

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: George E. Mencer, Jr.

COLLECTION: 4700.0621

IDENTIFICATION: McKinley High School graduate, Class of 1937; Former McKinley High teacher and football coach, 1946-1960; Former principal of Scotlandville and Valley Park Junior High Schools

INTERVIEWER: Roderick Jones

SERIES: McKinley High Oral History Project – History of McKinley High

INTERVIEW DATE: June 13, 1995

FOCUS DATES: 1930s-1960s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 905, Side A

Introduction; born in 1917, in Burtville, Louisiana; parents George Mencer and Octavia Jones Mencer had no education; mother was a housekeeper for white family, father was a common laborer who also worked at a Central Lumber Company; a common laborer's work is "whatever he or she is told to do"; attended McKinley High School from 1933 to 1937; McKinley went from eighth to eleventh grade and was the only school in the area for African Americans at that time; he played on the football team under Coach J.L. Kraft; he praises McKinley's academics; school dress code: girls wore dresses, boys wore clean pants and shirts; explanation of khaki pants; traveled to play football games in Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, and other parts of Louisiana, against other colored high schools; coach never lost a game while Mencer was playing for him; traveled to games on yellow school bus, often to play other African American schools in the New Orleans area; student government positions in the '30s required good academic standing; Mencer was an average student; attending Leland College in Baker, Louisiana, 1937-1941; Leland and Southern University were the only colleges in the area for African Americans; Mencer's role model was the preacher Gardner C. Taylor, former pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church; Mencer played football with Eddie Robinson at McKinley and Leland College, Robinson got him interested in coaching; drafted into the army in 1941, served until 1945; taught P.E. and coached athletics at McKinley from 1946 to 1960; was assistant principal at Scotlandville Junior High School 1960 to 1967, principal of Valley Park Junior High School in Baton Rouge from 1967 to 1979; as coach at McKinley, team won the 1953 and '54 state championship; poor facilities at that time, practiced football in vacant lot; local competition began when Capitol High, another school for African Americans, was built circa 1950; Southern University Laboratory School also got a team; Capitol High built because McKinley was so crowded; explanation of platoon system, which divided student body into two groups, one that attended in the morning, the other in the afternoon; when Capitol was built, half the McKinley student body transferred over there and former teammates became competitors; most gratifying

moment as a student was when he made the all-state football team; favorite teachers at McKinley: J.D. Young, L.M. Young, A.E.. Carter, Coach Kraft; football accomplishments at Leland College included a pass-kicking record; ranks held in army, he was discharged as a provost marshal; McKinley was outstanding in athletics and academics, and so are many of its graduates; politicians John Guidry and Cleo Fields are McKinley graduates; George Eames, former president of the local chapter of the NAACP, is a McKinley graduate; improvements in facilities since his coaching days at McKinley; advises present day McKinley students to plan their future wisely and get all the education they can; recommendations of other people to talk to about McKinley; end of interview.

TAPES: 1 (T905)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 30 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 16 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Correspondence; interviewer's notes and comments (2 pgs); McKinley class of 1947 40th Reunion booklet (24 pgs)

RESTRICTIONS: None