

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAMES: Dr. Louis and Carolyn James

COLLECTION: 4700.1025

IDENTIFICATION: Dr. Louis James participated in the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott; Carolyn Brown James is his wife

INTERVIEWER: Dawn Wallace

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

INTERVIEW DATE: June 19, 1998

FOCUS DATES: 1950s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1512, Side A

Louis and Carolyn were married eight months before this interview, but have known each other all their lives; he was her family physician; at time of interview, Dr. James had been practicing medicine in Baton Rouge for fifty-two years; first black physician to work in East Baton Rouge Parish coroner's office; Dr. James involved in McKinley Alumni Association; he originally had medical office in front of his mother's home; started first black neonatal clinic in Scotlandville; at first, the neonatal clinic was in a church off Plank Road; signed bonding documents for students arrested in Kress lunch counter sit-in; born at 916 McCalop Street in Baton Rouge; attended Howard University in Washington, DC; worked at Homer G. Phillips Hospital in Saint Louis after graduation; Dr. James got drafted into US Army Medical Corps; received letter of commendation from army for helping desegregate a battalion; as part of bus boycott, moved "colored" signs that designated where African Americans were expected to sit; tried to get signs posted to limit where whites could sit; Dr. James participated in boycott even though he had a car and was not dependent on bus to get to work; describes his past and current offices; segregation in the hospital system; Dr. James has three children; children's education and careers; sitting beside a white person on a bus; Dr. James was appointed to mayor's Biracial Committee; James replaced Gardner Taylor on committee; activities of Biracial Committee; white people on the committee were scared; cross burned on Reverend Jemison's lawn; explains where Baton Rouge General Hospital and Mount Zion Church were located; their church had a good relationship with downtown white churches; believed he was being watched, so carried a pistol; didn't go to all the city council meetings because he kept his office open until 8:30 pm; collecting money for people to hire defense attorneys; police protection for meetings at churches; their integration efforts did a lot of good; group of white doctors who helped black doctors get admitted to hospital; Dr. James was recently ill and hospitalized; he's happy about progress made for black race; Chester Laborde served as Reverend Jemison's bodyguard; Carolyn James remembers

riding the bus as a child and having her seating options restricted; her grandparents sent her to school in California to avoid integration in Baton Rouge; even after bus integrated, fear of what would happen if she sat in front seat; friend convinced her to eat at newly-integrated lunch counter; insulted by racist white women; at first, integration frightened her more than it made her happy; her grandfather died at age eighty-six never having eaten at a Piccadilly or most other public places because he was scared of not being able to protect himself from violent whites; Carolyn's thirty year-old son can't relate to segregation; important names in Baton Rouge integration movement; Carolyn was always too afraid to participate in protests; nonviolence and compromise keys to success of black progress; Carolyn is starting a foundation in her husband's honor to support more young black doctors going into family practice; story of a patient who went to a doctor who never even touched her; Wallace requests photos and additional records, asks them to sign releases; conclusion

TAPE: 1 (T1512)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 12 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 49 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Biographical sketch, Booklet on Baton Rouge Bus Boycott of 1953

RESTRICTIONS: None