

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: J.B. Williams

COLLECTION: 4700.0692

IDENTIFICATION: McKinley High School graduate, Class of 1961

INTERVIEWER: Shawnda Hollins

SERIES: McKinley High School Oral History Project – History of McKinley High School

INTERVIEW DATE: July 18, 1995

FOCUS DATES: 1950s - early 1960s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1019, Side A

Williams was born in East Baton Rouge Parish in 1944; father graduated from McKinley in 1933; mother attended high school but did not graduate; father was a cement mason, mother a housewife; Williams graduated in 1961; he was in last class at the old McKinley on McCalop Street; McKinley Junior and Senior High shared a campus; had more than one thousand students on campus; McKinley was an elite educational institution with the best faculty in all of East Baton Rouge Parish; rivaled white schools; McKinley was strong academically; Capitol High was their biggest rival; rivalry sometimes resulted in fisticuffs; Reverend Jemison often came in to speak about good conduct; Williams involved in McKinley choir, High-Y and band; was a B student at McKinley; got more interested in academics in college; at McKinley, he was a social being; Williams urges Hollins not to postpone excelling academically; biology teacher Fess Hall was a supreme role model; also emulated Coach George E. Mencer; Mr. A.E. Carter was highly intellectual, an English teacher and choir leader; buying fashionable attire at “Jew stores” on Main Street; clothing fashions; fad of wearing slippers to school; graduation night held in gymnasium, sweltering heat; buying blue graduation suit at Goudchaux’s on Main Street; English teacher Mr. Yates helped him improve his language skills; Mrs. Young also a fantastic English teacher and grammarian, and introduced them to English literature; McKinley students did not feel that they were receiving inferior education to their white counterparts; immediately upon graduation, Williams enrolled in summer session at Southern University; got BS in social studies with minor in library science; Williams is currently principal at Baton Rouge High School; proposes a McKinley High School Hall of Fame to acknowledge black accomplishments in Baton Rouge; McKinley graduates who participated in civil rights activities, such as sit-ins; his father wanted Williams to have a better lifestyle rather than follow in his masonry footsteps; “McKinley prepared me for life”; hopes to retire soon and spend more time with his granddaughter; has a few regrets, but tries to profit from his mistakes; memories of McKinley principals; acknowledges value of McKinley Oral History Project; his enduring connections with

the people and success of McKinley; Williams worked as librarian and media specialist at McKinley for nine years; urges aspiring McKinley graduates to do their best, make every day count, study a lot and accept support; suggests two people to interview; demolition of Reddy Street and Perkins Road elementary schools; conclusion.

TAPE: 1 (T1019)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 29 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 14 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Preliminary index (2 pgs)

RESTRICTIONS: None