

Interviewees: Johnson, Deloris "Marie" & Johnson, Napoleon

Interview Date: February 26, 2009

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

Interview with: Meeting, Class of 1958, Smith Branch Library (Deloris Johnson, Napoleon Johnson)

Interviewed by: Debbie Harwell, Carroll Blue, Reed Amadon, Anna Burke

Date: February 26 2009

Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

CB: Could you talk a little bit about Mr. William Holland?

DJ: Mr. William S. Holland went to Yates as a teacher first and I have lots of information on him. But anyway, he started out as a coach at Yates under Professor Ryan and after Professor Ryan died, then he became principal. And what an awesome principal he was. The man had integrity. As the old folks would say, he had gumption. He really stood out in terms of his beliefs and principles and instilling principles in us as his students. Many people thought he was white and if you would see, you would know why. But he really, I don't want to say he stayed in conflict with the whites during that time but he really supported this community and he supported his teachers, he supported the parents and he supported the students. He went out in every way that he could to get the best for us and with that, many will tell you that Jack Yates students were prime students in the day, and many went on to wherever, whatever, in whatever capacity. But you were under Mr. Holland. His motto was, "You are tomorrow what you were yesterday, plus the few changes you make today." And we lived with that because that was the first thing he told us every day, every morning. He was on the microphone with us every day. Every morning, he gave us words of inspiration and encouragement and he told us that we needed to prepare ourselves for a day that would come, which is now, and the crossover that we had into integration from segregation. He said, "You have to be the

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best that you can be and you are going to have to be better than others to get the job."

And we knew that, and we experienced that. But Mr. Holland went on, not only education but with us being in the community and working in the community even in the parades. I will give you an example of that. A lot of times, in the parades, we would have to march behind the horses and he said, "No, my students are not going to march behind horses." He would not let us go in the parades. He was an awesome man. I have information on him that one of the students wrote, Melvin _____. I think it is about 12 pages that he wrote about Mr. Holland.

CB: Now, is this useful for Mrs. Johnson to talk about?

DH: Yes, because it helps us to learn more than we know already and also I think it will help us to have better questions when we interview the class members just like you said, that you weren't very happy with the first interview, that you felt like the questions didn't dig deep enough.

RA: Well, I think the first interview with you.

DH: Right, not your interview.

RA: No, but I mean, in our mind, the whole idea of preinterviews is to find out what their specific area was which you were very helpful in doing. But then, when you go back . . .

DJ: Not to cut you off but, see, when we went to the other place, we had no preinterviews. The questions were spontaneous and we were on camera right then and there.

RA: That is not too good.

DJ: No, it was not good. They did not sit down with us at first and just say . . .

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CB: It was a different way of doing interviewing. I have got to defend them. It is a whole different approach. It is less people and they do sound bites and there is some valuable information in that, too.

DJ: Well, I am saying how I was uncomfortable with it because there were many things that Thelma and I said, well, we could have told them much more about what life was after school. They asked you questions and it was like you needed an immediate answer. It wasn't anything where you could tell the story. I do believe in story telling, giving the big picture as well as the details.

RA: I thought Beatrice was very interesting, to hear about the way that she talked about working with the Bakers, the way she talked about her family in Louisiana and growing up. It adds so much context.

DJ: But there was so much she didn't tell. I wish you could go through that book and we are having a family reunion meeting on Sunday which is also her birthday. She is going to be 96. But that book will tell you a lot. And I wish you could see the documentary that they made for Pastor Thompson who was the patriarch of the family. But that was not here though, that was in Louisiana. That was not here.

DJ: We must do Pastor Lawson. He worked with Mr. Quentin Mease also during that time. That is why he is so highly respected - one of the reasons he is so highly respected.

RA: He was sort of the dean of nonviolence, even with Martin Luther King. He was really the trainer who did all of that. And he didn't start that way. He started very conservatively and then just said, O.K., it is time to get involved in this.

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RA: He is national stature though he was mostly focused here. But he was very much a part of the national movement. Mease had a different aspect. He was so much involved in the business part. That was a fascinating part of the whole story.

DJ: [After phone call] She said he [Reverend Lawson] is not doing good.

RA: What does that mean?

DJ: You see that's the same when we went to interview Chase yesterday. Chase was not feeling good. We couldn't do it. It may be, you know Quentin Mease just died. I don't know if that took a mental effect on him or what.

RA: Would he not be able to be interviewed then?

DJ: Not right now. But, you know, he is so well-versed in that particular period and the onset of it. And then, he could tie in the education part because he was right there at TSU and everything.

RA: What happened to Nesbitt? Is he around?

DJ: I don't know.

RA: He was very instrumental in all of that, too.

DJ: I don't know.

RA: He was the head of TSU.

DJ: Yes, see, when all of that was going on, I was at Hampton. I was in school at Hampton. I marched up there.

RA: So, you were not here in the early 1960s?

DJ: Except to come home for holidays and whatever. I was here after 1962.

RA: A lot of stuff happened before then.

DJ: Yes.

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DH: The woman who was the first African American representative on the school board? Hattie May?

DJ: White.

DH: Is she still alive?

DJ: Oh no. Her daughters are. She has a daughter and a son and they are still alive. Her husband just died not long ago.

RA: Is Eldrewey Sterns around?

DJ: You know, I don't know but Reverend Lawson could tell you.

RA: That would be an interesting experience. I am not sure a woman should do it. He had some real issues with women. He could be very abusive. That is one of his issues when he went into a psychosis. He was very, very abusive with women. But he would be a really interesting character to talk to. I would love to talk to Eldrewey.

DJ: Well, you know, when you talk to Reverend Lawson . . .

RA: You will call him?

DH: Well if he is not doing well right now, I am not going to call him right at this moment. Is that what you are saying?

DJ: That is the office. That is not the home.

DH: Oh, O.K. If you call the office, I don't know who is going to be there, maybe his daughter or whatever. And if you can't get anybody, they will call me back.

RA: Can you recommend . . . are other students from Yates coming today?

DJ: The Bowmans are supposed to be here. She had asked for the representatives to come that were meeting with her. Thelma is the other one.

RA: Thelma Robbins Gould?

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DJ: Thelma Robbins Gould.

RA: Now, have you all been interviewed on your committee?

DJ: The 3 of us were. Come on, Napoleon.

RA: Oh, he was sitting right next to me. You were in the car right next to me. I am Reed Amadon.

DH: Debbie Harwell. Nice to meet you. Do you still work with Channel 2 at all?

NJ: No, that was so many years ago. I barely even remember being there. I just retired from 25 years at Houston Community College in journalism and mass communication.

RA: Mass communication? My wife is at HCC. She teaches math. She teaches speech communications at Northline.

DJ: Napoleon would be an interesting person, too, to interview. He was one of the first black anchormen.

NJ: There were several African Americans on television before I was. I might have been maybe around the 4th or the 5th but there were others before me.

RA: Now, you were already interviewed though for this project, right?

NJ: I was interviewed in something that Carl Davis set up. It was at HCC.

DJ: That is the one I was talking about.

NJ: What was the question again?

RA: Was Carroll Blue involved in that?

NJ: No or we didn't see Carroll. It was simply through the city.

DH: Well, now, there is a cooperative project between the city and the University of Houston to do oral history interviews to collect the history of the city.

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DJ: They were city workers who interviewed us.

NJ: Right. They work under Carl in the City, the city planning and development office for the City of Houston.

RA: Do you know what, if we were able to do you two, for instance, one thing you could do for us would be to write your own questions. We could ask you what you would want us to ask you so we would get the information from you you want to get to us.

DH: That you want to get on tape . . .

RA: Yes, I mean, why not? There is no reason for us to come up with it. I mean, obviously, we could do whatever you need but obviously if you knew the information you wanted to get out, give us the questions, we will ask you and you answer the questions specifically. You would be great at it and I am sure you would be. We are talking about . . . basically, we have been trying to focus on things prior to 1958 or before and your experiences in the community, what you saw growing up, what was education like, what was your involvement, what did you see in terms of racial problems, racial issues, what did you see in terms of the Civil Rights Acts?

DJ: See, that is what I thought we were going to be asked then but we were asked primarily what our schooling was, right?

NJ: When we were at HCC and the young lady with Carl was asking those kinds of questions - basically about our school experiences, what kind of classes we had, what kind of classes did we take.

DH: I think some of the things I would like to know, too, is I would like to know about how you felt about the Brown decision when it was handed down and the frustration that

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you experienced when the Supreme Court said yes and nothing was happening. I would think that that would be something that . . .

DJ: I thought it was going to be more meat and potatoes like that.

NJ: I am not sure we have answers for that though.

RA: That is a presumptive question in a sense . . . that is the kind of thing. There is that, there is the issue of the white primaries. There was the issue of the school board thing that came up. There were unions. Even the thought or concept or awareness of what happened in 1917 with the riots. Just what was the state of mind of people at that time?

DJ: We were very young at that time in 1954.

NJ: That was 4 years before we graduated and we were concentrating basically on getting through high school.

DJ: However, we heard all of the controversy through the media and the neighborhood and everything and basically, it was fear.

RA: Fear. You were afraid it was going to blow up?

DJ: Yes, we didn't know what was going to happen. And as children, I don't think we had the big perspective of it other than something was going to happen as far as segregation was concerned and following that time, we knew different things that were happening in the community with segregation and how things were segregated. We were talking about that just the other night. Even in riding the bus. You know, many of us didn't even ride the bus to school. We walked. But if we had to go to town with our parents and if we didn't have cars or whatever, we couldn't go and eat at the lunch counters or whatever, and many of our parents fed us before we left home. And when we

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got there, if you had to buy anything, it had to be at a certain end of the counter and then you had to leave. You could not sit there and eat it. Surely, our parents would tell us, well, when you go to town, you are not going to ride, and we took sack lunches with us and that kind of thing and we had our own food.

RA: Well, that is the kind of thing that would be very, very interesting for people to know about because, even Beatrice when we interviewed Beatrice, she was much more . . . She may even have been from a more self-contained generation where it was engrained that they didn't even think about it.

DJ: You were isolated.

RA: Yes, isolated. And you were facing it all the time.

DJ: We were isolated but we knew that we were going to be able to break out of that cocoon and that is what Mr. Holland was telling us, to be prepared. When it comes . . . as Martin Luther King would say, "We are coming to the Promised Land." He told us, "You have to be ready and you have to be better." That is what we had to do.

DJ: And many of us went on and were the first blacks to leave and go into other schools and then graduate in our fields from those particular schools. And even some of the ones before us because we were way in 1954. You still had the 1957, 1956, 1955 and 1954, and there are a lot of good people that you need to interview. In fact, some of the people went to NASA.

RA: Well, but right now, what we are doing . . . I think the project is ongoing. What we are doing right now is trying to get somebody from 1958, from your class.

DJ: Another good person would be Judge Robert Anderson. I think he should be one of the next people you interview.

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RA: Well, what do you think, Debra? Do you want to try and do these guys?

DH: Sure, I think that would be fine.

RA: We could meet. You and I could meet. We could agree on the questions. We would make up the questions. Now, I don't want to tell anybody about this but that is pretty much . . . the whole point is we want good stuff.

DH: It is on the tape right now, Reed.

RA: O.K., erase it. No, but I am saying, that is not the point. The point is having good stuff.

DJ: You are not going to make up the questions. We are just going to formulate the ideas that you want to generate in this interview so we can make sure the interview fulfills its mission.

RA: There you go. So, we can collaborate on it.

DJ: That's right. It is what I thought should have been done with the others.

What did you think about those interviews? I thought they were too impromptu.

NJ: Well, I think the young lady who did the interview was . . . and I am not sure what sort of thinking they had done beforehand, but it just seemed like it was a little light. They weren't deep questions. It was basically like what was school like and I think one of my answers which might have been kind of flip was that, well, it was high school. There were cliques. There was the in crowd and frat people who did not always feel like they were part of something but it was also when you come to our reunions, certainly, in 1958, there were people who remember each other fondly but it was high school. If you've ever been a teenager you have an idea of high school was like.

RA: It has been a while.

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NJ: For all of us. But obviously, it was a special time and a different time because as we know, it was a segregated time. When the 1954 decision happened, there was no immediate change here in Houston. There were discussions about it at the school board and all of that. Mr. Holland, who was our principal and teacher, had been a fighter. We were certainly aware of that through the years. So, one of the things I remember about him is that sometimes when we would have assemblies, I remember the pain in his voice because if he saw students acting in any way that was probably natural to some degree, with being playful and being . . . I don't want to say devil-may-care but just too much play and not enough seriousness . . . he would get on the microphone and he would tell us about how difficult it was going to be and that you are going to have to be twice as good, work twice as hard and those kinds of things. That was the kind of language that he used. He was basically saying you need to wake up. You don't have time to act the fool. You need to get serious about what you are doing. And so, that is what I remember him, to some degree, is in those assemblies, saying that, you know, we can prepare you but you've got to be serious about getting prepared.

RA: Were you there when Reverend Lawson came over and talked to the students?

NJ: Yes. Wheeler Avenue, right down the street here. Yes.

RA: So, what was that like?

NJ: Well, I don't remember Reverend Lawson with the clarity that one of my classmates does and that is Thelma Robins Gould. At our recent reunion back in November, he was there and he spoke at our luncheon. She recalled how she had . . . she was the one who introduced him and she made him remember that, "You used to often come over to Yates and speak to us, and I can remember one occasion where I introduced

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you as a student." So, that was her recollection. I have a memory of that but not really a great memory.

DJ: Usually, he came on like Wednesdays when we had assembly and he would give words of encouragement or he would be the main speaker like for American education week, Texas history - the main educational weeks. I think I have a picture. There is a picture in the yearbook of him at one of those assemblies.

NJ: There could be. And some of these memories are better than others.

DJ: And then, too, when he was giving us those words of encouragement, he, too, was speaking in terms of the realm of what was happening and what was coming, and focusing us to be ready for that and inspiring us to, whatever happened, be encouraged and have hope. That was the kind of thing that he did.

RA: You know, later at TSU in 1967, you had some pretty serious violence between the police and the students.

DJ: I heard every bit of that right in my bedroom.

RA: What happened for that to have developed in terms of the leadership of the Movement and all that sort of thing? Had it gone into a different direction than nonviolence?

DJ: Now, I can't speak to that because I really don't know. I had just come back at that particular time. Reverend Lawson can tell you about that.

NJ: What year are we talking about?

RA: That was 1967.

DJ: That is when they had all of that shooting over there and they arrested all of those students. And somebody else who could tell you about that is Manson Johnson too.

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RA: There were some militant folks that decided that they had to take a stand and fight.

DJ: He was in the dorm at that time, I know. Reverend Manson Johnson. He is from Holman Street Baptist Church. He could give you information on that.

RA: Well, that it interesting. It was in the book by Eldrewey Sterns but unluckily it is not really known.

DJ: Do you know anything about where Eldrewey is now?

RA: Well, the thing is, it is really interesting about what you are saying, that you were in, sort of, here we are students in high school doing high school stuff and having friends and cliques and playing sports and all this and then you play it back and you realize that it is an all black high school, that everyone is forced to be in this environment and then at the same time, you are getting this emphasis on this change that is coming. There is a real movement towards something unknown and a little bit of fear about it that was kind of there in the presence of the students minds.

DJ: It was fear but I think it was excitement and anxiety and curiosity all at the same time. What do you think, Napoleon? Because we left and we went separate places. He went west and I went east to school.

NJ: We are talking about the fall of 1958.

DJ: I am fall of 1958.

RA: You were spring.

DJ: I graduated in January.

NJ: Right. I wouldn't call that the fall though.

DJ: That is not fall? Winter.

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NJ: I graduated in May or June, I guess, which is the spring.

DJ: We both left in the fall.

NJ: I don't remember anything in particular that was happening in Houston, I mean, that I was aware of with regard to atmosphere or what was going on different culturally because, like I said, when 1954 happened, there was no immediate change, there was no sudden integration. I think I remember reading it in the papers and maybe seeing it on TV, the beginning of things like, you know, discussions. There was someone who was in charge of the school board - I can't remember - he was white, tall, and he had been there forever. I just remember that at some point, they started talking about what we were going to do in the future. I don't even know the full grasp of it, I just know that there were no immediate changes. So, by the time we graduated, it was not like there was a great upheaval. We were doing everything we could do to learn and to graduate on time and we were writing letters to different colleges to try to go here, there and everywhere. I recall having gotten accepted at the University of Chicago. It seems like there was one other place. And then, there was a small college in New Mexico, in a place called Las Vegas, New Mexico. It was Highlands University.

RA: Did you go there?

NJ: Yes, I went there.

RA: It is beautiful there. I was in New Mexico for quite a while.

NJ: It was up in the mountains. I had never really seen snow. You know how Houston is. I had never seen any real snow or mountains or anything like that. That is where I went. But I did notice obviously that if there were tensions, it was primarily between whites and Hispanics because Hispanics were in the majority at my college. We

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had a few blacks that were mostly athletes from West Virginia on football and other kinds of scholarships and a few others. A really small number of blacks. It was not like any sort of tension at all that you might have had in Houston about going here or there. One of the stories I tell is that I was fearful leaving because it had been drummed into us for such a long time that you would have to work twice as hard, be twice as good, and I had this thing in my own mind, am I good enough? And when I came back, I completed one semester and when I came back in the winter, for the winter semester -- we were on a quarter system -- when I came back in January, I looked around and a lot of people I had seen when I came in September, weren't there and I am thinking, maybe I can do this! So, I finished in 4 years. I think I went one summer, maybe the summer before I graduated, and went during the summer. But basically, I completed my education in 4 years. I got out of there, came back to Houston briefly and I volunteered for the Army for 2 years. Vietnam was heating up. So, I did 2 years in the service. I spent most of my time in Fort Lewis Washington in the Tacoma and Seattle area. I came back to Houston and started working at NASA where I worked for 7-1/2 years as a technical editor. And I say all of this saying that having come back, that was like - what was it 1964 . . . Kennedy had been assassinated the previous year . . . I came back, I went to, it was an employment agency. I was able to get on at NASA because Lyndon Johnson had said that I guess available contractors, we had to provide equal opportunities. So, I got on at NASA at Philco Ford as a matter of fact as a technical editor and writer, and stayed there 7-1/2 years. Began watching TV. I began seeing African Americans on television. I, once again, thought, well my background was journalism. I was editor of the high school newspaper when I was at Yates. I thought to myself, maybe I can do that. So, I went

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over and it just sort of progressed from there. There was a guy, he was a film maker. He did advertising. What else? Commercials, things like that. He had spoken at a program that I had given, pulled together once. And then, I went to him for a job and he was saying that he didn't really have anything but he suggested that I try television, so that is how I wound up going over to Channel 2. He knew somebody there and that was my introduction to Channel 2. There was a photographer, Ray Miller, who did the Eyes of Texas. So, he was a photographer for that documentary show that aired every Saturday. He introduced me to Ray, having been introduced to him by this friend that I knew. So, I got on the Channel 2. Gave me an audition and sent me out on a story at a time when it was changing. I am talking about 1971. I went there in maybe May of 1971, and he hired me eventually. In August, I started going out with the different camera crews and my actual full workday was in September in 1971. But I went with camera crews to HISD, covered City Hall, carried equipment, a whole bunch of things to familiarize myself. I had a journalism degree but television was new to me as well. So the first 5 months maybe as a general assignments reporter. Then, came Education and Medicine is what I covered. So, I was always over at the Medical Center, always over at HISD, at U of H - anything that had to do with education.

RA: How long were you with the station?

NJ: I was there 8-1/2 years. 7-1/2 years at NASA, 8-1/2 years at Channel 2. I did 1-1/2 years with Mayor Jim McConn before Kathy Whitmire came in. We lost the election and of course everybody brings their own people for a very brief stint. I was one of his executive assistants, his liaison to the Public Health Department, to the Library, and the Solid Waste Management Department and he had executive assistants of the various

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areas: the executive assistant to the police, the fire department, he had executive assistants in charge of protocol and so on. So, I was one of those.

RA: You left the TV station when?

NJ: 1980. April of 1980. I got on at City Hall, I guess it was probably July of 1980.

RA: I just ask. I was going to say that I had never seen you on television but I have only been here since 1996.

DH: I saw him on television.

RA: I am not saying that I don't believe you, I just wish I had see you on T.V.

DH: I am a native Houstonian. I remember you being on television.

DJ: What school did you go to?

DH: Westbury.

DJ: I supervised there on HISD. A question that I have is about the people that you want to interview . . .

RA: Now, if you want, we can interview you all again or we can do 3 other people.

NJ: Let me ask you a question. I know that we tried to set up some interviews at Ryan. It seems like it was around September that I came through and there were delays. Did you wind up going over there in December to Ryan?

DJ: I didn't go.

NJ: Wasn't Carl over there with Someone?

DJ: Carl was over there. What they were doing, they were over there taking different items and scanning. I think the people who were interviewed went to HCC because some of the old teachers went like Mrs. Churchwell.

RA: To Ryan? Is that what you are saying?

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DJ: Thelma knows about that. I did not know about that.

NJ: The location was Ryan where they were looking for memorabilia.

DJ: Right, they went there. The interviews were done at HCC.

NJ: But it was not specifically the class of 1958 memories which is what you are looking for, I take it?

RA: Yes.

DJ: Right, and see, that is where we have had some confusion because we were asked to get the names of people . . . not only our class members but teachers were involved. And then, community people were involved. So, that is why I just opened up the question. Give us information on how our total class is going to be involved. Somewhere along the way, somebody said that all of our classmates were going to be involved.

DH: That is the goal for the long-term project. For our involvement . . . [end of tape 1, side 1]

DH: . . . were people who were involved in the school as a teacher and two community people _____.

DJ: How many teachers?

DH: Only one.

DJ: Community People?

RA: Well, that would have been Mease and Beatrice Green. Now, it is going to be Lawson.

DH: The second group of 3 would be 3 members of the class of 1958. And that is for our project right now for this class. Now, Carroll's plan is to continue documenting the

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history of the class of 1958 beyond this semester. Some of us might work on that as we have time or as part of another class. Her goal also is to be teaching a class eventually on oral histories and digital editing where she would have a much larger group of students instead of the 3 of us to work on collecting more interviews. So, the long-term goal is to document as many members of your class as possible. The immediate goal is to get the names of 4 more people for us to interview.

RA: So, that is what we've got to do here. So, who will be the 3 that are of the class that we interview?

DH: Well, we probably should identify 4 members in the event that Reverend Lawson cannot participate right now. I will give him a call and see if I can work that out but if not, we probably should have an additional name of a person from your class.

DJ: I think they need to do you Napoleon. You are the class president

NJ: Yes, well that is just a title. I keep thinking when you come up with these kinds of projects, that there are more people who are more articulate and who will remember more. I always want to promote Thelma or yourself above me with regards to having a better memory of how things might have been a little bit different during that time because once again, my memory is just basically trying to get through school. I remember Mr. Holland and I remember going to class. I remember my family life. I don't remember anything in particular. For example, you say here "6 interviews will be conducted and recorded as the starting point for a broader and ongoing oral and visual history project. It seeks to incorporate local history into a broader national perspective." And with regard to people who were active and different things, you know, really more school life, I think what did I do? I was the editor of the school paper my senior year. I

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attempted to run track for about 5 minutes. I think I might have been . . . I don't even remember student council. It might have been the history club or something. I just don't have the memory of, I think, the kinds of things that you are looking for.

DJ: And I can tell you why.

NJ: What is that?

DJ: Because he was a bookworm.

NJ: That is true and I am not afraid to say that I was probably the shyest person in my class.

DJ: Very much so. You didn't know he could talk until he got on TV.

DH: Well, how did you get to be class president?

NJ: I wondered about that myself.

DH: He had wisdom and integrity.

NJ: I remember about being all about going to classes and some of my classmates were mostly athletes who happened to be friends of mine. I was not a big athlete but I had friends . . . I remember once after lunch, we were just sort of standing outside the building and I am just the kind of person, O.K., I know the bell is going to ring in a minute, that there is class after lunch, I want to get to class. And so, there were about 4: Donald Dixon, Reverend Donald Dixon now, was one of them; and another gentleman, I think it might have been Judas Hastings who was the . . . did Judas turn out to be a chemist or what?

DJ: He is a chemistry professor at the University of the Pacific.

NJ: But they actually held me. They took me by my arms. I said, "Look, I have to go to class." They said, "No, you're not going to do. You've never done anything bad.

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We're going to make you late for class today. We are all going to be late together and you are going to be late with us." And they just did that on purpose.

DJ: Now, you will remember all of that but you can't remember . . .

RA: Those are pretty interesting.

AB: Now, I have a list here of the video interviews completed and your name is on here.

RA: They talked about that. The things they did, they did not feel very good about it.

DJ: I thought they were trite. What about you?

NJ: Well, I think you guys inserted information that needed to be put in there about the clubs you were involved in and the social life of the school.

DJ: I don't think it had that flavor of integration, too, that they are trying to put into . . . it didn't have that flavor.

NJ: It just seemed the surface stuff . . .

DJ: And you know something that you may want to capture, too, that I think is most interesting and I don't know about you, Napoleon, but Napoleon lived right on the other side of me on the other side of Elgin and I lived right here. This was the University of Houston. Both of us were in walking distance, spitting distance, and we both went out of town and many others. And I know for me, when I graduated, I was accepted at various universities. My eye was on going to Switzerland to school, however, I was accepted at U of H, I was accepted at Wellesley, and I was accepted at . . . I am sorry, not Wellesley, Northwestern and also Hampton. When I read the history of Hampton, I went to Hampton. I tell everybody I was going across the water but I went to the watering stop in Hampton and that is where I went to school, but the reason was if I had chosen to go to U

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of H, I couldn't have stayed on campus. I could not have stayed on campus. Those kids who left and went to the University of Texas when we graduated, they couldn't stay on campus. That was another place I was supposed to be going. And I said, well, if I can't stay on campus - you had to live with a black family and go to school. That was back there in that time. So, I chose not to go to either of them and I went to Hampton. And here we are in walking distance. Just like the stadium [Robertson Stadium] right here. This was our high school stadium, right Napoleon? All of our high school, every high school, had their games here. But when they had the white games, we couldn't go unless you were on the end, this very end. But, you know, there are stories to tell here and when you read it . . .

NJ: And you know this stuff, you and Thelma.

DJ: Napoleon doesn't know because he was at home with his head in the books. But do you see what I am talking about? It seems like I was telling you about Buster Kern lived right here, I lived over here. We could not go in the white neighborhood around over here.

RA: Well, on the list that you've got of classmates, which ones would be good to talk to?

DJ: I didn't even look at the list.

DH: You are going to do Deloris.

AB: I was thinking of doing Edith Holland, the daughter of William Holland.

DJ: Where is she? She is not here.

NJ: She is number 20 on this list.

DJ: Yes, but she is not here, is she?

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RA: She is not in Houston?

NJ: She’s here. I worked with her brother at HCC.

DJ: Jackie Bostic is the great-granddaughter of which Reverend Jack Yates?

DH: Where is she on the list?

DJ: 19.

DH: Do we have a contact?

RA: For Jackie?

DJ: Yes. I will give you Jackie's . . . I will have to get it.

RA: Those 2 would be great. Those are all women but that's O.K.

NJ: I am not sure of the age of Bill Holland who is Edith's brother but I would say he was a colleague at HCC. He worked in the international department. I have heard him speak to students before and certainly, he must have some sense of who his father was. I wondered when I used to pass him in the hallway, what was Mr. Holland like as a father. He would be knowledgeable, too, if you are able to get both, he and his sister might be a good interview.

DJ: Would you scratch #30. Holman is dead.

RA: Can I ask you a question? How old is your class? What is the general range of the people . . .

DJ: The age group?

RA: Yes.

DJ: 68, 69. Going on 70 this year. I will be 70. And that is because, see, our class is a mixture of . . . we are mid winter, spring and summer graduates because, at that time, we had like low 12 and high 12. And if you did not graduate in the spring, you would

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graduate in the summer, go to summer school if you were missing a half credit or something. The next time . . . are we going to meet again?

RA: Well, I don't know about as a group. You and I are.

DJ: Well, you can look at my yearbook and I will show you all the information.

DJ: Are we going to do, you said, Thelma?

NJ: Yes. If you know someone better, but I know you and Thelma would be the 2 people that I would choose who are not afraid to speak and who know stuff.

[LARGE PART OF INTERVIEW HERE - TOO MANY PEOPLE ARE TALKING TO ACCURATELY DECIPHER. ALSO, DID NOT TRANSCRIBE THE IDLE CHIT-CHAT]

NJ: I will tell you how bad my memory is. My wife accompanied me to the various reunions we have had through the years. I guess we were probably 15 years out before we had our first reunion . . .

DJ: And we have had them ever since.

NJ: And we have had them ever since. But my wife accompanied me. She sees people at the grocery store or photo and says, "Isn't that your classmate?" I say, "I don't know." My point is that if you want to know anything about the class of 1958 or 1957 or whatever, talk to Deloris. Deloris knows everybody. Everybody knows that Deloris knows everybody. I have kidded Deloris a couple of other times, I barely know you guys. But Deloris knows everybody.

DH: This is a personal question. Did either of you ever go to a record shop in town called the Jive Five?

DJ: The record shop we went to was King B Record Shop.

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DH: Well, it first was on Alabama and Shepherd and then from 1957 to 1959, it was. . .

DJ: Girl, we could not go down there. We could not cross Main St. We just crossed

Almeda. We went to Weingartens on Almeda.

DH: That is where you would have the sit-in.

DJ: That is right. That is exactly right.

DH: Were you there for that?

DJ: No, I was marching in Virginia. I went to Hampton University and we had the marches there and I can tell you about the marches there.

NJ: So, from 1958 to 1962, I mean we were basically out of here. We came home for the summer but otherwise, we were at college.

DJ: We were too poor to come back home for Christmas and Easter. I stayed in Baltimore with one of my classmates.

NJ: Well, I was closer. I was at least able to come home for Christmas but I did not really know about what was going on like sit-ins and things like that. Things began to heat up here when we were basically away. When I came in the summer, I basically just stayed here in the neighborhood, went to the YMCA right over here on. It has now closed down.

DJ: Where Quentin Mease was the head of that.

NJ: It was just on this side of TSU. Summers, I would go to the Y and stuff like that.

DJ: I see Verna Watson is on here now. They interviewed her with her mother's picture, I think. They have her on camera. That is why I need to talk to whoever is doing all this so I can tell them what has happened.

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DH: So, Carroll got information from you two about who had already been interviewed? Is that where she got that information?

DH: What about redoing your interview? Are you interested in that or you are not?

RA: You just spent about a half hour telling us about how you didn't know anything about . . .

NJ: I mean, if you need me, fine, but I would prefer you get in the other people first. But, I mean, if you need me, of course.

RA: We can get you at some point.

DH: Maybe in the summer because I know Carroll wants to try and continue some of this during the summer; and in the fall, so if it doesn't happen in this go around.

DJ: Do you want me to give you my gut feeling?

DH: Sure.

DJ: And I am being real truthful. You probably know me by now but I think in light of what I said at the very beginning, you need to do all of them. You know, it is like we were singing a song. They asked him the same questions and we gave the same answers. It wasn't anything to me that was "putting your person into it" except what we interjected, right?

NJ: Yes.

DJ: It was like where were you at 12 o'clock on February 26? At the library, and we would ask you. You are going to say the same thing.

RA: I think what Carroll has done for us is she really insisted that we get in a whole bunch of . . . we had to watch videotapes, we had to look at television series, we would look at books.

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DJ: Did you look at those interviews?

DH: Not those interviews, no.

DJ: Now, when you do Thelma, you do Thelma with her brother. They are twins.

DH: Who is her brother?

DJ: Thurmon. They are twins. Do them together. She has a cute little picture she could show you where they were among the twins at school . . . they took pictures of the twins every year. There were about 20 or 30 sets of twins.

RA: Wow, really? How big was the student population?

DJ: Oh, what was it? Like 1,500.

NJ: It went from 7th grade through 12th. We did not have a middle school, the whole wing was together. I started in the 7th grade and went through until 12th.

DJ: And remind me to show you the picture of our class.

RA: Oh, that would be great. That is one thing we really need. What about, can you and I meet on Wednesday and do preliminary questions and then perhaps set up for the next week for the interview?

DJ: If I can get you in my book.

RA: See if you can get me in. Pencil me in somewhere.

DH: If you all would not mind, if you could email us, like Reed had said earlier, some things that you think that we should be asking or considering in the questions, if you could email us some thoughts on that, that would be very helpful.

RA: I think what I would try to do with the preliminary interview with Deloris is literally make the questions up and then get her a copy of the questions before the interview. But that is a good idea.

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DH: How many of your class still live in the neighborhood? Or came back to the neighborhood?

DJ: They always come back to the neighborhood. Can you understand that?

DH: Anna and I, since you are going to meet with Reed or do you want Reed to do it, give us some hints for what kinds of questions you think would be appropriate to ask?

DJ: I will email you after he and I get them together because I am going to feed off him.

RA: In your community, were there any people in your community that were part Native American? There are a lot of African Americans that were part Cherokee or part Choctaw or part Chickasaw or whatever.

DJ: My grandfather was part Choctaw but not here in Louisiana.

RA: I will tell you, honest to God, you can explore the whole world looking at indigenous people. I am going to Mongolia in 1 year and I don't know if I will still be involved in the program but I want to tie Tibet and Mongolia into the Native Americans of the United States.

DJ: And you know something that I find real interesting: just since we have graduated and through the reunions and whatever, I now find that so many of my classmates came from Louisiana, just like we did. In school, I never would have thought of that.

RA: How long were you in Houston before you started school?

DJ: Oh, I was born here but they say that I have been going back ever since I was 20 years old. But that was one of the main reasons I went into speech therapy, because when I went to school as a child, I was called geechee because of my accent. I had a

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heavy Louisiana Creole accent. My parents spoke broken Creole. My grandmothers, they spoke a lot of it around us but they did not per se teach it. We could hear it and pick it up but we had that flavor. Our language was tied to it so that is the way it came out. So, my teachers worked with me a lot in school, so much so until I started making speeches in 6th grade and then I went on through high school - we had no speech pathologist at that time. They went to the white schools. They would not put them in the black schools. So, I said, you know, kid aren't going to have to go through what I went through. I am going to be a speech pathologist. So, I did.

NJ: I don't remember because I went to Blackshear. You didn't go to Blackshear, did you?

DJ: Yes.

NJ: Oh, you were at Blackshear?

DJ: Ahead of you.

NJ: I don't remember, in the time that I have known you, I do not remember that you had any kind of an accent. But I used to look up to you. I never told you that but we took Mrs. . . . who was the English teacher who we were so afraid of and we had to deliver those soliloquies? We used to talk in the schoolyard, “if you can, don't get in Ms. Cotton's class.” She was rough.

DJ: Yes, she was rough.

NJ: She was tough. They had to learn Shakespeare soliloquy.

DJ: “Is this a dagger which I see before thee.”

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NJ: I remember that. We were fearful. But I remember you that you always spoke extremely well. I never knew anything about an accent, I just remember you being well-spoken, my whole life from high school through now.

DJ: That was because I worked with my teachers in elementary school.

RA: You were probably more severe. My wife was born in Beaumont and she went in speech therapy. If you talked to my wife, you would have no idea that she had any kind of accent. If she gets tired, it comes back.

DJ: Or when she gets with her family.

RA: Yes.

DJ: And, you know, this is what I would tell many people at the conventions when we were talking about black language, when that was a real high fashion in speech pathology. And I would tell them, "I have 3 different kinds of languages. I have a language at work, at home, and then with my peers." And that is true. It happens like that. That is why I went into speech pathology and I went all the way to the state board.

RA: But you were involved when that whole thing about black language was really coming out. What finally happened with that?

DJ: You know, I think that first started with Covington . . . no, that was before ebonics . . . with Covington out of Howard University and, oh, I can't think of his name, but black language took off and we went through the ramifications of it then after that . . .

[end of tape 1, side 2]

DJ: . . . we had gotten into it with black language at first.

RA: Well, they used to say it wasn't a language and then, of course it is. I mean, it's got a very consistent sentence structure and all . . .

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DJ: Well, I think it has a language like . . . I think all cultures have their own language. It is a cultural language. And I don't care where you are from. Even within the city here, we have different languages for various cultures although we are all speaking English. And it has English tied into it with whatever their language is. You know, they talk about Tex-Mex a lot. I don't know what it is in the Vietnamese world, in the Japanese world or any of the Oriental languages. I know when I was in speech therapy, we were told that there were over 33 dialects in just the Chinese language that we had here in Houston. And we would have to hire different people with the different dialects to help us test the language, so it happens. It is interesting. Well, studying language is studying people.

RA: Yes. That is right. I am in ethnography, studied anthropology first. I can learn everything about you by the words you use. You probably don't think so.

DJ: I want to know how all of you are involved in this. We don't know anything about you invaders.

DH: It is public history.

RA: Well, we came to conquer, don't worry about it! We are here, we are going to take over. Relax.

NJ: So, is Mrs. Blue teaching the class?

RA: Carroll Blue is running a project that our professor, Dr. Melosi, who is in public history - public history is oral history . . . instead of going 1,000 years behind, we look at more topical history, more present time. These guys are more pros about it.

DH: Public history is anything that is history outside of the University.

DH: This is like documenting for a museum or an archives.

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DJ: And this is graduate work.

RA: Ph.D., masters, that kind of stuff. We are looking at . . . but it is, in a sense, looking at history is we are recording stuff now so when it is history, old history, we have got a lot of evidence and there is a lot of information as we see, primary sources. We want you to be the primary sources.

DH: I am working on another project, it is a civil rights project in Mississippi. It is documenting a group of women who are sponsored by the National Council of Negro Women that came to Jackson during Freedom Summer and worked one-on-one with middle class women to try and get them to see the light, so to speak, and just in the short time that I have been working on this project, it is amazing how many of them have passed. If you don't document . . . if you don't start now and . . .

DJ: Who is the national . . .

DH: Dorothy Hike. I got to meet her. I got to sit in her office and visit with her. It was one of the greatest moments for me. But anyway, I think last summer, there is also somebody working on a documentary film and she had been down there in Mississippi and she interviewed several women not long after the filming, two of them passed and if she had not been there, those stories would have been lost forever.

DJ: And, you see, this is what I thought you all were trying to do - some kind of documentary. I gave all those names because I was trying to find people as far back as we could. Like, one of those ladies on there finished, was at Yates in the 1930s. Ms. Lilly B. Davis. I have other people like Doris Peavy, Lavonia Bassett - they were all there in the 1940s.

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RA: The whole point is that after 1958, things really heated up locally. And so, it is kind of like this preliminary thing - what is going on before the storm?

DH: And I think partly, too, it is because you were the last class to graduate from that building, plus you just marked your 50th reunion which is a big step. So, I think there were a number of reasons to begin with.

DJ: You need to hear Reverend Lawson's speech, don't you think, that he gave to us.

DH: How can we do that? Is it recorded?

DJ: Yes, it is recorded. We are trying to get our work together.

NJ: I don't think she took his whole speech. I don't believe. I might be wrong but I don't think that whole thing is in there.

DJ: Or maybe she did not put it on there.

NJ: Well, it is definitely not on the video tape.

DJ: Maybe we will see if she has that.

NJ: I remember seeing Thelma getting up giving her remembrances of him coming to the school and how she introduced him, and I saw him sitting at the table while she was talking and then Wanda who is Ms. Jack Yates, gave some remembrances. I don't remember seeing Reverend Lawson up in that whole speech. I don't remember that. I might be wrong but I don't think I saw that.

DH: I will tell you that I know Carroll does want to do a long-term digital documentary project with your class, with this information that we are gathering. Another thing that we would like to use it for is the University publishes a magazine called Houston History.

NJ: Who publishes it?

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DH: The history department, Center for Public History. I work on the magazine also as part of my graduate work. That is another thing we would like to do with these interviews that we are collecting from you all and the pictures. We would like to include those in a magazine issue featuring the class of 1958 talking about what was going on with integration in the city at the time. So, there are a couple of different projects that hopefully this information is going to end up there.

