

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: James John Batiste, Sr.

COLLECTION: 4700.1035

IDENTIFICATION: Participant in civil rights activism in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, during the 1950s and 60s.

INTERVIEWER: Rashada Jenkins

PROJECT: McKinley High School Oral History Project: Baton Rouge Bus Boycott

INTERVIEW DATES: June 30, 1998

FOCUS DATES: 1950s – 1960s

NOTE: No audio recording associated with this interview

ABSTRACT:

Born in New Roads, Louisiana, on January 12, 1947; works on janitorial staff at McKinley High School; parents are Lawrence Batiste and Albertha Batiste; has three brothers; first started riding the bus when he lived in Scotlandville, Louisiana, they called that “the black bus”; on the Scotlandville bus, he could sit anywhere, on the Baton Rouge city bus, he had to ride in the back; remembers first time on the bus at age twelve, sitting in front then being told to move back; as he got older, began to understand why he had to sit in the back; explanation of boarding and exiting the bus, blacks not allowed to exit through the front door; white people made him prejudiced against them because of how they treated him and other African Americans; recalls businesses with segregated seating e.g., Picadilly Cafeteria; details the route of the Scotlandville bus into Baton Rouge; white people kept news from the African American community; experiences while picketing and boycotting, holding signs, being arrested; learned nonviolence from Julius [Julian] Bond, attended meeting where they were trained to avoid conflict with whites; picketing at stores where African Americans were not promoted to better jobs like cashier; having bottles and rotten eggs thrown at him while picketing; explanation of people riding the Baton Rouge bus, mostly African American, old ladies having to stand in the back after long days working in white people’s houses; believes African Americans were treated wrong back then and are still treated wrong by whites but just in a “sneaky” way; believes whites didn’t want integration because it would mean African Americans had the same opportunities as them; story about his white friends who were the same age as him, telling him they learned things two grades before he did; the church helped to get the word out in the community about the bus boycott; whites didn’t want to “intermingle” with African Americans; “Uncle Toms” would tell the white community what was planned for protests and boycotts; African Americans supported the bus boycott but some had no choice and had to ride the bus anyway; white people barely the rode the bus and

those that did “didn’t have too much” but were the most prejudiced; he was never scared while picketing or boycotting, white people would threaten but he was trained not to fight; his father told him to never fear anything because when you had fear, you got hurt; arrested twice while picketing; jail cell discussions with fellow picketers; incident at a 7-11 in Port Allen that led to his arrest; Martin Luther King’s influence; boycotts worked because they applied pressure; he believes what they did was right and he would do it again; incident while working at Romano’s, a white coworker tried to hang a “white only” sign on the water fountain and picked a fight with Batiste; shop owner told coworker that prejudice was not tolerated there; he thinks they helped encourage more activism for civil rights; conclusion.

TAPES: None

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: n/a

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 17 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Two indexes (1 pg each); Biographical info (4 pgs)

RESTRICTIONS: None