

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Reginald R. Brown, Sr.

COLLECTION: 4700.1018

IDENTIFICATION: Baton Rouge native; long-time East Baton Rouge Parish sheriff's deputy;
Baton Rouge City Constable

INTERVIEWER: Jeong Suk Pang

SERIES: McKinley High School Oral History Project - Baton Rouge Bus Boycott

INTERVIEW DATE: June 23, 1998

FOCUS DATES: 1950s-60s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1503, Side A

Brown born in Baton Rouge in 1946; mother a college graduate, teacher; father graduated high school, worked as laborer; older brother, a disabled military veteran, now lives in Los Angeles; Brown has two sons and a daughter; attended two years at Southern University; has worked in sheriff's office for twenty-four years; goal to give more positive impression of law enforcement; fathered a child at age nineteen; Brown was seven years old at time of bus boycott, has vague memories and can recall family discussions; reasons for bus boycott; organization of carpools; some white people financially supported the boycott; Martin Luther King visited Baton Rouge to see how bus boycott was done; Brown's family mostly relied on buses, during boycott joined carpools; few black families had cars then; men got around on bicycles; taxi services also popular; Brown got to kindergarten by taxi; black-owned bus company in Scotlandville; restrictions against Scotlandville bus operating within Baton Rouge; rode Scotlandville bus when attending Southern; memories of movable sign to mark where blacks could sit, depending on how many whites on bus; law prevented blacks from driving buses; now majority of drivers and riders are black; attended segregated schools; high school diploma states "an accredited Negro or colored high school"; school desegregation law passed in 1963, a year before Brown's graduation, but he finished at his segregated high school; attended Perkins Road Elementary in Baton Rouge for first and second grade; then went to Upper Maringouin Elementary School where his mother taught; graduated from Thomas A. Levy High School in Rosedale; black social networks spread news of boycott; importance of church as center of community; political connections of black ministers; "the highest person in the community, basically, was your minister"; WXOK was Baton Rouge's first black radio station; during bus boycott, riders pitched in gas money to carpool drivers; strategy of boycott; carpools stopped at regular bus stops to pick up riders; organizational meetings mostly held at churches, biggest meeting at Memorial Stadium; word of mouth used to publicize meetings and developments in boycott; much of his knowledge of boycott gleaned from parents over the years; black newspapers in Louisiana; Brown's mother served in World War II; mother's shock when she came home from war and had to readjust to discrimination and segregation; mother worked at Picadilly's but was not allowed

to eat there; Brown's family valued harmony and community between races; role of black church, "the castle where everybody went to and worshipped"; universal respect for church; if political leaders needed to disseminate information to black community, they used church networks; money raised in boycott mass meetings used for publicity, gas, funds for laid off workers; balancing courage and safety during boycott; mother told him stories of bus boycott while they rode a train to New York; tensions and resentments among laid off bus drivers; selective buying campaigns; boyhood memories of segregated drinking fountains and restaurants; McCrory's was first restaurant with decent seating area for black diners;

Tape 1503, Side B

Importance of boycott to send message that blacks wanted to be treated decently; complacency in black community since boycott; current struggles in black community: education, drugs, people having children too young; diminished strength of churches; Catholic Church has been more successful in outreach than Baptist; bus boycott in context of larger civil rights movement; how civil rights movement spurred women's liberation movement; memory of segregated lunch counter in one of the Carolinas in 1966; segregated lines at ice cream stand during childhood; much as he loathed segregation, better than today's problems of drug abuse and teenage moms; water hoses turned on Southern University students during 1950s protest; 1967 protest march from Bogalusa to Baton Rouge; Brown has always taken the peaceful approach; patrolling the streets the night of Martin Luther King's assassination; is too much of a realist about life to worry when black folks call him "Uncle Tom" or white folks call him "nigger"; Southern University students marched to capitol, demanding an overpass over railroad tracks so they could get to class on time; Bogalusa march led by A.Z. Young; reaction in Baton Rouge to King assassination; police brutality cases; use of curfews to prevent riots; efforts of civil rights leaders to keep people in movement on target, rather than working on hidden agendas; Brown treats all people with dignity and respect, including criminals; Louisiana's first black elected official, Joe Delpit of Baton Rouge; as a young man, rode his bicycle to governor's mansion to ask governor to help him get a job; friend Jerry Bennett, who worked in governor's mansion at that time and knows a lot of Baton Rouge history; importance of black people helping other blacks; importance of helping younger people, regardless of race; Joe Delpit's election to be first black on twelve-person council; importance of black community and black businesses to Baton Rouge economy; problems in education system are the cause of problems in society; in Brown's mother's time as schoolteacher, they had God and discipline in the schools; morality versus democracy: "We can't let what the majority of people say influence us to do what we know is morally wrong, just because the majority say let's do it"; supports prayer in school and reciting pledge of allegiance; children should be forced to go to church; education begins at home; three key elements to raising kids right: the home, the church, the school; end of interview

TAPES: 1 (T1503)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 23 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 41 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Biographical sketch

RESTRICTIONS: None