

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Joyce Robinson

COLLECTION: 4700.0769

IDENTIFICATION: Librarian at Harding Elementary School in Scotlandville, Louisiana, during the 1970 crossover of East Baton Rouge Parish teachers

INTERVIEWER: Helen Haw

SERIES: Civil Rights

INTERVIEW DATES: February 13, 1997

FOCUS DATES: 1970-1980s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1112, Side A

Introduction to discussion of crossover of East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, teachers in 1970; Robinson was asked by Harding Elementary School principal, Lillian Harrison, to help new teachers adjust; teachers told they would be switching schools, both black and white, were anxious and upset; white teachers going to teach in black schools wanted to do a good job; many teachers went back to school; workshops and seminars were set up at Istrouma High School to help the crossover situation; as a librarian, Robinson remained at Harding during the crossover; most of the white crossover teachers were young, right out of school, while the black teachers had more experience; more preparation and planning would have been helpful; some teachers refused to crossover and retired; teachers were sent to look at schools and decide whether to teach there or not; white teachers were eager to educate black children; in some instances, teachers had no help; mediators had to spend long hours counseling crossover teachers; the parish initially held Saturday morning workshops to facilitate the crossover; by the second year, the parish left it up to the individual schools; teachers who became frustrated with cultural differences and lack of assistance so they quit or complained to the school board; some teachers were "not sure which foot to put first"; Robinson started working at Istrouma High in 1978 when desegregation was still somewhat isolated and the school was predominantly white; changing demographic began around 1984, and school became predominately black around 1987; there were good and bad outcomes from the crossover; she's surprised that there was not more intensive training and orientation leading up to integration; even new teachers now are struggling to find their way; importance of experienced teachers; some administrators wanted integration to work while others were going through the motions; teachers got lost in the shuffle; teachers who are grateful for the program and people who helped them; importance of experienced faculty and staff having open-door policies; Robinson feels successful when former students tell her she made a difference in their lives, recent instance of meeting a successful former student; hearing that a student isn't successful makes any teacher wonder what they might have done better; it seems to her that there should be plenty of jobs for everyone, especially in technology; crossover resulted in better opportunities for many teachers; recollections of two teachers who ended up in

supervisory positions; believes that the crossover helped the black community but still has questions about effectiveness;

Tape 1112, Side B

Black students and white students had different life experiences and it was crucial for teachers to understand that; black children were not as familiar with certain cultural areas, even things in Baton Rouge, because they did not have the opportunity to be taken around; black teachers knew this and had it covered in their lesson plans; need for methods to get black children on target; feels that some blacks take the idea of integration too far and feel they are owed something; white students may be selfish about what integration should or should not be; meeting the needs of children of any color will be a struggle until the end of time; role of a child's general environment and home life; there have been plusses and minuses in integration; vocational education opportunities at Istrouma have helped students get jobs that they may not have previously; integration brought more opportunities; role of apprenticeships and internships; if students have the ability to learn, they can be successful, and will extend a hand to others; the crossover was a crossroads towards new and different opportunities; she and many teachers are glad they were part of the crossover; recently ran into a fellow teacher who thanked her for her support; prior to 1970, black students went on to jobs in segregated society; few career paths included teaching, being a minister, or a nurse, but positions were often mediocre; raises for teachers involved in the crossover caused excitement; crossover gave people an opportunity to show their qualifications; people have to work for what they want and to meet qualifications of their jobs; when people are let slide on qualifications, that's when corruption comes in; she pays her bills on time because she's a good citizen and is responsible, trying to instill that honesty in students; boys and girls rushing for qualifications without realizing that success requires continual work; integration has nothing to do with how families bring up their children; it all goes back to home life, family life, values, children meeting expectations; she has observed a trickle-down effect of parents being competitive; her idea of a job is something that an individual can enjoy, while realizing all jobs have their successes and drawbacks; importance of family to instill in children the value of education; integration succeeded in giving children opportunities. End of interview.

TAPES: 1 (T1112)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 51 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 22 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: None

RESTRICTIONS: None