

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Huel D. Perkins

COLLECTION: 4700.1792

IDENTIFICATION: Former Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs at LSU; Former Executive Assistant to the Chancellor at LSU

INTERVIEWER: Petra Munro Hendry and Dorian McCoy

PROJECT: McKinley High School Oral History Project – Social Organizations

INTERVIEW DATES May 11, 2006

FOCUS DATES: 1920s – 2000s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3516, Side A

Introduction; Perkins born in 1924 in Baton Rouge on South Boulevard; his father John was a lawyer in Mississippi, his mother Velma was the first graduate in Home Economics at Southern University and previously attended Baton Rouge Colored High School; father moved to Baton Rouge after losing most of his arm in an accident, opened a loan company and later got into insurance; Perkins had one brother; attended elementary and high school at Southern University Lab, finished in 1940, then went to Southern University; in the navy for two years, then back to Southern where he met his wife; they both graduated in 1947, went on to Northwestern University and both received master's degrees in 1951; he returned to work on a doctorate at Northwestern during the summers and taught during the year at Southern; finished his doctorate in 1958 with financial assistance from the Danforth Foundation; his dissertation was on college opera post-WWII; relates how his interest in opera was spurred by one of his wife's teachers at Northwestern; he remembers the three elementary schools for African American children in Baton Rouge, students moving in with relatives so they could attend McKinley High; he went to Southern Lab because his mother taught there; location of the three elementary schools; presence of so many African American schools was unusual in the South, helped by leaders like J.M Frazier and J.S. Clark; McKinley was a great school and many students went on to college; McKinley graduates were not allowed to wear robes, they made matching suits instead; Southern Lab also produced college-bound students; high quality of teachers at African American schools and effective discipline; he was a Boy Scout through his church, Bethel AME; Allen Endeavor League at his church; other activities in the church and community; he was a good basketball player, they played at the Temple Theater; Temple was a gathering place for African Americans, many events held there; events at McKinley like the March Rhetorical and operettas; he grew up in a segregated neighborhood; his father was always involved in politics, he enjoyed campaigning for candidates and mobilizing black voters; he father was able to vote by negotiating all of the barriers like the literacy test;

Tape 3516, Side B

Explanation of why black voters like his father registered as Republicans; civic involvement of the Butler, Baranco and Clark families, they were all associated with the YMCA; the Temple was a Masonic building, Masons were big in Louisiana at that time; he was a Mason in his earlier years, a member of Blazing Star Lodge; he was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha at Southern; Alpha's movement to encourage African American students to stay in school, education as a way out of segregation; all African American fraternities had a focus on betterment either in encouraging business or career choices; his father was involved with the local NAACP chapter; John G. Lewis, Masons grand master, Perkins knew him through church and his fraternity; he's not sure of Lewis' activities because he was away at school in Chicago; education was important in moving African Americans towards equality; recalls speaking at a national meeting of some fraternity, saying that race is an "accident of birth"; people who changed America like Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Lyndon Johnson; different view of African Americans in the South versus the North; his mother said that the South was forever fighting the Civil War and blaming the negro; he's been in Baton Rouge almost his whole life, was at LSU for twenty-three years, he's seen changes over time; explanation of why Felton Clark expelled Southern University students who had demonstrated at a lunch counter; Perkins was on leave from teaching at Southern during that time; he submitted a book to LSU Press and was turned down, so was Hendry; he recalls the consent decree and people's reactions to it; back to a discussion of his mother, Velma, born in 1898; he has a family genealogy that he wrote for his son; his great-grandmother, Mary Jane Davis, was the child of a slave master and a black woman; family background on Mary Jane and her husband Jared, their child Lily Davis (Perkins' grandmother), Lily's marriage to Huel and their children, Perkins' mother and uncles; they owned property on South Boulevard, had a twelve-room rooming house; made a good income on the house because blacks couldn't stay in hotels at that time; grandfather Huel Davis; book he wrote for his son on the family history; he considers himself a friend of Bill Clinton; Baton Rouge has changed so much during his life he feels he's not in the same place; his son is an anchor for a Fox station in Detroit, he arranged a trip to Europe for Perkins and his wife's fiftieth wedding anniversary; interview ends.

TAPES: 1 (T3516)**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 30 minutes**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 68 pages**OTHER MATERIALS:** None**RESTRICTIONS:** None