

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Joseph A. Delpit **COLLECTION:** 4700.0626

IDENTIFICATION: Graduate of McKinley High School, Class of 1957; Baton Rouge City Council 1968-1976; Louisiana State Representative 1976-1992; Owner of Chicken Shack in Baton Rouge 1959-present.

INTERVIEWER: Roderick Jones and Shawnda Hollins

SERIES: McKinley High School: History of McKinley High School

INTERVIEW DATES: June 8, 1995

FOCUS DATES: 1940 - 1995

ABSTRACT:

Session I

Tape 910, Side A

Born January 9, 1940, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Thomas Henry Delpit and Ed Mae Lamotte Delpit Butler; mother attended McKinley High School, graduated Summa Cum Laude from Southern University and Louisiana State University (LSU), and earned a Master's degree; father achieved G.E.D. as an adult; father started a restaurant called the Chicken Shack; mother worked at the Chicken Shack before furthering her education; left St. Francis Xavier Catholic School for McKinley High School in 1957; describes a typical day at McKinley; discusses the importance of academics at McKinley and emphasis teachers placed on learning; played basketball and practiced after school late into the night; discusses lack of opportunities many students had outside of their family's trades, such as carpentry, bricklaying, electrical work, and plumbing; discusses lack of opportunities for women in particular, outside of domestic work; was involved in community projects and volunteer work; discusses the role of sports at McKinley; McKinley were co-champions in the United States Championship of Basketball Teams in 1957; football was the dominant sport at McKinley; McKinley produced multiple professional basketball and football players; discusses the rivalry between McKinley and Capitol High School; despite tension and "scrimmages" between McKinley and Capitol students, there were no weapons present in fights; discusses how, after graduating, McKinley and Capitol students would often become friends and work together; describes himself as an average student; compares his experience at St. Francis Xavier to McKinley; teachers at McKinley placed more emphasis on academics and education than teachers at St. Francis Xavier; lists his father, Coach Carl Stewart, Coach George Mencer, Reverend T.J. Jemison, and his grandfather, Marshall LaMotte, as his role models; was also inspired by fellow student General Jude Patin, who went on to become Secretary of the Department of Transportation and Development; Coach Doris Hardnett was another role model; discusses how he became interested in politics through participation in community volunteer work; was involved as a "soldier" in "The War on Poverty" program started by U.S. President Lyndon Johnson; friends

encouraged him to seek Office of City Council; was elected to the Baton Rouge City Council At-Large in 1968; left City Council in 1976 and was elected to the House of Representatives that same year; was also elected to the Democratic Convention in the sixth district, which includes East Baton Rouge Parish, Livingston Parish, and Tangipahoa Parish; describes several memorable moments at McKinley, particularly how the teachers served as role models; recalls an inspirational quote from Coach Stewart that encouraged and motivated him; recalls a time when Coach Mencer stood up for him after being wrongfully accused of throwing a rock through a window after a McKinley/Capitol game; recalls a lesson he learned to not lie after a confrontation with McKinley Assistant Principal J.D. Young; recalls meeting his wife at McKinley; discusses his favorite teachers, Ms. Joseph, Ms. Clark, and Coach Stewart; discusses his life after leaving McKinley High; initially wanted to join the Navy, but changed his mind and attended college; dropped out of college and briefly moved to live with his uncle in California; his father “tricked” him into returning to Baton Rouge to attend college by promising him a car; dropped out of college again and began working at D.H. Holmes department store in downtown Baton Rouge, on Third Street; got married at seventeen when his wife was fifteen and still in high school; he and his wife worked at his father’s Chicken Shack and took over when his father got sick; father died when he was eighteen; he and his wife bought his mother and sisters out of the business and ran it together; discusses his City Council work as Chairman of the South Baton Rouge Advisory Committee; lists businesses he owns, including additional Chicken Shack locations, Lettsworth Oil Field Services (named after the street his father’s original Chicken Shack was on), and Hillhaven Nursing Centers: East and West; describes his father’s habit of feeding children who could not pay for meals at the Chicken Shack; discusses how McKinley and its graduates affected the history of Baton Rouge, the political life of African Americans, and McKinley students’ roles in the Civil Rights Movement; recalls H. Rap Brown, a former McKinley student who became a prominent Civil Rights leader; discusses other people in the South Baton Rouge community that were heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement, such as Reverend Jemison, Attorney Alex Pitcher, and Attorney Johnny Jones; describes how McKinley differed from the time he attended, specifically making note of the lack of drugs in his time, the increase in white teachers after desegregation, and an overall lack of love and understanding as compared to his time.

Tape 910, Side B

Discusses how he would change McKinley to better represent the community by hiring majority Black teachers; discusses how he would like to put the love that is missing back into McKinley; leaves words of encouragement to current and future graduates; lists Coach Stewart, Coach Mencer, and his mother as potential interviewees; remembers Teddy Graham, a former Capitol student who later became an assistant principal at Kenilworth Science and Technology Charter School; end of interview.

TAPES: T910

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 50 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 27 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Interview notes, words list, and interview excerpts.

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