

## T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

### ABSTRACT

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Alexander Pierre Tureaud, Jr.

**COLLECTION:** 4700.0245

**IDENTIFICATION:** First African American to enroll at Louisiana State University as an undergraduate, son of prominent civil rights attorney, A.P. Tureaud.

**INTERVIEWER:** Rachel Emanuel-Wallace

**SERIES:** University History - Integration and the African American Experience

**INTERVIEW DATE:** April 25, 1993

**FOCUS DATES:** 1950s, 1953

### ABSTRACT:

#### **Tape 375, Side A**

Expectations of college life; parents' experience at Howard University; father always talked highly of LSU; choice to attend LSU because it was the best school, close to home, "at a terrific price"; father never recruited him to attend LSU and didn't make it seem like attending would be an issue; father filed petition for Tureaud to attend while family was in New York; "then the stuff hit the newspaper and we had to go back to start the trial"; guidance counselor at his high school thought his intention to attend LSU was a joke; sent in application and LSU replied that they couldn't take him because he was negro; familiarity with his father's previous cases to integrate LSU graduate and law schools; father was a support system to the African American students at LSU he had helped to attend; his first day at LSU "was a horror story"; typical excitement of a student about to go to college; he never had the opportunity to be recruited and courted by LSU as most students were, atmosphere was the opposite for him, "Don't come. You're not welcome, go somewhere else"; refused admittance because of a paperwork glitch; met upon arrival by vice president or vice chancellor and the press; admitted the next day; escorted from president's office to his dorm room in the stadium; fifty students queued up outside his room waiting to clip his hair; he was excited to take part in this tradition and thought these students would become friends; however, students wouldn't talk to him or answer his questions, "like I was an inanimate object that they were performing this ritual on"; parents took him to a barber shop to fix his hair; excited to get back to campus and send his parents home so he could make friends, but all the students had gone; "I was absolutely alone . . . that was a severe blow"; vice president came to escort him to classes but he didn't want that, it would cause more disruption and he wanted to blend in; "from that moment on, the nightmare began"; awareness of LSU traditions like head shaving, beanies, etc. and wanting to take part but "it just didn't happen"; classes he took; physical education class with a swimming test; the *Reveille* announced "First Black to swim in pool"; letters to the *Reveille* saying he should be fed to Mike the Tiger; professors acted like he didn't exist; math teacher who announced that she had never taught a "nigra" and didn't know how she would make it through; students sat far away from him; "it got to be very lonely and depressing"; some students didn't know who he was because many international students looked "more swarthy" than he did; racquetball partner who didn't

realize who Tureaud was and said he hoped he didn't get "that nigger" as his partner; Catholic Newman Center on campus were the only ones supportive of him; friendship with married African American graduate students; wife was pregnant and verbally abused on campus, "what are you having? A baby mule or a gorilla?"; Tureaud wasn't afraid and didn't feel a threat of physical harm; harassment he endured in the dorms; his loneliness; doubts about how long he could stand the situation but wanting to "see the thing through"; parents visited frequently and he had other African American friends in Baton Rouge; trouble he had in Spanish class and unwillingness of professor to help him; overall feeling of being unconnected from everyone else around him; parents were very supportive; mother came up on the bus to visit him when he hadn't spoken to anyone in days; his dad took his old car and gave Tureaud his newer car so he had a reliable way of leaving campus if he needed to; spent weekends at home; going back to campus like "going back into a firing squad"; did not experience the "richness of LSU" in terms of participating in social and academic activities; friendship with white children growing up in New Orleans; accustomed to being around people of all races and social standings through travelling with his family; African American women in the cafeteria were quietly supportive; story about an African American man who brought his young son to campus to meet Tureaud, "because he wanted his kid to remember that this was possible"; realizing he had the responsibility of being looked up to; wanted to leave LSU but thought how many people he would disappoint if he did; father told him he could get out whenever he wanted; media attention from the *Reveille* and *Ebony* but he avoided both; didn't want to be the focus of attention, he was there to get an education; wanting to take part in a fraternity and attend the first football game; nobody would talk to him; priest gave a sermon about Tureaud getting the silent treatment; leaving LSU when court decision was overturned; father made arrangements for him to start at Xavier the next week; it took him a year to recover emotionally from his time at LSU;

**Tape 375, Side B**

Fear about possibly having to return to LSU; "hard to be in the middle of a college campus as lively, as enriched, as extensive as LSU . . . and to be almost treated like an alien"; he didn't have contact with any international students; other African Americans that attended LSU after him did not attend alone; Tureaud never expected to have such a hard time; attending was hard on him because he was alone, no other African American student in his same predicament; his time at LSU was about "surviving from day to day . . . but that's not what I was there for, I wanted to be enriched by the experience"; Norman Francis tutored him in the math class because the teacher wouldn't help him; he set the curve on the next math exam and suddenly other students started "to move closer in to where I was sitting"; people who wanted to use him; vice president offering to help if he had any problems but Tureaud thought it wasn't a genuine offer; interviewer asks about an incident involving a knife but Tureaud has no recollection of such an incident; all students in the bathroom would leave when he came in; he left LSU because he couldn't legally stay; Leander Perez's appearance and reputation; attending a deposition where Perez called him "the most ungrateful nigger in the state of Louisiana"; parents tried to explain to him that Perez wasn't talking about him personally; Tureaud's belief that adversity builds character

**TAPES:** 1 (T375)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 7 minutes

**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 32 pages

**OTHER MATERIALS:** Correspondence (7 pages)

**RESTRICTIONS:** None