

**KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

***HISTORY OF THE COBB COUNTY BRANCH OF THE NAACP AND CIVIL RIGHTS  
ACTIVITIES IN COBB COUNTY, GEORGIA***

**AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE HIST 4425 (ORAL HISTORY) CLASS AT  
KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY, FALL SEMESTER 2009**

**INTERVIEW WITH JOSETTA O. WALKER  
CONDUCTED BY STEPHANIE McKINNELL and CRYSTAL MONEY  
WEDNESDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2009**

**And**

**INTERVIEW WITH LOUIS C. WALKER  
CONDUCTED BY WILLIAM E. WALKER and JEREMY P. WATKINS  
WEDNESDAY, 14 OCTOBER, 2009**

**COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 26**

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 26  
Interview with Josetta O. Walker  
Conducted by Stephanie McKinnell and Crystal Money  
Wednesday, 11 November 2009  
Location: Walker residence, Cobb County, Georgia

SM: This is Crystal Money and Stephanie McKinnell interviewing Ms. Walker at her home on November 11, 2009. We just want to start by asking you, Ms. Walker your full name and your birthday, if you don't mind.

JW: Oh birth date! Josetta Oates Walker and my birthday was June 13, 1944.

SM: Can you tell us a little bit about where you grew up, what it was like, your family?

JW: I was born the seventh of seven children to McKinley and Lessie Oates in a little hamlet called Barton, Alabama in Colbert County. I grew up pretty much as an only child because the brother that was right above me was nine years older than I was. That meant when I was fourth grade, he was graduating from high school. Because I had so many older brothers especially, I was told that I never crawled. I walked at nine months, but I didn't put my bottle down until I was two because whatever I wanted I got. Somebody was always there to give it to me. I went to elementary school, to Rosenwald Elementary school right at home. I could walk to school. In seventh grade I went to a school called Cherokee High. I guess there was no middle or junior high school; there was just elementary and high school. So in seventh grade we went there and stayed until twelfth grade. These, by the way, in rural Alabama, during the 1950s were segregated schools. We made the best of it. My mother and my dad were uneducated, but they had a lot of learning. They very much emphasized that all of their children at least graduated from high school, and they did. That was a feat in the 1940s in rural Alabama for blacks. A lot of families did not have that, but Mom and Daddy were very much in tune with the times and what they knew would be expected, and so all of them graduated from high school. I was the one who went to college though. That was probably because I did come along as late as I did. As a result, by the time I graduated from high school everybody was grown and beginning their families. I had two sisters and four brothers, who really supported me and made sure that I had what I needed, and I went to college. It was a large family, and it was a family where we were taught to always watch out for each other. As my dad said, always stick together. And that's what we did.

SM: Did you grow up going to church?

JW: Oh, yes. I think that's where I got my beginnings in public speaking was going to church and having speeches for every occasion during the year, Christmas, Easter and whatever children's day. Whatever they came up with, there were speeches to be said, so you learned early to get up in front of an audience and speak.

SM: Was it a big church?

JW: Well, actually no. For that community it was the biggest church, and it probably had 200 members at that time, but it was very, very active with Vacation Bible School, Sunday afternoon Baptist Training Union classes, and Wednesday night Bible study—all of that kind of thing. It was rural, but it was not the most rural place I’ve ever seen. We had a community of people and it was very, very loving as I remember it. I’m sure there may have been problems I didn’t even know about as a child, but everybody seemed to have gotten along. It was a time when people felt they had to stick together in order to accomplish anything. So yes, I’m a Baptist, and I’ve always been a Baptist.

SM: Well, the focus of this interview is especially Zion and its role in the community and activism or not. When did you first and how did you hear of Zion and why did you choose that church?

JW: My husband and I got married August 1965, two months after he graduated from college. He came to Marietta and got a job. I still had another year in college, and he began to go to Zion that first year he was here. So, when I came, we joined as a family, and that was how I heard about it. One of the leaders of the church was the family that he stayed with during that first year.

SM: Who was that?

JW: Mr. and Mrs. [M.J. & Kathryn] Woods. You may or may not have heard their names.

SM: The principal?

JW: Yes. One and the same. He was a member of that church, and she was a member of another church. He [Louis] visited both, and he told me, “Josetta, I know you like good singing. You’ll like Mr. Woods’ church.” So when I would be here on Sundays long enough to go to church, I would go there, and I did indeed like the fellowship, and so we joined.

SM: So that was in ’66 when you moved here?

JW: Actually we went to the church regularly for two years before we joined officially, and the pastor thought we had already joined. He said, “I thought you all were already members!” Because we were going and involved in lots of things. We were young and didn’t realize that we should have gone ahead and joined in the beginning because we never as a family went to another church. We always went to that one.

SM: So Reverend [Robert] Johnson was the pastor of that church?

JW: Reverend Johnson was the pastor. Well, at that time I guess he had been here six or seven years because he came in 1960.

SM: What do you remember about him? I believe he was instrumental in the NAACP?

JW: Yes, he was instrumental in the NAACP, but there was a man before him named Reverend [Jesse] Cook who as I understand it really thrust Zion into the forefront when it came to activism in the community. I think he was there several years in the late 1950s [1954-60]. In fact, he immediately preceded Reverend Johnson.

SM: Do you know if Zion ever had an official position in being active in the NAACP or if it was individual members?

JW: Well, the only thing that I know is that Reverend Johnson was the president. I think he was one of the organizers of the Cobb County branch of the NAACP, and he was one of the first presidents. He might have even been the first president, but I know he was one of the first presidents of the NAACP in Cobb County.

SM: But it was left up to individuals to decide what role they wanted to play or how they wanted to be involved?

JW: Oh, I see what you're saying. Yes, absolutely. One thing about the Baptist church and I know about the black Baptist church, it's a totally volunteer organization. It's autonomous in its government. So you do what you want to do. If you choose to do something you do it. If you choose not to, you don't do it. If there's any pressure put on people it was pretty much from themselves to decide, maybe I ought to be doing something rather than just going and sitting every Sunday. But, no, even after I came here I remember him saying things from the pulpit about the NAACP and asking people to think about joining and that kind of thing. I also know that there were some NAACP meetings held at the church because they didn't have an office at that time. Zion has a history of opening its doors to the community for events, for causes, that kind of thing. Now that I have been there a long time, I see that it wasn't anything that was unusual for Zion to do.

SM: What did the old church physically look like? I know that it's been updated and turned back into a museum that you showed us. What's physically changed about the old church?

JW: Nothing. [laughter] Nothing. We made sure that the integrity of that building remained intact. When I first went there, the interior had different colors of paint for the trim and that kind of thing. I think I told you all in the class visit that we got a paint analyst to come in when we were restoring, and she went through like six layers of paint and brought it all the way down to its natural color, which is what it is now. But so far as the structure, so far as the interior and the exterior design, it's the same, and those are original bricks on there too.

SM: From what, 1880-something?

JW: Late 1880s [1888]. When Zion built its first church some time between 1866 and 1888 it was a white clapboard building. It burned. So, when that church burned, they put the

present structure in its place, same place. So that brick building has been there since 1888.

SM: So the restrooms behind the back were all the same?

JW: Okay, it didn't have restrooms. I'm sorry. That little part in the back behind the pulpit was added on sometime later. I don't know if it was the 1920s, 1930s, or 1940s. I don't remember, but when you are looking toward the pulpit, the one on the left where the restroom is was the pastor's little office. Then the one on the right was the choir room. They just built those two things I guess when they put the choir loft in there. I'm not sure, but I know that that little part came later. Everything else was original.

SM: So was the building just standing empty before you guys starting renovating it?

JW: Yes, it was. In 1978 we moved into the sanctuary directly across the street; what we now call our chapel. That building sat there for how many years? Almost twenty years.

SM: Just untouched?

JW: At first there would be little programs and meetings, whatever, in there. Gradually, people stopped using it at all because in that new building we had a fellowship hall. Now, it seems too small to me. But, we could partition off and have various meetings and that kind of thing. So, folks just stopped going in [the old building] for any reason. They had the utilities cut off because no one was using it. Then, as I understand it, maybe in the early 1990s someone from the city came—the fire department, I guess—and decided that it should be condemned. My husband was on the trustee board—which is the governing body of the church—at that time. They were talking about it one night, and there were a few people who didn't want to see it destroyed, but he told them we either need to fix it up or tear it down. It's just sitting there. So the people in the meeting, as I understand it, said, "Oh, we shouldn't tear that down; that's too much history; we shouldn't tear it down." Then they asked him if he would lead a restoration project. This was 1995.

SM: That wasn't very long ago.

JW: No, it wasn't: 1995. So, that's how that came about. Then he went ahead and opened it up with the original pews and all of that in 1997. Then we decided, well, we're still not using it for anything that much. So, we need to get people in here to see this building. Then we came up with the idea of having a museum put in there and worked on that for a couple of years from roughly 2001 to 2003 and opened it up.

SM: Can you talk about the controversy, for lack of a better word, over building the 1978 sanctuary and what the church went through? I know the five deacons mortgage their houses for that. Can you talk about that?

JW: I was not aware of any controversy because by that time we probably had, I want to say, a couple hundred members, 150 or so being active. Most of the people had decided that we had pretty much outgrown that building. Number one, there were no restrooms inside the building; there was running water, but only in the baptismal pool. So, you had just outgrown it; you needed something more and something better. I'm not aware of any controversy.

SM: That may have been the wrong word.

JW: Well, no, I know what you're saying, but I know that the mortgage was paid off early for the 1978 building. So, that lets you know that people came in and gave and did what they were supposed to do.

SM: I think they said it was paid off in two years?

JW: I don't think it was two; it might have been five or seven, something like that. It wasn't two. Somebody might have gotten that mixed up with the restoration because we worked on it for two years, and when we completed it, it was paid for, and we had money left.

SM: Can you tell us about that combined service with the First Baptist Church and walking to the new chapel?

JW: Oh, yes. That wasn't the new building; that was when we restored the old building, the museum building. We decided that since we had grown out of First Baptist—the Zion congregation came from First Baptist Church—that it would be very nice to have a symbolic service on the day that we dedicated the restored building. We asked First Baptist about all of us combining, starting a service at First Baptist, having maybe a song or prayer or something else; I'm not sure what we did but a scripture, and then walk down the street to Zion singing the song, "We're Marching to Zion." Then we were out in the parking lot for the service that we had. When we finished with that we went into the church. That was a very powerful service because we had ministers and deacons from both congregations doing things, you know, involved in the service.

SM: So that was when the old church . . . ?

JW: When the old church was restored in '97.

SM: Mr. [George] Williams showed us a lot of pictures from the '70s that I thought was when the new chapel opened. Was there a combined service then?

JW: No, not that I'm aware of. I don't remember. In '78?

SM: Yes.

JW: There could have been some of Marietta's leadership there.

SM: Maybe that was it.

CM: I think it was the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

JW: Yes, right, I think that that was probably what that was, but we didn't have a service with First Baptist. The first one we had was in '97.

SM: Can you tell us a little bit about what Zion's done for the community over the years?

JW: Zion as far as I know, has always had an open door policy. Somebody can die, I'm serious, and Mr. Shelton and Hanley can get the body, and they need somewhere to have a funeral. He'll just call Zion, and Zion will say, "Come on; let this family have a funeral here." You see what I'm saying? We have various outreach programs and have had for quite a long time, especially in the immediate community where we have public housing. One thing that we've done over the past decade at least is for our Wednesday night Bible study. The church bus goes through that community and picks up children and brings them to Bible study, gives them dinner—because we have dinner before Bible study—and puts them in classes. The same thing happens for Vacation Bible School, which is only once a year, but this thing goes on with the children every week throughout the year. We have an active outreach program where people actually go into the community and hand out leaflets and talk to people and ask questions and invite them to church and that kind of thing. Let's see what else just for that portion? We do participate every year in the downtown consortium of church activities. Our pastor is on the board or whatever. I guess the whole group is a board because there's only five churches, but we participate in that and have been participating in that Thanksgiving program for I don't know how long—a long time. I know the last couple of years after we moved into our large sanctuary we hosted it for the first time because it was the first time we'd had enough room. The 1978 sanctuary held about 350 people. So now we seat about 1,200.

SM: What's your normal congregation on a Sunday?

JW: Well, we have two services. We have a 7:30 service, which is small; we probably have a couple hundred people who come to that one. Then the 10:30 service we usually average about 500 or 600.

SM: That's a lot of people.

CM: My early service might have 30 or 40!

JW: Yes, the 7:30 service is typically an older crowd; that's the one I go to. My husband and I go to that one. It's typically an older crowd, naturally, and then the 10:30 service you have your younger people coming in.

SM: When was all the new construction done and finished?

JW: Okay, in '97 the same fall that the old Zion was dedicated, a fellowship hall was dedicated. So that added to the 1978 building. Then in April 2007 we moved into the large sanctuary with the large fellowship hall that seats about 450. It has classrooms. We have a preschool in that building. All of that opened in 2007. There was a twenty year span, and then there was roughly a ten year span and then another ten year span.

SM: How long has the school been opened?

JW: It opened when the new sanctuary opened. This is the third year of operation. Every year they get more and more students. Yes, they do. We were concerned this time last year when the economy went south, and we know that some people were laid off. Well, if you were laid off, you stay at home and keep your children. Now the pre-K—we have two state funded pre-K classes, and they, of course, are free. So, the employment of the parent would not infringe upon that at all. Yes, but it's doing well. Before you all leave I'll share the latest newsletter with you, but go ahead.

SM: In an interview that Dr. Scott did with Reverend Johnson, one thing he said, and also a theme that we've seen throughout our class this semester, is that once the schools were integrated that a lot of people were actually sad to see the segregated schools go because they lost their neighborhood schools, their sense of a place, even if it was segregated. Do you think that the church has become stronger after that, after the end of segregation, because . . .

JW: After segregation ended?

SM: Yes, because people were still looking for a community sense or a community place?

JW: I don't think the church became stronger after that. I personally don't think that. I'm looking at Zion in particular. Over the past fifteen to twenty years Zion has become more of a commuter church. We have a very low percentage, maybe 10 percent of our congregation, who live within the city of Marietta. Look at where we live [in suburban Cobb County]! Most of our people live in Cobb County, some even over in Fulton and Douglas, so, we are a commuter church. People use the church to come together at certain times, but so far as the church being stronger after integration, I don't think so because I remember that people started assimilating, most people did. Some people didn't. Some people went to their graves bemoaning the fact of what happened with desegregation of the schools.

SM: Both black and white you mean?

JW: No, I don't know about the white; I just know about the black. But I think paired with what you said a minute ago about some people feeling like they had lost their place when desegregation came, also there was an acceptance; how can I put this? It was not true acceptance but it was, this is the way it is; this is what we're going to have to do; and we'll just do it. I know there was an attitude in the white community, and there was an attitude of some of the people in the black community also.



SM: You talked about some of the modern outreach programs; what did Zion do in the 1960s and early 1970s that you recall?

JW: Well, again, they tell me that that Reverend Cook walked through the community every day, every day, talking to people and encouraging people and telling them that they needed to try to affect changes. Somebody told me he held a sit-in at Atherton's Drug Store or Dunaway or [McLellans] way back when he was here in the 1950s before that kind of thing became popular. I've heard the expression he was before his time in Marietta. I never met him because, like I said, he had left before I got here, but I did hear of him, and I know that he did that. Now so far as the members themselves, I cannot tell you with certainty what a lot of them did. I know what a few of them did—the Charles Fergusons, the Hattie Wilsons, and a few people who they could bring along with them. But you have to look at something and be realistic about it. In those days people had to be very concerned about their jobs; they had families; they had to be concerned about maybe rubbing someone the wrong way. You had to be very sure of yourself, and you had to be very courageous to step out there and take a stand as a lot of people did, and as the people who I've just named did. But a lot, lot, lot of the people didn't feel like they could afford to do that. There were some people who would even say I'll work behind the scenes. So if you are asking me if Zion was like Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, I don't think so. Something else, Reverend Johnson lived in Atlanta; he did not live in Marietta, Cobb County. He lived in Atlanta, and he was very active in the NAACP and all of that there, where he laid his head every night.

SM: So he had a very different perspective.

JW: Yes, and he worked for the Post Office, so for him to step out and say, I will be president of the NAACP was fine; he was a federal employee you see. But people who were employed by local folks had to think twice about what they were going to say and what they were going to do. I understand that there were people in the white community who agreed with the civil rights thing, but they didn't tell their friends, and they wouldn't come out and publicly support because of the peer pressure.

SM: For the same reasons.

JW: Yes, because of the peer pressure.

SM: What did you and your husband do for a living?

JW: We taught school—Marietta City.

SM: Do you think that Zion mirrored the trend of Marietta and Cobb County from what we've taken from Dr. Scott's book and from interview that Marietta was way more peaceful, no riots, only a few sit-ins.

JW: Oh, yes. I can speak personally from the school point of view because when the schools were desegregated, the year before my husband came here in 1964, when the first two kids [Daphne Delk and Treville Grady] went from Lemon Street to Marietta High School, there were no problems. They had geared up, as I understand it, for problems, but there were none. Now, I give the superintendent of schools all the credit for that because he had prepared his administrators. They in turn had prepared their teachers for this. It was long overdue because Lemon Street did not have the facilities they needed for the kids. I grew up going to a school like that, and in spite of everything, sometimes you do okay. It just depends on what you have, and you don't do as well as you possibly could if you had had more exposure, but you are far from being left behind. So I'm giving Loyd Cox a lot of the credit for that. And of course, evidentially, his board of education at the time decided that this is what needed to be done, and they left it up to him to work it out to make sure that it was done right, and it was. We didn't have any problems. My husband was the first black male teacher in Marietta High School, and we were like twenty-two or something like that. He said many times, after the first few days, when he met people and people were friendly, he didn't feel pressure. So, that was due, as I said, to the leadership in the school system.

SM: Fortunately.

JW: Yes, fortunately because in a lot of places things just blew up because people were just so opposed. I was watching something on TV this year about Little Rock and looking at the footage. Some of the footage was just amazing. I remember seeing it on TV when I was in high school, and it just brought back a lot of memories. The community where I grew in extreme northwest Alabama was very much predominately Caucasian, and we didn't have all of that when it came time to desegregate the schools. By then I was in college, but you didn't hear anything about it. They just did it. The same with voting—people died trying to get to vote in some places, but that wasn't the way it was where I grew up. I always remember my daddy voting, but there weren't enough black votes to make a difference. But you had to pay a poll tax, so if you were not a landowner, you couldn't vote, and that was everybody. I remember him saying, "Oh, I've got to go over to the courthouse today and pay my poll tax. Every time there was an election, he went and voted. When I was at Tuskegee right here in Montgomery, forty miles from us, they were having all of that hoop-la about voting, and even at Tuskegee, I thought, what is this? What's the big deal? But they had professors, Ph.D.s, all of this, had to go down to the courthouse and take some ratty little test, and some woman who may have had a high school education would tell them, "I'm sorry you didn't pass the test." It was that kind of stuff that went on. But we lived through it.

SM: Where did your husband go to college?

JW: Tuskegee. That's where we met.

SM: Did you have a class together or how did you meet?

JW: I was on a work program, and I went down in the summer. I had a job waiting for me. I could type like 75 words a minute, and so I had a job waiting for me. I went to the job, and he was there. He came that summer, and there weren't that many kids on campus. They had maybe two boys' dorms and two girls' dorms open, and so everybody who was there saw everybody. That's how we met. I don't remember the exact date or anything like that, but I do know we had this huge cafeteria, and he came across the cafeteria and sat next to me and said, "Are you going to eat that?" [laughter] So our daughter loves to tell people, "My daddy and my mama met when he asked her for her food!" [laughter]

SM: Well, I think a good way to wind it up might be where you see Zion going in the future and what its goals are.

JW: I see Zion doing nothing but getting bigger and better. I don't know if you have seen one of our bulletins, but we have all kinds of things going on at Zion.

SM: I've looked at your website a few times, and it seems like there is.

JW: Yes, there's a lot. If you look at the back of the bulletin there's a lot going on. Pastor [Harris T.] Travis—who is an educator himself—emphasizes education, and he always is looking for ways to involve young people because he always says, "It's our future, and we want our young people to be pushed out front and to be recognized." That's how you pull them in. You all aren't much older than that, but you can see when you were a teenager or a pre-teen, when adults whom you looked up to paid attention to you and acted like they had faith in you and what you could do in your abilities, that made you want to work harder. That's what he likes to do. He likes to involve first the young people then as many people as he can. I think he's right in the way that he approaches that because young people will leave you there standing, but folks like me aren't going anywhere. You see, you're just not for the most part, but you can't grow if you don't have youth. It just does my heart good when I see young families come up and join because I say, "Look at them, those young ones."

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

JW: We are doing more outreach. We are moving out of the confines of Marietta and the local community and going to other places. We have made a couple of trips to the Katrina catastrophe. We have, oh goodness, Sisters on a Mission, and they go different places to help out with different things. The brotherhood does prison ministry, and I think the sisterhood is about to start one. Those programs are going to get stronger. Sometimes I wonder, "Is there anything else anybody can come up with?" Then when I ask the question, sure enough, somebody comes up with something else. Pastor likes to listen to what you have to say, and if it makes sense, and if it's Biblical, he'll say, "Go with it." That gives people encouragement too. It's not that a few people over here get a chance to do everything and other people don't get a chance; he's not like that. That's

how we have continued to grow and thrive, I think, under his leadership over the last seventeen years. I think we'll just get, as I said, bigger and better and stronger. I do.

SM: What would you say is your favorite moment at Zion if you had to pick one fondest memory? [laughter] All of them?

JW: Oh my goodness. Probably when my daughter was baptized. She was twelve.

SM: That was a good day?

JW: It was a good day. She was baptized in the chapel. Probably when she was baptized. I hadn't thought about that before, but, yes, I remember being so proud because we had always taken her to Sunday School and church and everything, and when she decided that she wanted to give her life to Christ, yes, and to see her baptized, yes.

SM: How many children do you have?

JW: One. We have a daughter. Those are hers! Then the eleven year old was baptized a couple of years ago. The six year old, I don't know. No, I mean, he's fine. We've had a good life at Zion.

SM: Your daughter goes to Zion also?

JW: Yes. She and her family go to Zion. She's an engineer at Lockheed.

SM: She grew up going to Zion.

JW: Oh, yes. She's never known another church and she is not interested in learning about another one; that's her home.

SM: Did she meet her husband there?

JW: Now that is very interesting. That is the most interesting thing. He's three years old than she is, and they were boyfriend and girlfriend in high school. She was ninth grade and he was twelfth. Well, she wasn't dating then, I didn't believe in dating that early. It's a lot different than some parents these days. So they would be at church and sitting together, and she couldn't wait to get out of here and go to church and Sunday School and choir. Well, I knew, and I said it doesn't matter what reason she wants to go, just get her in there! So, well, you know how it is with teenagers, they broke up after a few months, and they stayed apart seventeen years. They both got married, had a child, and one of their good buddies lost his mom in 2000. We were all at the visitation, and they saw each other and started talking and found out what was going on with each other. She was getting a divorce, and he was getting a divorce, so he told me he said, "You know, when I left talking to her"—he had his girlfriend in the car—"All the way back to the car I was thinking, how am I going to get rid of her?" [laughter]

SM: That's funny.

JW: It is funny. So they got married in '01 and got married in the old church, in the chapel church because we had restored it, because that's where they knew each other from was the old church when they were children. It was a really nice event. Pastor Travis said, "You all are going to have to work real hard to mess this one up!"

SM: Is there anything you want on tape for posterity about Zion?

JW: Well, we have a slogan that says, "Zion is a church where everybody is somebody and Christ is Lord." And I believe that. I believe that. There may be some people sometimes who don't feel that they are anybody, but it just depends on how you look at things, how you wear your heart on your sleeve, whether or not you're looking for people to cater to you. But in the grand scheme of things at Zion people call us the hugging church. Everybody hugs, everybody, all the time. My husband said, "Oh my goodness, whose lipstick have I got on today?" We just do, we just do. So Zion is truly the church where everybody is somebody and Christ is Lord.

SM: That's a good way to wrap it up. Thank you.

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 26  
Interview with Louis C. Walker  
Conducted by William E. Walker and Jeremy P. Watkins  
Wednesday, 14 October 2009

WW: We're just going to start off by asking you where you're from and how old you are.

LW: Well, I guess I consider myself being from Marietta now. How old I am? I had a birthday on September 16; I'm now sixty-six years olds. I was born in September 1943.

WW: Where did you grow up?

LW: I grew up in Livingston, Alabama. It is sixty miles southwest of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, so if you've heard of the Crimson Tide, University of Alabama, I'm just sixty miles southwest of there.

WW: Right. What was it like growing up as far as race relations go?

LW: You didn't really think too much of race at that time as best I can remember simply because we were out in a rural area, and there weren't any other kids to play with other than black kids, so we didn't have anything that wasn't in common. No white kids lived really close to us, so it's not something we spent a lot of time thinking about or even discussing. Even though, saying that, we recognized and saw that there were certain places in the town that we couldn't go and if we did go we had a special place to sit. I guess probably when I got to college is when I really became totally aware of the major differences that existed between races at that time. We didn't have the opportunity to play with white kids because we didn't have a neighborhood where you could go 100 yards and knock on somebody's door. We lived more out in the community.

JW: Did you live on a farm?

LW: You'd call it a small farm; it was nothing huge. We worked ten or twelve acres of corn and five or six acres of cotton, and I couldn't pick much cotton then. I always went out and tried to pick, and I think the best I could do was about forty-nine pounds a day, and that was two cents a pound. So I made 98 cents that day. There was another lady and her family—and this is what families did then—they would come pick cotton, and they made two cents a pound, but she could pick 150 pounds, and her kids could pick over 100 pounds, which made them seven or eight dollars a day at that time. When I came back one year from college to visit, because I went to Tuskegee, picking cotton had gone up then to three cents a pound. So if you pick 100 pounds, you'd get three dollars a day. That was pretty good money too.

JW: Was that how you family made their money?

LW: No, my father was a brick person, and my mother was a teacher. At that time in black schools you could teach without degrees. I never did ask her, but I assume you had to go back to school until you got a degree if you were teaching. She went to Alabama A&M and got a BS and later in life went on to Tuskegee and got an MS degree. My mother had a regular job from the early 1950s, as best I can remember, for a regular income in our family. My father taught veterans that came out of the Second World War. Later in life, we did the brick work and the cement finish and everything, but he couldn't find enough work around Livingston where we lived, so he had to go other places and do that kind of work. Later, even without a degree, he went on to teach at a school called R.B. Hudson High School in Selma, Alabama, where they had the big [voting rights] march [March 1965] and so forth at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. He taught brick mason and cement finishing in high school at R.B. Hudson. He went on back to school and got a degree in the late 1950s or early 1960s because Daddy died in May or April of 1970. He had a massive heart attack.

JW: What was his name?

LW: Louis Walker. I'm a junior, he's a senior.

WW: What was his degree in when he went back?

LW: Trade and Industrial education, and that's really what I finished in was T and I. I taught shop when I came to Marietta.

WW: Let's talk about your high school?

LW: I graduated Sumter County Training School.

WW: All right. Then you went on to Tuskegee from there?

LW: I went to Tuskegee from there, stayed four years, and was just lucky to get through in four years because I went to summer school some summers. I left Tuskegee in 1965. I graduated in May, and Dr. King was our commencement speaker at that time. It was interesting because he wasn't quite as renowned, and folks didn't know him quite as well at that time as folks later got to know him. He, as best I remember, did a good job talking to us, and I left Tuskegee and came here in August of 1965 and taught at Lemon Street my first year in Marietta. My wife and I got married in August of 1965, and she came here the next year because she was still in school. Of course, we've been in Marietta ever since. In the 1966-'67 school year I was transferred in Marietta City Schools to Marietta High School. That's where I stayed the next forty years. Thirty-three of them full time and seven of them part time.

WW: Lemon Street High School, we've talked to a few people who went to the segregated schools in Marietta. From your perspective as far as books and materials went, to you were they up to par?

LW: They were very inferior. Lemon Street kids used a lot of the hand-me-down books from Marietta High School, and Marietta High School was the best equipped school I've ever seen in coming from where I came from—a two-room elementary school with a coal heater in where you shoveled coal or went out in the woods—and this is hard to believe—to cut the kindling yourself and make a fire. It ended up being a one-teacher school until they closed it down when I was in the fourth grade. Sumter County Training School in Livingston, Alabama, was pretty much a run down school, but we had good teachers, obviously, because my classmates have done tremendous things now. Folks before me didn't have the same opportunity that we had coming out of that '61 class and going on to school and graduating. Just the times made a difference probably in our success, but we had a tremendously successful class, Ph.D.'s, a couple of school superintendents, three or four college professors; all of those things came out of that class. That's an indication that in spite of the inferior education that we probably had materialistic-wise, we still had good teachers for us to be able to get to that point in life. Marietta High School equipment-wise could be rated as high as any school I've ever gone in and probably in some areas as high as Tuskegee, and that was a college. I'd never been in a high school, and up until the 1970s there wasn't another school, equipment-wise, in this area that equaled the equipment that Marietta High School had. It took the county schools a while to catch up to Marietta High School equipment-wise in my opinion. You would not believe the items and the things that were there.

JW: So, when Marietta High School students were ready for a new edition, that is when they would give the old books to you?

LW: I would assume they gave them to Lemon Street because I did see several books that had the Marietta High School name stamped in them, and that's probably the only way you would have gotten it at that time.

WW: You said your dad was the brick person. Did you ever go to work with him?

LW: I did. I did a little cement finishing. I was really pretty good at the cement finishing. I can give you a nice, slick surface. Now, I wasn't very good at the blocking and brick laying, but the cement part I could give it a try and make it pretty slick and make it look pretty good to you. Folks always liked me. Despite being lazy, I always worked, and folks always liked that in me. I always believe from a young age that if you put forth the best effort you could that was always rewarded with at least appreciation. It may not be the best job, but folks know you did the best that you could do, and people always appreciate that.

JW: Your elementary school, was it just a local school that was put together by the community?

LW: Strangely enough, my elementary school, and most of the schools at that time in the black community seemed to have been connected some way with black churches. My two-room school was located at Johnson Baptist Church. I don't know why I still remember it. The school is gone. I guess you could say our community did it, but it was a huge

community because you didn't have communities where I was located with people that were close. People that came to that school lived a half mile or a mile or two miles, five or six miles away sometimes. There was a family that lived up there at the end of that road. You didn't have school buses that picked us up. We got school buses later on, but in the early stages of my going to school, we didn't have school buses, now that I think about it. My mother ended up being my teacher at that little one-room school. We had an old truck, and I would go with her to school, but other kids for the most part walked to the school. The white kids had buses, and they would pass by us. We got buses a little later on, but that first one or two years when the white kids had buses, to the best of my knowledge, we didn't have buses. You had the segregated school buses, and the white kids rode one, and the black kids, when we got buses, rode the other one. I know that had to cost the county a lot of money because they would pick up all the kids going, so they could get a seat.

WW: Do you know why the elementary school closed down?

LW: Numbers. It wasn't cost effective. I'm sure that's one of the reasons. They could move us to a larger school, and it would be far more cost effective.

WW: So where did you go after that?

LW: After the elementary school? We left the two-room school in the third grade, and then we went to Livingston to Sumter County Training School. Most of your black schools, if you go back and look at history, had "Training" in their name. Sumter County Training School is where we went in the fourth grade until we graduated from high school.

WW: So you went to the same school from fourth grade until graduation?

LW: Yes.

WW: How was that school?

LW: Well, I have to rate it as being pretty good because, like I said, our class turned out to be very high achievers. You may have had four or five that fell by the wayside, but all of us went on and did something with our lives and made a contribution to society. I have a friend now that I'm in contact with that was a high school principal. We just talked the other day because he's retired. Well, I had two because another one is a principal in Gary, Indiana. They won't let him retire, I guess, but he was a kid who would work. And we had one that was a secret service agent for Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Carter, George Bush the first, and Ronald Reagan. All of us made contributions and did something with our lives, so the school had to be the thing that prepared us for that. Now, could we have been better prepared? Probably so. But would we have been any more successful? Probably not. You can never tell what success could have been if you had had this. You just don't know because sometimes you might have success. I think Sumter County Training School overall did a good job with us. We had a band. We had a football team that practiced during the school day. You could get to miss a class, so

everybody went out for football. We had a gym. Our gym was a clay court. We played our basketball games during the day and missed class again. If you didn't play, you still missed class, because there weren't enough kids in there to have class. All of them had gone to the basketball game. Athletics weren't structured state-wide so that you could have a play off and win the state championship. When I was in the eleventh grade, that team would have been good enough to compete on a state level in its size. We didn't have that at that time. I can remember playing a school out of Birmingham, Alabama. We played them twice, up there and down here. That school was the largest high school in the South at that time. Parker High school was the name of it. We only lost to them 19 to 18, and they were supposed to be a good team. I always remember that game, why? Because we came close to beating them. I always remember the best high school football game I played was against another school, Fayette County High School. I made two-thirds of the tackles in that game, and the guy I was up against later played in college with me at Tuskegee. He was a good player.

WW: Did you work your way through college or did you go on scholarship?

LW: No, I did not work my way through college. My wife did, and she's my hero. She is. She worked her way through school, and it was what they call at Tuskegee at that time the five year plan. If you came to school you worked more your first year and only took a few classes. She finished that five-year plan on the honor roll in four years, and she was taking five, six, seven classes a semester and managing to keep an honor roll grade average. My parents paid, and I have long recognized the financial hardship they must have gone through because as teachers they didn't make a lot of money and school was expensive. It's cheap in considering what we pay now, but if you put it on the same scale I'm sure it would equal out. But my parents paid. I did from time to time work. I got a football scholarship that came from grant money, I guess, that the school got. All the football players were under the impression that we had a scholarship, but that was just for a year or two. I paid for the other years. With me teaching I think they just made me pay half of it back because I was doing something in the education field. I didn't have to pay all of it back, so that was a plus.

WW: Did you like school growing up?

LW: Yes, there wasn't anything else to do. It isn't like kids today who can get on the computer and do things or get on the television and do things. All you had in my time was radio, and you had to listen to it; you couldn't play anything with it. Then you could only pick up a certain number of stations. It wasn't like you could get 450 stations like you get today. I enjoyed school. I've always enjoyed school. College was a tremendous experience for me. High school I did enjoy. I don't ever remember not wanting to be at school. Being at home was about the most boring thing you could do. I lived in the country, and nobody was in walking distance. We had one kid I could play with, but he still lived a half mile away, so we had to walk the half-mile to somebody else's house to play. Yes, I enjoyed school to answer your question.

WW: So you graduated in 1965 from Tuskegee?

LW: May of '65.

WW: What brought you to Marietta?

LW: Well, probably the young lady I was dating. I had a job offer in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, and I just came through here to interview. I had intended to take that job in Elizabeth City, but I was driving, and it took a long time to drive from Elizabeth City to Tuskegee, which is where Josetta was. So I decided that job really wasn't for me. I stopped here for an interview going to Elizabeth City. They told me here in Marietta it was going to take two weeks for them to check my references. I told them I didn't have time to wait on them two weeks, which is a bad thing to tell an interviewer. I said I'm going to take the first job that comes because I've got to work. I don't have time to wait for you all to determine whether you're going to hire me or not. They asked me for my references, and I gave them two or three people at Tuskegee that they could call. That's what they did that that day, apparently, and sent me a contract out that afternoon. I was in Tuskegee working. They sent the contract to my home, and I called back in a couple of days to ask them what they had decided. They said, "Well, you don't have your contract yet?" It was Mr. [Willie] Hill who called. I said, "No sir. I'll go home and get it." I didn't go to work the next day. I went and got the contract and signed it and sent it back that night. I've been here ever since. I just always appreciate him calling the folks at Tuskegee. They told me he had called and told me what they said to him. I asked them if it was good and not too bad, and they said it was pretty good what they had to say about me. So, I've been here ever since.

WW: How the other teachers at Lemon Street all have college diplomas?

LW: Yes. In Marietta all of them had to have college degrees at the time when I came. I don't think there was anybody who didn't have a college degree. I haven't worked with anybody that I know of in Marietta that didn't have a degree. But you know that would be an interesting question to go back and see when the school system start requiring college degrees because they didn't always require a college degree. I would assume in black and white schools, not just black schools, that would have been almost any place, I would think.

WW: So did you teach there at '65 or '66?

LW: I was at Lemon Street '65-'66 school year. Then in '66 they integrated the Marietta High School staff and Marietta City Schools. Ms. Dorothy Dyer and I went to Marietta High School. Ms. Ruby Williams, I always thought, came the second semester that year, but I've been told that she came the first semester.

WW: What did Ms. Williams do?

LW: She taught home economics. Again, my thinking is that she came after school had started. More than likely they had more students than they thought enrolled in home

economics, and they needed another part-time teacher. To my knowledge she wasn't there full time until the next year.

JW: What happened to Lemon Street High School after '66?

LW: Well, after '66-'67, Marietta City told Cobb County they had to educate their own students. Marietta City had all the black high school kids in Cobb County. With integration coming, they were told, "You're going to have to take your own kids now and educate them," which meant Lemon Street lost a large part of the student body. Marietta had to decide whether it was really feasible and advantageous to keep a school open that physically did not meet all of the standards it needed to meet. Even though you had built a stadium to meet Southern Association accreditation, you'd have some difficulty meeting those standards. It was just easier in '67 to cut that school out cost-wise, shift the staff, those who stayed, to other positions, and send all the kids to Marietta High School. After '67-'68, everything was cut, and they closed Lemon Street. It sat there for awhile, and then they made an alternative school out of it, and other kids came. Lemon Street Elementary, where the Hattie Wilson Library is located, became a regional school. Those other buildings were built shortly before I got here, and then they put some additions on to that to meet the Southern Association accreditation.

WW: What do you think about integration? Do you think from a standpoint of like black students now, do they get the same feel of their heritage as y'all did?

LW: Probably not. I don't know if you look at it as an advantage or disadvantage, but at that time, the '60s, you had segregation, and in Cobb County all your black families knew each other. You only had 3 percent in Cobb County anyway, and most of them were located in Marietta, Smyrna, Austell, Mableton and probably Acworth. Those would have been the five communities, but all of them knew each other because the kids, all of them went where?

WW: Lemon Street.

LW: To one school, Lemon Street. When everybody knows each other you have a certain interaction that you don't have with folks you don't know. I think to some extent that probably did hurt in terms of the closeness and so forth. Now, you can look at it another way, you have more opportunities now than you had during segregation. You can be whatever it is you want to be in this society if you choose to work hard. That does not mean that you're not going to run into some difficulty because we all do, but your opportunities are full throttle compared to what they had been. For the most part in your southern states, what did you come out to be if you were going to be a professional and you went to college? You were going to be a teacher in that community. At this time you don't have to be a teacher. My daughter is a computer person. She majored in computers. Coming from where I came from, her only job as a professional would have been as a teacher, because there weren't any additional opportunities there. In Cobb County I imagine you could have found other jobs, but I'm not so sure you could have found a lot of professional jobs to pay you on the level that we get paid now. Today, you

have a lot of blacks in here who make a lot of money. They have high jobs. Look at Lockheed, the plant general manager [Lee Rhyant] is a black man. I would imagine at Kennesaw State you have folks in administrative positions that would never have been there otherwise. So to try to answer your question, it hurt in some ways, but it enabled you to expand in other ways that you would not have been able to. I look at black colleges like FAMU. You all are too young to remember this team, but it was a track team. Bob Hayes and other went on and played pro football. But they would never assemble another track team at Florida A&M, a black school, like that team. That team broke all kinds of records throughout the United States. A black school won't get those kids any more. Who's going to get them? Kennesaw State, Georgia, Georgia Tech. In fact, I have a second cousin coming to Georgia Tech this weekend. They've been following him since the ninth grade. He's a smart kid, and he can run a football. He's got over a 4.0 average. So those kinds of kids won't go to a black school; they're going to go to a Georgia Tech. You're going to have some that will go, but they have more choices than they would have had coming up in a segregated society. Now, I'm not sure anybody got hurt by that. The more choices you have I think the better off overall you are, so I guess if I had to give a very brief answer, nobody got hurt.

WW: So when Lemon Street closed, do you know what happened to most of the teachers that didn't integrate in Marietta?

LW: Yes, some of them moved to Atlanta. You had several who stayed, and they were placed in various schools in the system, one or two in each elementary school. And in the high school you had Ben Wilkins, Earl Jackson, myself, Ms. Dyer and Ms. Ruby [Williams]. You had probably six or seven at the high school. I would have to check the '67-'68 yearbook to be certain, but all of them were placed in the school system, those who stayed. But you did have a quite a few that went to the Atlanta school system.

WW: Did they go there because they could not get a job in Marietta?

LW: They would have been placed, I'm fairly certain they would have been placed in this school system. I know of no one who wanted to stay that was not placed in a school. My guess would be that if they wanted to stay they could have. That would be my guess.

WW: So you didn't go to Marietta High School by choice?

LW: Well, let's put it like this. What really happened is they called me in around the last of April or the first of May and said to me, "You're going to go to Marietta High School next year." Well, that's the last I heard of it. I couldn't quite figure out why they were going to send me when other men had been there a lot longer than I had been. I was inexperienced. I was a twenty-two year old kid. I never used this term, but I was about to make history in Marietta city schools, and my preference would have been for an older person to do that. But they didn't choose an older person. I didn't hear any other information. I'd gone to Tuskegee that summer to work. Josetta had just graduated in May, and she had a job working. They said, "Well, if Louis comes, we'll give him a job too." I still knew some folks that were there. I'd just been out one year at that time. I



called back over about the middle of July, two or three weeks before we were supposed to come. I hadn't heard anything in terms of where I was going to be. I said, "Mr. Hill, am I going to be at Lemon Street next year?" He said, "No, Walker, we told you that you were going to Marietta High School." I said, "Okay." That's kind of the way it came across. When I came back a week before school started, I called in and asked him if I was still going to Marietta High School. He said, "Yes, go over there and make me look good." I said, "Well, we'll make you look as good as we can." So that's how that started. I think folks looked after us, but a gentleman by the name of Carl Etter was going to be the person I worked with, and he was very nice. All of the coworkers I had to work with were very good. You only had one or two teachers that didn't speak, and you didn't worry about that because that was the largest staff I had ever seen. You had sixty or seventy staff members that you were working with, and that was a large staff. Lemon Street staff was twenty- or twenty-five teachers, and that was big for me. When you get to a sixty, sixty-five member staff, then that was large.

WW: Why do you think they chose you over the others?

LW: Now that I look back over it, my age was part of it and my ability to be able to get along with people. I was never, to my knowledge, hard to get along with. In that situation, if I had gone and created problems, it would have been difficult for whoever followed me. I think I went and set expectations that were good. I got along well with kids, and that was probably the reason I was chosen. Even though I was a first year teacher, the first year I was observed, I managed classes fairly good. I got better as I got older, of course, but I think that was the reason. I've thought about this many times since. I'm very doubtful that other teachers had this, but I had the whole board of education to come down through my class my first year there. I didn't think anything about it. I just thought that was the way things were done. That shows you how naïve I was. It just so happened everything was going good that day. Everything didn't always go good, but that day it was. That would be the reason, class management, the ability to get along with people, and the ability to communicate even if you did split a verb every now and then. [chuckle]

WW: So you said members of the board of education came through.

LW: I taught the superintendent's kids, several doctors' kids, and for a while sometimes I think they made sure all the kids came to me. They didn't come but once now.

WW: Was that just special interest, were they wanting to make sure that everything was going okay?

LW: Well, it may have been curiosity because I believe they knew everything was going okay, simply because if it hadn't been, I do believe you would have heard about it. I think curiosity could have been primarily the reason. They can say, "We went through that class, and it looked like it was doing pretty good." But I don't really know what their thoughts were at that time. Whatever they were, we had a certain calmness that should have been there when they left. Kids were extremely good that day. I still remember and I don't know why I remember that, I still remember that, they were good.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

WW: Were the only problems that you had the first year or so with just a few teachers that wouldn't speak to you?

LW: At the most one or two. That would be the major problem. The kids and I got along fine. I guess if you had to pick one incident that would have been all that I had in class, but that was a math class, and not a shop class. A kid who probably didn't particularly care for my teaching—and probably the way I taught was a little different, I'm sure; but that would have been the only incident I had. The principal was always very supportive, and I didn't have anything but support. My co-worker—and somebody probably needs to talk to him sometime—Carl Etter—was really good in our relationship and in working together. He was there when integration occurred, and he would be able to give his side in terms of what and how they prepared for it. I've been told many, many things, and most of it always ends up about the same in terms of the kids coming and making sure that they had some senior boys to escort the two young ladies from class to class. I've always given our local leadership an awful lot of credit for making sure that integration went as smoothly as it could go. I think they did a good job in that process. There's a black and white community working together in that process, and the two kids from what I understand had no problems. Daphne Delk, the one who graduated—because [Treville] Grady did not graduate from Marietta High School—but I understand that Daphne Delk got a standing ovation when she graduated from the high school. Your local leadership had to be given a bunch of credit for a job that was well done to make sure the lid stayed on things and folks didn't end up out in the streets fussing and fighting, shooting and standing in school doors as they had in some communities. Having said that, you had a 3 percent black population, which was not a threat to your white population that was 97 percent at that time. That made a big difference, you know. Blacks didn't have a lot of problems registering to vote in areas where you didn't have a lot of them. Your problem came in areas where you had 40 or 45 or 50 percent where they could make a difference. I would assume that's kind of what happened, even in school desegregation.

WW: Were there ever any problems between students as far as white and black that you can remember?

LW: I've run that back through my mind many times. I've done many interviews that dealt with that, and to my knowledge there were never any real racial problems between students. Students can work out most anything, youngsters can. If you're going to have problems, parents are usually the biggest instigators because they love their kids and they want to do the best they can for them, and therefore they create sometimes things that don't need to be created. I guess if you had to look at the biggest problem that black kids had, it was feeding into the athletic program because Lemon Street had a tremendous basketball program and football, and a lot of those kids didn't get to play when they went to Marietta High School. It may not have had a lot to do with athletic skills, but just

simply not fitting into the system that had been established for the kids from seventh or eighth or ninth grade. Football is a game where if you're not in the system and you don't know the system, it's going to take you awhile to catch on to that system, so I think that probably would have been the biggest point that stood out. I understand that the gentleman that coached the team was good to the kids, especially the black kids that made it. I don't know of any major problems that black kids had.

WW: So overall the whole transition for everybody was pretty well done?

LW: It was good, overall from what I could tell.

WW: Would you attribute most of that to the school system or the community as a whole?

LW: I attribute that to the community as a whole. They could have made it a lot worse. I attribute it to the school administrators for making sure everything was done fairly and just kind of keeping tabs on what was going on. I thought everything went smoothly.

WW: I want to touch a little bit on Zion. When ya'll first came to Marietta, did you go straight to Zion or did you go other places?

LW: I visited two churches, Cole Street and Zion. I loved Zion's choir. They could sing, even now, still can. I think it was '69 or '70 when we joined. We had, by that time, been going on a regular basis, and Pastor [Robert] Johnson stopped by the house one day and said, "Y'all need to come on in down there and join; you're coming every Sunday; it ain't going to hurt you to join." So that's what we did and that's where we've been ever since.

WW: What got y'all started on the preserving of the old building?

LW: The museum?

WW: Yes.

LW: Well, I was on the trustee board, and I made the statement that Zion is a lead church in the community, and we either need to tear that building down or fix it. It had been condemned. Of course, when you make a statement like that, folks pick you to be the one to fix it if it's going to be fixed. Are you going to be the one to tear it down if they choose not to fix it? Dr. Scott and I were on a committee together, and I told him that. His wife Kathy called and said, "Y'all can't tear that building down. They give out grants from the state to restore buildings like that." So we wrote a grant, and Pastor Travis called the church conference together to approve it because we had to match the grant that they gave to us. We wrote it, and the church approved it and allotted the money to do the building. We turned in the grant, and we got the money for it. The church had already allotted so many dollars, so we got started. We called in an architect—I still laugh about this—and him we needed him to come in and do some work and that I couldn't promise him he was going to get paid. That still amazes me. His name is Jim Cothran. I could tell he was a little reluctant, but he got involved, and he did

all the architectural work that we needed to do to turn into the state. They ended up giving us \$35,000, and the project itself was supposed to be \$70,000, but we paid between \$140,000 and \$150,000 to get the restoration done. That cost us, but we had \$7,000 or \$8,000 left over that we could use to keep up the building.

WW: Did the church just pull the money out of their account or did they do fundraisers?

LW: We raised money. The first \$40,000 just shifted in the church's account, but we set up what we called team captains. Each month they were supposed to raise as much as they could raise to go towards the restoration of the building. Like I said, when we finished, in January we had raised \$3,000 or \$4,000, and that was being done every month, so we got that done and built the building, and all twelve team captains came through. That's how we set up the financing of it.

WW: All right.

LW: We just had team captains who could do whatever they wanted to do to raise the money for us to keep the building going. Many folks donated at that time too.

WW: Right. Who did the work on the building to get it fixed?

LW: I don't recall the contractor that was in total charge, but he donated his time because we were supposed to give him, I think, 10 or 15 percent of the total cost. When we finished, he said, "Louis, that's going to be my donation." So he donated his time because we would not have had the \$7,000 or \$8,000 left over. We would have had to raise \$5,000 or \$6,000 more to pay him for his time and effort.

WW: So he did all that work for free.

LW: He did all that work for nothing, for free.

WW: Very good.

LW: We had several other craftsmen to come in and do things and didn't charge us. It would have been probably \$170,000. In fact, we spent an actual amount between \$140,000 and \$150,000, and there would have been a little bit more than that if they had not donated their time and effort to do what they did.

WW: What year did you retire from teaching?

LW: I retired in 1999 full time and I worked seven more years part time, so what would that be, 2006?

WW: When you left, as far as the population of white and black in both the staff and the student body, had it started to equal out? From the 3 percent that it was?

LW: Well, your student body is totally different. You're student body, when I left probably had 24-26 percent white kids, 42-44 percent black kids, 29-30 percent Hispanics, and probably 5 percent others. That's the ballpark figure. You're student body had totally changed. Now, your staff has not. Your staff has remained pretty much a white staff. Out of 140-150 staff members, you probably have fifteen black staff members.

WW: Why do you think that is?

LW: I don't know. My guess is you don't have as many blacks going into education programs. That's one reason. But now be reminded that black school systems still find black teachers to come in and teach. Therefore, you know some are there. I don't know if we just don't look in all the right places that need to be looked to find the kind of teachers that we are looking for or just the numbers are not there to go into the field. See, forty years ago, my daughter, instead of being an engineer at Lockheed, would probably have been a teacher, and I would assume there are a lot of black kids that would have been teachers, but have chosen to go into other professions. I would think that would be one situation. The other situation of course, I would think we may not have looked in all of the right places; we may not have recruited black teachers where we needed to recruit them to get them to go into the field of education. I think that would be the second issue that we'd be looking at because I'm sure some are there, but you're not in the right place to get them to come.

WW: What's caused the big rise in the student numbers as far as African-American students?

LW: Well, I guess that's probably two-fold. That probably has changed just a tad now because they tore down all the projects, but you probably had more black parents moving into the City of Marietta than you did white parents. You had more white parents that probably sent their kids to private schools for various reasons, and you had an influx of Hispanic kids that moved into the area. If you have more blacks moving in and you have more Hispanic kids moving in, then that's going to give you a different balance. I would think that our school system would be pretty close to what I gave you in terms of the total number, not just at the high school but pretty much all over number-wise. Some schools may have more one than the other. That's just the way neighborhood schools work, but I would think that system-wide Marietta High School would represent and your seventh or eighth grade middle school would represent pretty much what your student body would look like system-wide because they are combined one and the same.

WW: Do you have anything else?

JW: I think I'm good.

WW: All right, just to close off, how do you feel as far as the present about race relations? Of course, we have our first African-American president. There's definitely been progress, but how do you feel as far as where we are today? Is it far enough?

LW: Well, I don't think we're going to ever be far enough along with race relations because I don't think mankind can communicate on the level that we need to communicate en masse to be happy with each other. I'm not just looking at race. I'm looking at religion. I'm looking at all of those things that are involved. The people in the world fight each other, and they can be the same race, just different religions. Of course, we've made progress, and I suspect that we're at the highest level we're going to ever be in this country for awhile and during my lifetime anyway. During my lifetime I never expected to see a black president, but obviously there were enough folks who voted for him that thought that he could do a good job. The think about American politics now is not just because Obama is in office; the thing about American politics now is we seem to hate each other; Republicans hate Democrats and Democrats hate Republicans, and those two parties don't appear to really be interested in what's best for the country.

JW: They just want to smear each other.

LW: They just want to smear each other and talk about each other, and the sad thing about it is, they'll be doing the same thing when the parties change. You see, Obama gave the stimulus package and the conservatives complained about how bad it is. All right, when George Bush was in there, he gave one, and the conservatives supported it and the liberals kicked that to no end, you know. If they had us at heart, they would sit down and say this is best for the American people, and this is what we're going to do. Well, we aren't getting anything. Y'all may live to see what I'm going to tell you now. I won't live to see it. I'm too old to see it. This country will be destroyed from within with us fighting among ourselves. It's not going to be a power that can come from outside, you know, and throw us. We're too strong a nation for that. But we do not appear to be too strong a nation to get overthrown from within. If we don't in some way come up with a way for me and you to sit down and figure out what is best for the people that we're supposed to serve, they're up there all of them too interested in saying, well, we can't do it this way. Look at the war in Afghanistan, now, President Bush sent us there. Democrats and Republican voted for it. Now all of a sudden you have a big divide on what's going to happen, and all of that now is Obama's responsibility to solve. Well, if they get together, it would probably be a lot easier to solve. I think President Obama will do a good job. I think it's going to be difficult. I think race relations with him will be kind of revved up and I think it's going to probably be a little worse than it ordinarily would be simply because folks who will not say anything from a racial point of view will now say something, and they want to be heard too. And the race groups that you have that folks wouldn't listen to, whether black or white race group, now folks are listening to them, and that's going to make it a little bit worse, I think. Did that make sense?

JW: Yes sir, definitely. Thank you very much for sitting down with us.

LW: Thank you, sir. I've enjoyed it tremendously. Good talking to you all.

WW: Good talking to you too.

END OF INTERVIEW

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