

CRSTA 11A

Subject: J. A. Webster

Interviewer: David Colburn

8-15-70

sj

C: This is David Colburn, I'm in St. Augustine, Florida, on August 15, 1970, interviewing Mr. J. A. Webster. Okay, Mr. Webster, when did you first become involved in the racial crisis, I know it started in 1963, ~~At~~ what point did it begin to affect you?

W: I've been here since 1936, and I haven't been directly involved in racial picture except in my school work.

C: Now, you were principal, weren't you, of Murray High School?

W: No, I was principal of Webster Sixth Grade Center.

C: Webster Sixth Grade. And how long had you taught, how long did you teach in the school system, and how long were you principal?

W: Well, I was principal up until the time I retired. And, my first job wasn't at the Webster Sixth Grade Center. I began working with Florida Memorial College, Under ~~Collier~~, President Collier, and then, later, <sup>Tilley</sup> ~~Sidway~~, and then Dr. Puryear.

C: Now at what year did you become principal of Webster?

W: Oh, ~~1940~~ 19...1940.

C: What were, how would you describe race relations in St. Augustine as you were a young man, and while you were principal?

W: Well, schools were totally not integrated at that time. It was all black <sup>schools</sup> ~~students~~ at the time I went <sup>to work.</sup> And so <sup>I went to</sup> ~~was the~~ work at Florida Memorial College at that time.

C: Um hmm. What was the relationship between say you and the white people in this community, was it.....?

W: Well, fortunately, I have always enjoyed a very fine relationship between the whites, educationally, ~~And~~ in other ways you might take it.

C: <sup>Okay.</sup> Did, were there any problems before 1963?

W: Well, in segregated schools there always is problems.

C: Good point.

W: First, the books we used were old, we didn't get first, new books, and ~~this~~ <sup>it's</sup> had been quite a problem. And ~~probably~~ <sup>laugh that</sup> we ~~didn't~~ have ~~to pay~~ <sup>they're</sup> integrated.

C: What about the teacher's salaries, were black teachers paid less than white teachers?

W: Yes, from the beginning they were.

C: When did they change that, do you know?

W: No, I don't remember the exact year. But when I first started, I was getting \$420.00 a year from the \_\_\_\_\_ students.

C: ~~\$420 a year?~~ Four hundred-twenty dollars. [chuckle]

W: Yes.

C: Was it after World War II when they changed it?

W: Oh, yes.

C: It was after World War II.

W: ~~Yes, yes.~~ Oh yeah.

C: Now, what caused the racial problems in the ~~60's~~ <sup>sixties,</sup> Before Dr. King came?

W: Like, the ~~like~~ <sup>lack</sup> of having the right to eat where you want to eat and stay in public facilities. As you know, Holiday Inn and, let me see, what is the other place, two places, were the first place to....

C: Howard Johnson.

W: Howard Johnson, and Holiday Inn, yes, were the first places...

And that's what caused it all, they wouldn't let them swim in public facilities or anything. ~~That was some of the~~ <sup>because that was</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

C: Was Dr. Hayling the man who was ~~probably~~....

W: Yes, I was here at that time, and Dr. Hayling was here, and ~~he~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ probably the emancipator, you might say. He was involved in a lot of things for freedom of the black race.

C: How would you describe Dr. Hayling?

W: A very energetic personality. Someone who participated in.

C: Was he easy to get along with?

W: Very, very easy. And understanding. He was also my dentist.

C: Yes, I understand he also had most of his patients were white, <sup>at the</sup> ~~time~~ <sup>then</sup>, Because he was about the only dentist in town. Now, he took over Dr. Gordon's...

W: <sup>Gordon,</sup> That is right.

C: In 1963, I think, was the year in which much of the...

W: ~~---~~ strife started.

C: Started, right. That young white fellow was killed in that year, and some young black students from Florida Memorial, and high

school students participated with Dr. Hayling in the demonstrations.

W: ~~That is correct. That is correct.~~

C: Was Dr. Hayling, did he have, in that year, did he have <sup>the</sup> cooperation from most of the black community at that time?

W: Not ~~one-hundred~~ <sup>100</sup> percent, but I should say, <sup>it was,</sup> well, I'd say a majority.

C: <sup>Yeah, the</sup> ~~A~~ majority. Okay, who were the black people in town who were reluctant to be involved, and why were they reluctant, would you

say? Were they older black people, or were they younger?

W: Well, the young had no reluctance. <sup>C: At all?</sup> No, but the older were

for peck of safety, reasons why they were reluctant.

C: How about Dr. <sup>Puryear</sup> ~~Pourter~~ in '63, was he a supporter of...?

W: Yes, he allowed to have interracial conferences, and so forth on the campus, he was outstanding person in bringing about, you see, because his school was a private school, it was not connected with the public.

C: Who would you say were the black leaders in those years, besides Dr. Hayling and Dr. <sup>Puryear</sup> ~~Pourter~~?

W: Let me see.

C: Was Reverend Wright, I guess he was before he left?

W: Reverend Wright, and a Mr. Twine.

C: Mr. Henry Twine, yes, I've talked to him, I've interviewed him. Henry and his wife Catharine.

W: Yeah. And, let's see there were quite a few that <sup>were available to help.</sup> the names don't come to me, <sup>right here.</sup>

C: Right. Were there any other ministers that were prominent besides Reverend Wright, especially after he moved?

W: Reverend Wright <sup>and there</sup> was a minister, let's see, there was a Reverend Bass here at the First Baptist Church. And there also was a preacher at the First Baptist Church that they burned up his car, but his name doesn't come through.

C: Yeah, I, <sup>I</sup> ~~might~~ know who you're talking about, <sup>his</sup> ~~the~~ name doesn't come to me either. I know who you're talking about. Why did, what relationship did you have with Dr. Hayling, did you work with him? You were in a sort of a precarious position

because you were principal and of course you could be fired if the superintendent got irked at your behavior or anything <sup>like that.</sup> How did you respond in these sorts of things?

W: Now, as far as providing food for the out-of-town<sup>e's</sup> and association with them, I ~~was~~ responded pretty well, but I was never in a public demonstration, walking up and down the streets and picketing and that sort of thing.

C: Well, '64 was the big year, because that's the year that Dr. King came, and Andrew Young.

W: They threw him in jail and also this governor's mother from Massachusetts...

C: Governor Peabody's mother, <sup>W:</sup> yes. C: What impact did the demonstrations have on relations between whites and blacks in St. Augustine?

W: Well, it had a terrible impact on ~~them~~, <sup>them because</sup> so that negroes here were not afraid to demonstrate, and to march in the streets, <sup>and so</sup> ~~and so~~ <sup>forth,</sup> so it did have an <sup>impact</sup> ~~effect~~ on them.

C: Did whites react angrily to this, did they put pressure on you and other blacks to...?

W: No pressure was put on me, and most of the pressure was put on during the demonstration period.

C: Could you describe some of the pressure that was put on you?

W: In fact, no direct pressure was put on me as a principal of the school.

we did not have, I mean most of the teachers were appointed from the superintendent's <sup>office</sup> and he did ~~mistake~~ <sup>respect</sup> our <sup>what is it called, our....</sup> recommendations <sup>for</sup> ~~for~~ teachers. <sup>from</sup>

C: Did Mrs. Gordon work at your school, or did she work...?

W: No, she didn't, she worked at Excelsior High School, and later at Murray High School. She was a very good friend of mine.

C: Yes, I interviewed her as well. Now, who were the principals at

those schools, Murray, who was the principal of Murray High School?

W: When, now or then?

C: Then.

W: Richard J. Murray ~~was~~. And later, A. Malcolm Jones, a very dynamic, dynamic personality. And, then Solomon Calhoun was at Excelsior, the elementary school \_\_\_\_\_.

C: Was, is Jones still in town?

W: Jones died, he's deceased.

C: Oh, he did? I see. <sup>That's too bad.</sup> What, after the demonstrations ended, Dr. King left town. Why did Dr. Hayling <sup>move?</sup> ~~move?~~

W: Well, it made it very uncomfortable for Dr. Hayling here, <sup>In</sup> and <sup>C: killed his dog,</sup> fact, they shot in his house a couple of times, <sup>and</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>W:</sup> his family, <sup>yeah,</sup> his family was very much at stake <sup>of</sup> ~~by~~ the situation <sup>here,</sup> so that's why he left.

C: Well, he was a great loss, wasn't he?

W: Yes, he was.

C: What, what were relations like after the demonstrations ended in the fall of 1964? Was it really difficult for, <sup>for</sup> the black people in St. Augustine, were the white people very unfriendly? How did they respond after demonstrations, and..?

W: Well, I don't think <sup>the</sup> your white people, well the type of white people I came in contact with was always outwardly ~~with me~~ <sup>favorable of</sup> whatever ~~whatever~~.....

C: Really?

W: Yes, <sup>That's outwardly,</sup> I don't know any of them that did any under-cover work in the education system here.

- C: ~~I see.~~ <sup>Right.</sup> Did you have the Ku Klux Klan types, and those kind coming out here and harassing black people out here at all?
- W: No, they didn't come out here, but they did march up in the city, Lincolnville, <sup>in that area,</sup> in Central Avenue, but never Ku Klux Klan here.
- C: So you didn't have to worry about them shooting at you or anything like that?
- W: No, no, no.
- C: What was the impact on the schools? Now, you had desegregation, <sup>schools,</sup> the beginning of school desegregation, <sup>after that,</sup> ~~at that,~~ you had a few black children who went to the white schools, and then gradually it started to improve. Did it have any bad effect on the school system, the demonstrations?
- W: No.
- C: It didn't have any at all?
- W: No.
- C: What about after desegregation began<sup>?</sup> I guess, school desegregation began, what, in 1968? In St. Augustine?
- W: Yes, yes.
- C: What was, how did that go, did you remain the principal<sup>?</sup> I guess you did, you remained the principal at Webster. <sup>W: YES, YES.</sup> AC: And did you have many, did you have integrated student body there at the beginning of 1968?
- W: Yes.
- C: I guess you didn't have much trouble at the elementary school level, did you?
- W: No, no. When they integrated the school system, they did it

according to having census. My school was made a sixth grade school. And then, it didn't matter whether you were white, black, red, or green, if you were in the sixth grade, you came to Webster Sixth Grade <sup>Center</sup> School. Same with the seventh grade <sup>Center</sup> ~~setup~~ and the fifth grade <sup>Center</sup> ~~setup~~, which is paired on <sup>at the</sup> ~~only~~ to old <sup>Orange</sup> ~~large~~ Street school.

C: Right, right. Did, were you involved in that fight at all in 1969, where some of the John Birch people, white citizens, councilpeople tried to change the textbooks in the high school?

W: No, I wasn't involved.

C: You weren't involved in that at all. How would you characterize desegregation, school desegregation, has it been a success in St. Augustine?

W: It ~~should~~ <sup>certainly</sup> has been a success. ~~It should.~~

C: What about economic opportunity for black people in St. Augustine, is there much opportunity for black people in this community?

W: Very little. Very, very little. The majority of the, very little industry here that employs negroes. <sup>They</sup> You got boat building place down there, and, let's see what else do they have. They have the, well <sup>and</sup> all the places, the black women work in motels, <sup>and</sup> cleaning, and so forth, <sup>but there's</sup> a very little industry that hires colored people, <sup>or</sup> black people.

C: What about Fairchild, now, did they, when they were here, did they employ many black people?

W: Yes, they did.

C: Now, why, when did they move?

W: Let's see, how <sup>long has</sup> ~~old~~ Fairchild <sup>been</sup> ~~was~~ gone from here? I'd say around eight

years.

C: Eight years, huh? That sounds about right, 1972. Did <sup>uh,</sup> why did they leave, was it just bad business, things really slump for them?

W: Things slumped for them, and I don't think there was any pressure put on them by organizations or anything to leave, it was just a poor situation here.

C: Yeah. Now, who were the leaders in the white community in those years? I guess,...

W: When you say the leaders, what kind, you mean the, yes, the Wolf.

C: Wolf, I guess, was one of the most prominent. How about Shelley, Dr. Shelley, was he, would you characterize him as a leader, <sup>?</sup> or not?

W: No.

C: <sup>you would not.</sup> W: No.

C: Of course, he was very set in his ways, and very opposed to desegregation.

W: <sup>Yes.</sup> ~~Definitely.~~ Definitely.

C: Did you ever have any workings with him in particular?

W: No deals.

C: <sup>He.</sup> Now, Dr. Hartley, of course, was the superintendent of schools then.

W: That is correct.

C: What was he like to work with, and again, I can go off the record on this, if you'd like.

W: No, you can put this on the record. He was very fine to work with. Very fine and understanding. He did what he could to hold things together between the black and the white. I can't

remember him doing anything <sup>definitely</sup> ~~definitely~~ against the black race.

He was very fine to work with.

C: Now, he was, of course, <sup>the</sup> ~~a~~ cousin of Sheriff Davis.

W: Yes. L.O. Davis.

C: Davis, Davis was on...

W: I think it was his nephew. I'm not sure.

C: Oh, his nephew. I see. Okay, Davis was not particularly friendly in those years, '63 and '64, though, to blacks. <sup>W: No, that's right.</sup> ~~But~~

<sup>That's right. C: 24</sup> did you ever have any dealings with Davis at all?

W: Not any at all.

C: I heard that he became a little more open after the crisis, a little more...

W: Well, naturally, he would become more, more, what shall I say, he should become more open, he was running for office again. Naturally, you can't run for office without at least being on both sides of the fence.

C: That's a good point. How about Police Chief Stuart? He's still there, what sort of man was he?

W: I found him to be a very interesting person. I never had any trouble with him, he always cooperated with me. <sup>Virgil</sup> ~~Frank~~ Stuart.

C: What about, how would you say that the situation is now in St. Augustine <sup>for--</sup> today for black people? Is there much political opportunity, <sup>P</sup> ~~we~~, you've already said that economic opportunity is very small, ~~but~~....

W: That's true.

C: Are the young people all leaving St. Augustine because of the lack of economic opportunity?

W: Yes, yes. Educationally, there's no difference, they can go to any school they wish to, but they're stuck in a hole <sup>the</sup> ~~that~~ average black you ~~here?~~ <sup>hear</sup> ~~Not~~ \_\_\_\_\_. Employment situation is very, ~~rarely~~ very poor.

C: How about political opportunities? Are there any, really?

W: Uh, for negroes or ~~for~~ black people? Very little. Very little. Have you talked with Reverend Desue ?

C: I have talked to Reverend DeSwann<sup>on</sup> ~~the~~ phone, yes. Thomas D.

W: He is a very <sup>influential</sup> ~~instrumental~~ person in this area, and he is opening up many positions politically for negroes, and he's been quite successful at it. He is also secretary in NAACP.

C: Right. How about Otis Mason? Now, he's, what, assistant superintendent of schools?

W: Now, he is the super-<sup>or</sup> ~~of~~ the elementary schools supervisor.  
W: That's what he is.

C: Is that what he is? ~~He~~ He works over in the school board, also doesn't he?

W: Yes, he's head of all the elementary schools in St. Johns County.

C: Now, he strikes me as a very able person.

W: He is a very trustworthy and able person, And straightforward also.

C: Do you think he would have a chance <sup>to be</sup> ~~of being~~ superintendent once Hartley retires?

W: If Hartley retires, he would be, he would have a marvelous chance.

C: Would, now, he'd have to, you have to run for election here to be elected superintendent, don't you?

W: Yes.

C: Do you think enough white people would vote for Mr. Mason?

W: He's very well liked by whites and blacks.

C: He really impressed me when I interviewed him. What about, has there been a big difference, or very little difference in the relations between the races since 1960 to today? Do you see much of a difference really, other than the desegregation of the school system?

W: Well, it seems that the white person is understanding the negro better since the integration, they never had opportunity to know the negro, the gap was such a difference between them. Now they get into a meeting with the negroes, and now, in the educational system, if you earn a certain degree, you are paid, black or white, according to your qualifications. So, I think, I think teaching is about the only thing that, savior for the black race, because its nothing else for them to do.

C: That's a good-- that's what seemed to me, as well in St. Augustine that teaching was the best outlet...

W: ~~Best~~ Yes, that's the best outlet, yeah. And <sup>it was necessary</sup> ~~that~~ for the black people to go <sup>ahead</sup> ~~in~~ and get as many advanced degrees as possible so that they could increase <sup>their salaries.</sup> ~~themselves.~~

C: So the changes in the government, governmental positions, whether it be school teaching, or working for the city, have improved would you say? Have the jobs in the city improved for black people?

W: Yes  
Yeah, now ~~land~~ -- are

C: A How many blacks here on the fire department, do you have any idea?

W: None.

C: That's what I thought. And how many on the police department?

W: About <sup>at least</sup> two.

C: Two. So really, now that's one of the areas that Reverend DeSue is trying to open up, the fire department, the police department, so <sup>there's</sup> ~~that~~ more young blacks can be hired and go to work in those occupations. But obviously, he's having a lot of,   
 resist-- I mean, meeting-- a lot of resistance getting them opened up.

W: Oh, yes, yes indeed he is.

C: So really, when you come right down, it's as you said, that the school system is the key to the changes.

W: <sup>A lot.</sup> Yes, it is. But, I tell you something else might be interesting; suppose they have thirty percent black participation in the school system, and as principals, we have only three black principals and there are fourteen schools in the county, And that is including myself.

C: <sup>Yeah.</sup> ~~Oh.~~ How about the school teachers themselves, do the blacks constitute about thirty percent of the staff, the school teaching staff?

W: Oh, probably a little bit more.

C: <sup>A little bit more, I see.</sup> Maybe that's the way they justify it. Having only three principals.

W: Yeah.

C: Well, Mrs. <sup>G</sup> Bordon, now I guess Mrs. <sup>G</sup> Bordon Mills was certainly one who they never looked at for <sup>a</sup> the principal, and had all the ability. Seems to me...

W: Retired now. Oh, she has a tremendous ability. <sup>to</sup> ~~She'll~~ do anything she wants <sup>to and</sup> she's very well thought of, by whites and blacks, she's

- done some pretty fine things, you know. She's over Echo House.
- C: Right  
W: and counselling <sup>on aging</sup> ~~of old age~~, she <sup>has worked</sup> ~~was working~~ very hard at that.  
And she has done a lot for black and white, of aging.
- C: The Echo House does what now? C: Wheels? okay, yeah. I had forgotten that.
- W: Feeds, <sup>it</sup> and gives Meals on Wheels. AW: Is my smoking bothering you?
- C: No, not at all. Has the, is the city government easy to work with, is the commission easier for people like Reverend Desue to work with? Are they at least concerned.....
- W: They're <sup>very</sup> cooperative, at least when he asks for a hearing, or conference, they give it to him, because they realize he's a very powerful person in this community, and when it comes time for voting for various positions, they're going to need the black vote.
- C: Right. And, he, Reverend Desue is extraordinarily influential in the black community?
- W: Extraordinarily so, and at first <sup>when you're</sup> ~~we hear from~~ he, and also Twine, and \_\_\_\_\_ and, if you need any help, in connection with the NAAACP, that's where <sup>they're very powerful uh,</sup> ~~their power comes from:~~  
instrument.
- C: Twine is the president, isn't he?
- W: Yes, Desue is <sup>his</sup> the secretary. But Desue is the most powerful. He has a great following in <sup>his</sup> the church.
- C: ~~In~~ the church, yes. So the church is still a very important institution in the black community, obviously.
- W: Oh, definitely. ~~If~~ Not his church, the church, ~~the church~~ \_\_\_\_\_.
- C: Are the young people that involved in the church, <sup>or</sup> are they as involved as the older people? Or are they turning away from

~~or are they turning away from~~ the church? how would you describe that?

W: I would think that the young person is not as interested in church as a whole as the older ones. The background, or the backbone would be <sup>your</sup> the older people in the church. <sup>But</sup> And I'll tell you something, <sup>these</sup> the young blacks are very fearless. They don't mind going out and <sup>risking</sup> ~~mixing with~~ their lives or something. Something that the older people should, much more reserved than them.

C: Good point. Well, I can't think of much more. Are there any things that I haven't asked you that you'd like to comment on, either that we could put off the record, or <sup>could</sup> put on the tape, any way you think appropriate?

W: When is your book coming out, do you have any idea?

C: Oh, it won't be published for another couple of years. I won't finish it, writing it ~~till~~ <sup>restricted to</sup> this Christmas.

W: And it's supposed to be <sup>restricted to</sup> race relationships in St. Augustine?

C: Yeah, <sup>it's gonna be,</sup> I'm gonna look at the racial crisis, I'm gonna, I'm going to trace what race relations were like prior to the racial crisis and the Brown <sup>Brown</sup> decision in the racial crisis, discuss the racial crisis and what happened, and how the white community responded to the black after this. And then I'm going to talk about what race relations are like now, since 1964.

W: Are you going to remember the people you interviewed when your book comes out, and get a copy <sup>where</sup> ready ~~and~~ I can get hold to?

C: Well, I'll put a copy, I'll see that a copy gets over to the library. Of course they don't give me <sup>many</sup> ~~any~~, they only give me

about, the publisher gives me about eight copies.

W: ~~No problem.~~ Oh, I see.

C: So there are not enough really to distribute to all the people  
who <sup>are,</sup> I've interviewed, I guess about fifty people.

W: But it will be on sale?

C: Yes sir.

W: <sup>okay.</sup> How many pages do you anticipate <sup>your book has</sup> you'll \_\_\_\_\_.

C: Probably 250 pages.

W: I should like very much to get a copy of it. If it's on sale,  
I'll buy it.

C: Well, I'll notify the people over here that, you know, that  
**I** interviewed ~~me~~, I will write letters to you all, telling you  
that it, when it's going to be published.

W: How interesting was your interview with Dr. Ruzer?

C: Very good, very good. He was very open about the conditions  
here, and <sup>you know,</sup> told me about some of the problems he had, but also  
some of the things that, like people helped him with.....

(End of side one)

side 2

C: .....that would be August 1, interview.

W: August the first, <sup>yeah,</sup> I left ~~on the 30th~~, so it was <sup>very little</sup> really a difference \_\_\_\_\_, <sup>and</sup> he has a lovely home.

C: Oh, beautiful.

W: You met Mrs. Puryear?

C: Yes, yes. I've had lunch with them, in fact.

W: <sup>Oh yes.</sup> They're beautiful people.

C: Oh, they're very ~~much~~ nice people.

W: Once a year now, I'll come Winston, Salem with my boys, and \_\_\_\_\_  
~~I need him~~ so I knew them through school age and everything.

C: Now how did you happen <sup>to come</sup> to St. Augustine? Did your family move here?

W: No, I came to St. Augustine by the way of Edward Waters College.

C: In Jacksonville?

W: Yes, I taught over there one year, and President Collier came over to interview me and ask me to come over and work for the college. The college, the most, having reieved it's accreditation then, and he thought that my help, as principal of a demonstration school, would bring it up and in the next two years, \_\_\_\_\_  
two years apart \_\_\_\_\_.

C: And he put a lot of ~~inferences~~ <sup>emphasis, of course,</sup> on teacher training.

W: <sup>Oh,</sup> Definitely, definitely.

C: As I said, <sup>are</sup> ~~was~~ there <sup>are there</sup> anything you'd, that you'd like to say off record  
<sup>or anything?</sup>

W: I don't have a thing that I can think of. Off record, <sup>I think some of</sup> the older,

~~this~~ this is off record, the older.....

~~(End of tape)~~ [END OF INTERVIEW]