

FB 31A

Subject: Dr. John S. Jackson

Interviewer: "Button Project"

Place: Lakeland

8/22/75

sj

I: The first section deals with the voting rights act and it's effect on the participation of blacks in Florida politics. What year did you first register to vote?

J: In Florida?

I: Um hum.

J: In 1950.

I: Was that when you were first eligible?

J: Yes.

I: Have voter registration drives been held in Lakeland?

J: Yes, they have.

I: When were they?

J: Well, I don't remember the exact dates, but various organizations have had the drives made, I couldn't recall exactly what date it was, or dates.

I: Do you know what organizations sponsored these drives?

J: Well, the NAACP, number one, then we have the Voter's League, and more recently, the Optimist ~~Club~~ Club, these are all off the top of my head, now.

I: Were these drives oriented toward getting the black vote out, or were they...?

J: They were oriented toward the black vote, mainly, I'd say almost ~~one hundred~~ <sup>a 100</sup> per cent.

- I: Are there any things that prevent blacks from registering to vote in your district?
- J: Not that I'm aware of.
- I: Would you rate these following items as to how they're, how important they are in preventing blacks from registering? Economic dependence on whites?
- J: Are you going to take all five and let me ~~read~~<sup>rate</sup> them in the number of importance, or are you...?
- I: No, just rate them very, fairly, or not important at all.
- J: I would say they are important, yes, a fair amount of the blacks do depend on the whites for their information.
- I: So that would prevent them from registering, or influence how they voted?
- J: No, it would influence them as to how to vote, but I don't believe it would keep them from voting, ~~At~~ least I've heard it in recent years.
- I: What about fear of physical violence from whites?
- J: I haven't heard of that.
- I: Complicated registration forms?
- J: Nothing complicated that I've ~~ever~~ seen. <sup>The</sup> Only thing <sup>they</sup> you need to do is raise <sup>their</sup> ~~your~~ right hand.
- I: What about registration hours, would that prevent blacks from registering?
- J: That possibly could on those who work during the registration hours. However, we have a very nice lady who is <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ registrar, who actually brings the books out to <sup>the various</sup> ~~these~~ areas and does facilitate it, if they would even take time out for that.
- I: So you consider that fairly important?

J: Yes, um hmm.

I: What about registration being held often enough?

J: To answer that <sup>one</sup> I, I don't believe it would make much difference if it were held often, or just periodically. I think those who are going to register, as I have found out, will register, and those who are not, you just can't budge them.

I: Do you think that the voter registration drives were very successful?

J: At the time that they were held, yes, yes.

I: In what way?

J: Well, the fact that the people registered, ~~that~~ that some who had never registered before, and, well, that's the main thing, the ones who had never registered before, and, that's it.

I: What kind of effect do you think the new registration ~~drives~~, <sup>new</sup> registration drives had?

J: On the, well, I can relate to my experience as a commissioner that it was very effective during the time that I was a commissioner. Prior to that time, I, I don't know, I wasn't that involved.

I: Was there a change in the atmosphere at all, or in the politics?

J: Yes, definitely, definitely a change in the atmosphere. Positively.

I: What was that changed to?

J: Well, the fact that people were interested. More interested in the, especially <sup>in</sup> local government, and how it affected them. As far as statewide, practically the same. Nationally, as with most places.

I: Were there any changes in policy as a result of the drives?

J: Definitely, yes.

I: What were these?

J: There were more blacks involved in city government that were appointed to boards, and they actually increased the voter participation.

I: The total?

J: Total, yes.

I: What about indifference of blacks to voting, does that prevent them from registering?

J: I would have to say yes. The word indifference may need to be qualified some, too.

I: Qualified?

J: <sup>By the fact that</sup> They may not be as aware of the importance of registering and voting.

I: Why is that?

J: I think it's just the past history that they were never a part of the so-called politick, and that just makes them feel as though it <sup>w</sup>ouldn't make a bit of difference if they <sup>did</sup> ~~indeed~~ vote, or did not vote.

I: Do you think it does make a difference?

J: Oh, yes, I do.

I: The next set of questions deals with the election campaigns of the black officials. Were you able to campaign freely?

J: Freely, without any obstacles, yes. The only obstacle I had is my profession, and that is my own personal thing.

I: You weren't threatened or anything in your campaign?

J: Threatened, <sup>?</sup> never.

I: Were you handicapped by a lack of campaign money?

J: No, no.

I: Did the party organization help you?

J: Well, we have non-partisan elections in the city, so there was no...

I: So your money came from your own pocket?

J: Well, no, we had donations, mainly donations. Both, I guess, Republican, Democrat, and Independent.

I: Why did you decide to run for office?

J: That's a good question. Sometimes I wonder why I did. Um, well, I'd been interested in the city government, how they run it, how they spend my money, and I had attended the meetings, and on the spur of the moment, and maybe a little stimulation from some of the younger people, we ran. It was actually almost a spur of the moment thing.

I: How many times did you run for office?

J: Two.

I: Did you win both times?

J: Right.

I: What were the most important issues in your campaign?

J: Our number one was how the city government was run. Number two, well, I guess that was the main thing, I could almost stop right there.

I: What do you mean by that?

J: Well, the priorities....

I: Did it have a bad history?

J: .... the priorities that the city had, in relationship to the citizens.

I: You want to give me an example?

J: Well, we can take specifically, if we wanted to, the northwest

section, or the black section of the city, <sup>had been dormant</sup> ~~and then go on it~~ as far as the politicians were concerned, it was way behind the other sections. Well, that's number one.

I: In the city services, you're referring to?

J: City services, anything you wanted to name.

I: Were the main issues that you ran on, were they the problems facing blacks?

J: Yes, they were. Mainly housing, streets, lights, jobs, similar to other cities.

I: Why did you run at large instead of from your district?

J: Well, there was one reason, the main reason was I wanted to be a total representative rather than a sectional. <sup>In fact,</sup> ~~But~~ I had the opportunity of running from northwest, but that would categorize me, so I waited until the next time. If I want to put it that way. The next time, <sup>then</sup> ~~when~~ we had the at large, which denoted a city-wide.

I: But you consider yourself an advocate of the northwest section?

J: I would consider myself as a total, uh, elected official.

I: The next section of questions are asked to determine the conditions which enabled the blacks to win office in Florida. You were elected at large?

J: Um hum.

I: How many people are in this city?

J: Last census gave us approximately ~~42,000~~ <sup>43,000</sup> forty-three thousand.

I: And what percentage of that population is black?

J: About a fifth.

I: Do you know what percentage of the blacks of voting age are registered to vote?

J: I'm not aware of that. I would be misquoting if I gave a guess.

I: Do you know how many blacks actually came out to vote when you ran?

J: The first time, if I could remember my figures, I wish I had that sheet in front of me, I imagine it was about ~~2,000~~ two thousand.

I: And you don't have any idea how many are registered?

J: As of now?

I: Yes.

J: No, I, I haven't, it's slipped my memory since I got out of office.

I: Are you out of office now?

J: Yes, uh huh.

I: But, in any case, did you get the majority of your votes from whites?

J: Yes, I'd have to say so, because my first election, I didn't need one black vote at all to have won. Have to have a majority without the black vote.

I: How many opponents did you have in your first election?

J: In the primary, there were three of us. And in the run-off....

I: You participated in the run-off?

J: Yes.

I: Was that in '69?

J: Uh, in '68.

I: ~~Sixty-eight.~~ '68  
^ And when was the second time you ran?

J: ~~Seventy-one~~ '71

I: How many opponents did you have in the '71 election?

J: Just one. Last minute. Yeah, I <sup>think</sup> figure it was about five minutes to five, <sup>when</sup> he came to the place and registered, put his notice in, saying that he didn't want me to go in without any opposition.

I: What percentage of the total vote did you get?

J: The last time?

I: Both times.

J: Oh, I, the first time, I believe it was between sixty and sixty-five per cent.

I: And the second time?

J: That or better.

I: The first time, was that in the run-off, or in the....?

J: In the run-off, it was a two to one advantage.

I: Okay. Have you ever run against another black man?

J: No.

I: The next set of questions is asked to find out how well the black officials represent, how well they benefit those that they represent. How do you think you've helped blacks in your district by holding office?

J: Well, as I mentioned before, they are now represented on all boards and committees. The physical characteristics of northwest Lakeland have vastly changed. In fact, if we take the main street, which is North Court Avenue, now called the first leg of North-South Expressway, every street that intersects that road is now paved, whereas prior to that, I believe, if I am correct, probably four of the total number of streets from the intersection of Memorial Boulevard....

I: How many streets are there?

J: It goes from First to Fifteenth, and then they have some additional ones that are not numbered.

I: Is there anything that's prevented you from doing a better job?

J: Well, I couldn't think of, except perhaps the time <sup>that</sup> ~~it~~ <sup>was</sup> put to ~~could~~

it, being in the profession that I am, it's ~~n~~ naturally curtailed a bit.

I: The next question again asks you to rate some items as to how important they are in preventing you from being able to do a better job for blacks. You're supposed to rate them not, fairly, or very important. The authority of the office, is the first one.

J: I didn't get the stimulus of the question, go over that again for me.

I: I'm asking you how important these items are in preventing you, or not preventing you from doing a better job for blacks in your district.

J: Okay.

I: These are some items that in other areas were important. The authority of the office.

J: No, does not apply. I think <sup>I mean,</sup> I'm a little twisted around the question again. Ask it one more time, so I can answer it properly.

I: I'm asking if the lack of authority in the office has affected your effectiveness in benefitting the people you represent.

J: No, no, ~~no~~, There's no, the, the, there's no lack of authority in the office, it is essentially the same for every official who is elected.

I: Right. What about being outvoted by white officials?

J: Well, that naturally comes into play, but you have to barter a bit to get what you want and hopefully you can gain more than you lose.

I: So how important do you consider it?

J: I think it's important.

I: Very important?

J: I would say it <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ very important.

I: Do you find that you have to barter a lot?

J: Yes, I would. Hate to use that word barter, but that's how things move.

I: Do you find that there's a lack of cooperation from the white officials?

J: No, no, in fact, sometimes, they're overdoing it. I mean, in order to show that they are genuine.

I: So, that's not important at all in preventing you from doing a better job?

J: I wouldn't say it's important, I wouldn't say it's not important.

I: What about cooperation from blacks?

J: Well, I think it is important.

I: Has it prevented you in any way from doing a better job for them?

J: No, it <sup>has</sup> ~~is~~ not.

I: What about the administrative duties involved, does that prevent you in any way from doing a better job?

J: ~~No~~, no.

I: Cooperation from state officials?

J: State officials, or the one that I have had contact with, have been very cooperative.

I: What about cooperation from federal officials?

J: <sup>Well they're</sup> ~~we're~~ so far away, that we <sup>have</sup> ~~we~~ had very little contact, however, there have been some episodes where we didn't get any at all.

\_\_\_\_\_ <sup>And</sup> expand on that one. <sup>with</sup> That was ~~is~~ reference to, prior to our having the open housing, and public foundations, locally we had a long delay, and an incident that happened here with the Justice Department, and the only way we got it resolved is by stimulation vocally, and by

newspapers. I don't know whether IRS is investigating me or not, but we sure have made some statements about them. Go ahead.

I: So what was that incident?

J: Well, actually, one of the black soldiers who was participating, who was participating, I'll get it right, in a Christmas parade was denied entrance into a bar, at the beginning of the parade. His white comrades were allowed to, and he was told he couldn't be served. Just as I became mayor. On the day or two after I became mayor.

I: This is in '71, then?

J: I'm not certain as to what year it was. It was during my second term, though.

I: Were you mayor both times?

J: No, just mayor once.

I: Has criticism, or lack of support from the black community hindered you in holding office?

J: No, no. Not at all.

I: Do they believe that you're a token black in government?

J: I don't believe they do. I would not have been there if I had the type that way. No way.

I: Do you feel that white officials treat you differently than other officials?

J: No, I don't. Except for the usual things that go with the society.

I: How do you mean?

J: Well, there are certain things that you do up to a certain point. As far as the city activities, no.

I: But, how do you mean underneath?

J: Well, they live in a different area. I live in a different area.

And, well, certain social things, we would do it up to a certain point. And I certainly hope you can read between the lines on that one. (Laughs)

I: I think so. I'm trying to spell it out ~~in~~ <sup>better.</sup>

J: Well, he'll be able to decipher that one.

I: All right. Are there any services besides the road paving that you've provided blacks in your district since you've been in office?

J: Any other services except.... Well, uh, yes, in the area of housing, there have been some innovations. When we built the first layer of North-South throughway, we had to establish a relocation office, which had to be vigorously, uh, ~~suggested~~ <sup>suggested</sup> by me until it's finally concluded, and that way, those people who were displaced were able to get, actually, better homes. And when we built the civic center, this is one thing I demanded <sup>that</sup> before I would okay, or vote aye on the building of the civic center; every person who lived in that area had to be in a home that was adequate for that person.

I: Would you rate how effective you've been in the following service areas? This, again, is not effective, somewhat, or very.

Police protection?

J: I'd say effective.

I: How so?

J: Well, the fact that, uh, when I got on the commission, there were, there was a segregation of officers, and segregation of ~~patrolling~~ <sup>patrolling</sup> in various areas of the city. The patrols were integrated, and they patrolled in all sections of the city.

I: Do you mean they wouldn't allow a white patrolman to patrol the black section?

J: Well, no, they would patrol here, but the blacks would not patrol there.

I: Oh.

J: As usual, I mean, it's all right....

I: Yeah, I see. What about streets and roads?

J: Pertaining to the question?

I: Yes, how effective have you been?

J: Very effective.

I: Very. Housing?

J: I would say very effective. As much as <sup>we could</sup> ~~as~~ get, with the assistance of the state and federal government.

I: What about welfare?

J: Well, that was a question that was a form <sup>of contention</sup> ~~of contention~~ with the city of Lakeland, they allegedly got out of the welfare business, and placed in the county's hands. However, they did do this, which was a plus, they established a neighborhood service center, and bought a school building, a former school building, and the grass roots thing just took hold, and through that organization, a lot of the people who were underprivileged and on fixed incomes, and so forth were able to get the services that they were not able to get.

I: What kind of services did they get?

J: Well, if they needed to go to the county hospital, or get medical services, the county hospital is twenty miles, fifteen miles from here, and the bus is provided through the service center. The various assistance agencies, <sup>like</sup> ~~such as~~ Red Cross, etcetera, they are, uh, given directions there, and assisted in whatever agency they need.

I: What about the area of employment?

J: That, I would say, is effective, by the fact that we have what we call the committee ~~of~~ the advisory committee on employment of the, the ones that are on there are appointed by the mayor, and it has been very effective.

I: Parks and recreation?

J: Effective, yes.

I: What have you done in that area?

J: Well, not what have I done, but what has been done.

I: Well, this is rating how effective you think you've been in the area.

J: Well, okay, I think I've been effective....

I: Considering your participation in the commission.

J: ....by the fact that the neighborhood parks have been upgraded, and some of them have, new ones have been created. In fact, we have an unusual one down the street, which has been named after me. One of the things that I was really grateful for the \_\_\_\_\_ commission to do, and they have unusual playground equipment, very indestructive. Very, ~~And~~ I, if you have an opportunity to drive down by, I <sup>would</sup> suggest you do, because it's right next to the new neighborhood service center, which is, you couldn't miss it.

I: Which way is this?

J: It's south, the next light, go south.

I: Oh, okay. What about water, sewage, and garbage?

J: I would say effective, as the total city goes, yes. I don't believe there were any, uh, differences in the extension of services.

I: Health and hospitals?

J: Uh, same thing.

I: What about education?

J: Well, that is a county function. So they're really not involved, except for the usual activities, as pertained to the city. <sup>Such</sup> as, if you need <sup>police protection</sup> ~~transportation~~, and other city services, but as far as running it, no, had nothing to do with it.

I: What about fire?

J: I would say the same as any <sup>other part of the</sup> ~~of the~~ city.

I: Have you gotten any federal funds for your district?

J: Yes, we've gotten federal funds, we're revenue sharing right now.

I: Do you know the amounts and the projects?

J: Oh, I knew you would ask that question, I couldn't tell you, but it's in the neighborhood of <sup>four to six hundred thousand.</sup> ~~\$400,000 to \$600,000~~. Well, maybe more than that, but I know the, at the time that it comes in, it's about that amount. ~~It~~ <sup>Maybe</sup> more than once a year.

I: And is most of, or how much of this money is put into the black areas?

J: Well, this again is a question, the funds are spent on a matter of priorities. It's a thing that has been developed by the administration through the, the questionnaires sent out to the areas. Utility holders, and it is not spent specifically in the area, I think police is first, <sup>then</sup> ~~and~~ parks and recreation, and crime, drugs are the top priorities that are listed.

I: Have you, as an elected official, brought any industry or retail stores into the area?

J: Well, I would say, not personally, but I think by the mere fact that I was a commissioner that certain things <sup>did</sup> ~~be able to~~ develop here, because of the, I think the atmosphere.

I: For instance, can you give an example?

- J: Well, as you know, we are an all-American city. And the fact that Lakeland has had a black elected official indicated that maybe the racial attitudes were better here than, than ~~uh~~, that's <sup>essentially</sup> ~~just seems to~~ be it. And I do believe that several industries did locate here because of that.
- I: Have you been able to see that blacks are hired fairly in local government?
- J: Yes, I think that they have been, it depends upon the qualifications, and they are now, in most of the areas of city government. I would say the only one that is not is the fire department, and I don't believe ~~we ever~~ <sup>we've</sup> had applicants for that.
- I: Is there a problem with the getting of applicants to the job?
- J: Yes, there are. Maybe two or three years ago ~~///~~ there may not have been, but now, they are, there are. I know that I'm speaking negative of this firm, but the other areas may not be, because they have been employed.
- I: Do you know what the problem is that's keeping the black applicants from applying?
- J: I don't know whether there's any particular problem. I do believe this, that through the Ace office, at, any problems that did exist could have been eliminated easily through them. They've been placing people in all areas.
- I: Do you think they're doing a good job?
- J: I think they're doing an excellent job.
- I: Have there been any black protests or sit-ins, ~~///~~ riots in the last ten years?
- J: Well, the only, yes, well, two things I can remember is a sit-in

at the movie theatres. This was actually prior to the, was it 1964, was that the year? The year the, the first year that the civil rights act was passed.

I: It ~~was 1960~~ might have been in '60.

J: We had some rumbles, in which I was involved, but one thing I can say, is that the theatres were integrated, and all of the eating places, or the restaurants, were integrated even before then.

I: Before the...?

J: We had a, we called an unofficial biracial committee, didn't call ourselves a biracial committee, we ~~just grouped ourselves~~ <sup>were just a group of citizens getting</sup> together, and that actually, was accomplished before the civil rights act was passed, here in Lakeland.

I: Were there any effects?

J: Of what?

I: Effects of the sit-ins, and law <sup>enactments?</sup>

J: ~~I don't~~ <sup>Well, I</sup> think we, we, the committee, that I told you, was able to settle problems, ~~And~~ that really happened.

I: What exactly were these problems?

J: Well, I mentioned the theatre that was not integrated. In fact, it couldn't go, and, through discussions with the owners, with the committee, they agreed to open the doors of the theatres, ~~As~~ well as all of the, well, we'll take the court area resaurants, actually agreed that anyone that came in would be served, ~~regardless~~ of race, color, creed, and national origins, and ~~and~~ <sup>so</sup> forth.

I: Was there any legal, was this just a kind of a gentleman's agreement? <sup>or was there any...?</sup>

J: It was done by the establishments themselves, we, no law was passed at that time, although

it had to be passed later on, but at that time, no.

I: Okay, the next section of questions deals with black politics in Florida in general. What do you think of Governor Askew?

J: I think he's a fine man.

I: Why, why do you think that?

J: Well, he seems to, uh, treat everyone equally to me, he seems to. At least he tries to.

I: What is your opinion of other state officials that have an attitude either favorable or unfavorable toward blacks? Anyone outstanding in your mind?

J: I wouldn't like to pick out anyone, because, it would be a little difficult to, uh, ~~read~~<sup>rate</sup> a person that way.

I: But do you have some opinions?

J: No, I don't have any, none that I can bring forth right now.

I: Do you think that winning and holding office in Florida has been worth your efforts?

J: Yes, I'd have to say so, yes. In one way, but in another way, it was not. That's my personal practice of the medicine, naturally suffered. It was worth it, though I think, a lot of things were accomplished.

I: What things were accomplished?

J: Well, the things that we mentioned before, in your....

I: Is there anything else?

J: Well, I can't think of anything I need to add to it.

I: Well, were there any other negative aspects of the job?

J: Negative?

I: Yeah, besides taking away your ~~job~~<sup>time?</sup>

J: I really can't think of any.

- I: Okay, the next, and final section of questions was asked to compile an overall profile of your typical black official. You were commissioner and mayor, right?
- J: Ask that again?
- I: The type of office you were....
- J: It was commissioner and then mayor, the mayor is elected by the fellow commissioners for a term of one year.
- I: And when did you take office?
- J: ~~1969~~ Nineteen sixty-nine.
- I: You were elected then, in November, of '68?
- J: Of '68.
- I: How old are you?
- J: Now?
- I: Yeah.
- J: Fifty four. You can subtract, ~~it's~~ okay.
- I: Have you had any other occupation other than a physician?
- J: No.
- I: Your education....
- J: Well, yes, I guess before I became a physician, but since I've been elected, no.
- I: Educational background?
- J: Starting from when?
- I: Grade school, high school, college, medical school, something like that?
- J: ~~We won't~~ <sup>Alright, we'll</sup> go into high school. \_\_\_\_\_ East High School, 1939, '35 ~~to~~ '39. Virginia State College from '39 to '43, \_\_\_\_\_ Medical College from '43 to '47, internship Lincoln Hospital, Durham, North Carolina, 1947, '48.

I: Did you have any problems getting into medical school or getting into a hospital for internship?

J: ~~NO~~, not in med school, or a hospital.

I: What was your father's occupation?

J: Steelworker.

I: In Ohio, right? And what is the salary you recieved from your elected position?

J: Three hundred dollars a month.

I: And is that the same whether you're a commissioner or a mayor?

J: Mayor gets <sup>a</sup>one hundred dollars more a month.

I: Is there any difference in real authority, or decision-making between the mayor and the councilmen?

J: No, the vote is the same. The only difference I see is the mayor can't make motions. In other words, that is a deficit, I call it, because you sit up there, and you <sup>may</sup> want to make a motion, but you cannot. There is a way of doing it, of course, you can step down and hand the gavel to someone else, but that's a rare occasion.

I: What church do you belong to?

J: Greater Saint Paul Missionary Baptist Church.

I: Are you an official in that church?

J: Yes I am. Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

I: What other community organizations or activities do you participate in?

J: Well, right now, <sup>I'm</sup> on the Charter Review Committee of the city of Lakeland, they finally squeezed me back in \_\_\_\_\_ tried to divorce myself totally from them.

I: What organization was that?

J: We are revising the charter of the city of Lakeland <sup>and I'm a member of it.</sup> ~~and~~ well,

the civic clubs, Optimist~~ly~~ Club, and fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, and the medical societies, naturally.

I: When were the Optimists, were they integrated since you've been in Lakeland?

J: Yes, uh huh.

I: Do you know of any other black officials in the area that have been elected since 1974?

J: Well, yes, Coleman, you have already talked with him, Gause, who has been mayor twice, of Bartow.

I: I'm talking about since 1974. The reason I ask is because the official list was in 1974.

J: <sup>Seventy-four, hmmm.</sup> ~~74.~~ Hmm. Yes, uh, Mulberry, Mulberry, just check Mulberry.

Uh, Frank, oh boy, I ~~just~~ got a brainstorm, but you can check Mulberry, he was, he was appointed, <sup>I believe.</sup> ~~that way~~ And Winter Haven, Gathers, he may have been in '72, Limiel Gathers, in Winter Haven.

I: Okay, the last question is, what was the effects of running and holding office on your family, and yourself personally?

J: Quite a sacrifice. We have our first vacation in six years this year.

I: Would you run again?

J: No. I have a baseball bat that the Detroit Tigers autographed for me which sits at the head of my bed, and this was told to me that if I should get crazy and say I'm going to run again, a certain person will wait until I'm asleep, and just like, watcha <sup>call</sup> B.C., bash! And I don't feel like getting bashed right now.

(END OF TAPE)