

## Interview Data Sheet

**Collection/Project name:** Black Families in Yalobusha County

**Processor's name:** Keon Burns

**Interviewee:** James Swearengen

**Interviewee occupation(s):** Mayor of Oakland, Mississippi

**Contributor:** N/A

**Interviewer :** Keon Burns

**Interviewer Bio:** Keon Burns, a graduate student at the University of Mississippi, took a seminar oral history course his first year in graduate school. In this course, he was added to the Black Families in Yalobusha County project, so he began collecting oral history for the project. After the semester ended, Keon joined the Mississippi Oral History Collective and continued to collect interviews. At the conclusion of his first two interviews, both narrators suggested that Keon interview James Swearengen next. However, Keon was not able to get in touch with James Swearengen until two years later.

**Date of interview:** March 10, 2021

**Location of interview:** Town Hall in Oakland, Mississippi (13863 Hickory St, Oakland, MS 38948)

**Interview context:** The town hall in Oakland, Mississippi is located in the center of the town, and it doubles as the sheriff's office. It is a one story building with large rooms separated by glass window dividers instead of walls. The interview took place in a back room that looked like the break room or conference room. Throughout the interview you can hear inaudible noises from calls coming in to the sheriff office. There is also periodic tapping on the desk and floor by Mayor James Swearengen throughout the interview. The floor is tiled, and the microphone is close to Swearengen, but far from Keon for covid-19 distancing. So the audio is low when Keon is speaking and something muddled by the face mask. Other than that, the quality is crisp and clear for the duration of the interview. There are no breaks or interruptions during the interview.

**Recording equipment:** Tascam Portable Studio Recorder

**Recording Settings**            **bit-depth:**    141 kbps  
   **sampling rate:**    N/A

**Length of interview:**        78:49

**Note about sound quality:**    The sound quality is exceptional, but has numerous inaudible background noises. Due the closeness of the microphone body functions such as swallowing are audible.

**Interviewee biographical information**

**Gender:**            Male  
**Age:**                70  
**Birth Date:**        August 14, 1950  
**Birthplace:**        Grenada, MS  
**Residence:**        Oakland, MS  
**Education:**        High School in Oakland, MS (name not specified); Arkansas State University

**Abstract:**

**00:00**                    Introductions and moving to Oakland, Mississippi  
**01:24**                    Segregated schools and limited activities at school  
**03:01**                    Black businesses and learning to survive in Mississippi  
**04:53**                    Running for offices in Oakland, Mississippi (Alderman and Mayor)  
**09:09**                    Concerned Citizens group organized in Oakland, Mississippi  
**15:55**                    Motivation to run for alderman in Oakland, Mississippi  
**18:06**                    Trouble with law enforcement and racist sheriff  
**23:45**                    Becoming president of NAACP branch  
**24:17**                    Protecting themselves while living in Jim Crow south  
**28:50**                    Early working career and moving back to Oakland  
**34:25**                    Becoming mayor, redistricting Mississippi, and gerrymandering  
**41:04**                    First time voting and voter intimidation  
**46:00**                    Marching with Dr. King in the March Against Fear  
**49:30**                    Physical altercation with white man as a teenager  
**55:05**                    Church life and black businesses in Oakland  
**57:28**                    Improvements made to Oakland during mayor tenure  
**64:11**                    Becoming president of the NAACP Yalobusha branch and meeting Aaron Henry  
**67:40**                    Attending fundraiser for Nelson Mandela  
**71:01**                    Aaron Henry attending Ole Miss before James Meredith did but undercover  
**75:44**                    Covid-19 effects on Oakland and receiving grants for Oakland

**Subjects and Key-words:**

**Names:** Martin Luther King, James Meredith, Buster Treloar, Dr. Aaron Henry, Nelson Mandela, Bennie Thompson

**Organizations:** Concerned Citizens, Mississippi Conference for Black Mayors, NAACP, SCLC

**Events:** James Meredith march against fear, Aaron Henry attending Ole Miss before integration

**Topics:** Jet Magazine, Segregated schools in Oakland, MS, Black mayors, Voter intimidation tactics, Covid-19, Black Church life, Free Spring Academy, Black Lives Matter

**Geographic:** Oakland, MS; Grenada, MS; Yalobusha County; Tate County; Mississippi Delta