN YOUR FAMILY?

U.W. - AS FOR AS SISTERS AND BROTHERS, IT WASN'T BUT THREE OF
US, MY MOTHER AND FATHER AND MYSELF.

R.J. - Oh, Seeing That You Were An Only Child, Do You Think That
You Had Things Better, Or Maybe Worse, SO FAR AS YOUR
CHORES AND STUFF LIKE THAT, AND BEING TREATED BY YOUR PARENTS?

U.W. - I THINK I HAD THINGS JUST AS WELL WITHOUT SISTERS AND BROTHERS,
BECAUSE MY FATHER A GOOD PROVIDER.

R.J. - He Was, OK, Would You Say That Your Father Was THE,
MORE-OR-LESS, HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD, OR WAS IT
LIKE IN MOST, OR A LOT OF Black Families, WHERE THE
MOTHER

- R.J. - Takes The Dominate Role.
- U.W. - My Father Was The Head Of The Family
And He Was A Minister.
- R.J. - OK. Well, You Were Reared, More-or-less
In A Real Environment Right, On A Farm?
- U.W. - Yes, I Was A Country Girl, Reared On
A Farm.
- R.J. - How Was Life On A Farm, For You, Growing
Up As A Child.
- U.W. - Well Life On The Farm Was Nice, I
Would Say, Because That's All I Knew,
You Know, Just Being On The Farm And
There Were Plenty Happy Days On The Farm,
Plenty Happy Days. Mother And Father, And I,
We Enjoyed Ourselves, Together. And After
I Grew Up We Were Just Like Sisters And
Brother.
- R.J. - OK, Well Being That You Were On A Farm,
And Mostly As I Perceive Farm Communities As
Being A Farm Here, And Then A Few More
Miles Down, Maybe A Mile Or So Away There's
Another Farm, Was It Like This Where You
Lived?
- U.W. - Oh. Yes.
- R.J. - Well Did You Have Many Friends, Being
That There Was Such A Distance Between
Farms?

U.W. - Well Now, Where I Was Reared Up We Didn't Live Too Close Together, But I Had A Lot Of Friends And Kin, You Know, Around Me. Even Though We Didn't Live Too Close Together We Kept In Pretty Good Contact With Each Other. And, We All Belonged To The Same Church, Just About Everybody Up There, We As Black People Up In That Community, All Of Us Belonged To The Same Church Even Though We Lived A Pretty ~~big~~ little piece apart. It Didn't Seem Far To Us In Those Days Though.

R.J. - OK, When Did You Get Together With Most Of Your Friends And Play Games And Stuff Like That?

U.W. - To Play Games?

R.J. - Yes, Or Just Get Together To Play?

U.W. - Well, That Was When I Was In School, Oh You Mean When I Was Growing Up, Coming Up? Oh Well We'd Always Go See One Another. And Somebody Was Always Coming Over To Our House, And Then There Were Other Children Reared Up In Our Home, You Know What I Mean, Somebody Always Stayed With Us. Not Just All The Time, But It Was Somebody There All The Time, You Know, In And Out,

V.W. - STAYING WITH US, A YEAR, AND TWO YEARS, AND A HALF A YEAR, AND ALL LIKE THAT, SEE.

R.J. - THESE WERE COUSINS?

V.W. - YES, THESE WERE COUSINS AND FRIENDS, COMING IN AND OUT, AND ESPECIALLY KIN PEOPLE.

R.J. - OK, COMING UP AS A CHILD WHAT TYPE OF GAMES DID YOU PLAY? WERE THEY SIMILAR TO THE ONES TODAY?

V.W. - WELL, ESPECIALLY ~~BASEBALL~~ BASEBALL. ^{Now} BACK IN MY DAY, GIRLS PLAYED BASEBALL ^{SEE} BECAUSE THAT WAS ABOUT THE BIGGEST ~~TO~~ GAME WE LEARNED THEN. AND THEN IN MY CLOSING YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL I LEARNED TO PLAY VOLLEYBALL AND MAYBE A FEW OTHER GAMES YOU KNOW. ON HICKER AND HICKER I LEARNED TO PLAY BASKETBALL.

R.J. - OK, HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED SCHOOL.

V.W. - FIVE YEARS OLD, WHEN I STARTED SCHOOL.

LEARNING MY "A B C'S".

R.J. - WAS IT CUSTOMARY FOR KIDS TO START AT THAT AGE?

V.W. - IN MY DAY IT WAS CUSTOMARY FOR KIDS TO START SCHOOL AT THE AGE OF FIVE.

R.J. - WELL HOW DID YOU GET BACK AND FORTH TO SCHOOL?

V.W. - WALKED, I WALKED TO SCHOOL EVERY DAY.

R.J. - HOW FAR WAS IT?

V.W. - OH, IT WAS ABOUT A MILE AND A HALF.

R.J. - A Mile And A Half?

V.W. - And I Have Walked Three Miles To School.

R.J. - How Many Hours Of The Day Did You Stay At School, Normally.

V.W. - I Don't Hardly Know, But We Stayed, You Know, All Day, You Know What I Mean.

R.J. - All Day?

V.W. - Uh um, (Yes)

R.J. - About Like It Is Now?

V.W. - Yes, Just About Like It Is Now.

R.J. - OK.

V.W. - Now We Little Children, If We Got Through We Didn't Go Home Till The Big Children Went Home, See Now, You See, They Have A School For Little Children, You Know, Small Children. But Everybody Stayed At School Until A Certain Hour. I Don't Remember Now What Hour It Was, It Could Have Been Three, It Could Have Been Three Thirty, But We Stayed There All Day.

R.J. - And You Did Take Your Own Lunch?

V.W. - Yes, We Carried Our Lunch.

R.J. - Well, How Many Rooms Were In The School?

V.W. - Sometime One, Most-Time One. All Of My Early Days Was One Room Schools.

R.J. - One Room School, One Teacher?

V.W. - And One Teacher,

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