

**University of Mississippi
Center for the Study of Southern Culture**

**Black Families in Yalobusha County
Interview with Beth Whiting Reed**

March 22, 2021

Interviewer: Jasmine Stansberry

Length: 56:30

[Interview Begins]

Jasmine Stansberry: 00:00 Today is Monday March 22, 2021. I am Jasmine Stansberry, a graduate student at the University of Mississippi. I am also the graduate research assistant for the Black Power at Ole Miss taskforce, and I am here collecting an oral history on zoom with Mrs. Beth Whiting. This oral history interview is for the Black Power at Ole Miss taskforce and the Mississippi Hill Country Collective, oral history project. I want to thank you for allowing me to interview you miss Whiting. next, will you please introduce yourself giving your full name, birth date, and where you were born.

Beth Whiting: I am Ollie, O-L-L-I-E, Beth Whiting, and second, I was born in Oakland, Mississippi June 18th, 1953.

Jasmine Stansberry: Okay, Mrs. Whiting can you tell me about your upbringing in Oakland, Mississippi.

Beth Whiting: Well, I grew up on a farm. My dad owned some land there, I think he was one of three blacks in the community who owned their own land. I am the youngest of eight. We are a blended family; we basically lived off of the farm. My daddy would raise the crops, and of course, we had gardens and chickens and hogs. Everything that we needed to eat we raised

ourselves. In terms of the things that I did, I was the youngest, so I didn't do a lot of the farm work. I basically did the housework that is what momma would let me do and cooking, but as far as money, we did not have a lot. We basically got by; we were basically poor, very poor people. In terms of clothing, we did not have a lot of clothes. For school, basically the way we get money for school clothes was to hire out. After we had finished our little crops, we would chop cotton and pick cotton and get a little money that way. So that we would have money to go to school, to buy clothes rather to go to school.

02:41 I was raised Baptist, my parents were very into the Baptist Church, so we went to church. Church was probably our only outing other than school, so they kept us involved in church and whatever the youth could do there I was involved in. Sunday school and Baptist training union and junior choir and usher board. you name it, we did it. Baptist training union, we didn't go to Bible study because at night during that time black people didn't want to be out at night. It was dangerous, so there was no Bible study. But I learned to speak in front of people, that is, I got a lot of my training to speak in front of people was from church.

03:37 In terms of schooling, Oakland had three schools there were the all black schools which was Walker high school. All the black students went there from kindergarten through 12th grade, we didn't have elementary. The white schools, they had an elementary school, and they had a high school. I spent the first ten years at Walker high school, and we had basketball, we did not have any other extra curricular stuff. The school was poor, it was basically controlled by the white folks even though they say it was a black school. We didn't have any say so. We did have home economics for the girls, and the boys had what they called shop. So, they learned a trade through

Beth Whiting:

that, but other than that we didn't have any other extracurricular activities for us.

During the year of 1969 in early spring, I kind of did an inventory, I don't know why period to this day I still don't know why, but I walked the campus and I looked at what we had and what we didn't have. I told my mother, I say, "We don't have any thing at our school to help us learn anything other than we just go to school." Our books were used books, most of the time by the time that we got him, you have at least four or five names in that book. I think I could probably recall after 10 years there that maybe two classes that we got new books for. The rest of the time they were all used books. So, I kind of did a self inventory of the school for myself. And I looked at the, and I knew the next year I should have been able to take typing. Well, the typing lab was tore up, all the typewriters were torn up. Then I looked at the biology lab, the lab was torn up nothing was working in the biology lab.

So, during that time, I guess in a couple of years they had to start the freedom of choice. That spring, I guess May of 69 when they gave out the sheets for everybody to sign up, I just automatically signed up to go to the white school. So, my classmates were like you going to the white school? I say, "Yeah I am going." It was about 11 people who said, "Well if you are going, I'm going." So, they signed the form, and when the teacher took it up, he was looking like are y'all for real? [Laughter] So he turns the forms in, and I thought that eleven of us we're going to the white school which was actually Coffeerville high because Oakland closed their high school to keep from integrating or so they thought. So, they sent all their kids over to Coffeerville high because they didn't want their kids to go to school with the black kids.

Beth Whiting:

So, during the summer the white people went around to different folks because a lot of folks lived on their land, and said, "If you send your kids to the white school, you gone have to move. You have to find somewhere else to stay." So, everybody was backing out, this guy came out to the house, and he talked to my daddy. My daddy said, "Well, if she wants to go, she is going." Because I didn't tell my parents at the time that I had signed up, I didn't tell them till later what I had done. My mother said, "If you want to go, you can go." So, when school started, it was only three of us that caught the bus. The rest of the black kids backed out. One of the girls, her parents did live on somebody's land, so they did have to move. But her mother told my daddy, she said, "Well, if Beth is going then Ernestine is going too."

The three of us integrated the high school, Coffeenville high in the fall of 1969. There were about 1000 whites to us three black girls. [Laughter] We were bused 20 miles one way and 20 miles back to Oakland. Then we had to get off of that bus and get on another bus to go home. It was a interesting, a very interesting year. We encountered a lot of stuff, of course. The name calling, the N word, racial times, things being thrown at us, but thank God we never got hit by nothing. It was amazing. Whatever was thrown, it always landed either own our feet or around us or the chair behind us.

It never hit us even on the bus; the kids would throw smoke bombs from the back of the bus. They would land in the aisles or either on somebody other than us, up to the front of the bus. We always sit in the second seat from the front; we never went to the back of the bus. Well, one evening one of the guys back there he threw the smoke bomb; it landed in this girl's lap whose daddy owned a whole lot of land. [Laughter] They were rich. We don't know what was said from that point on, but evidently, something was said because they never threw

Beth Whiting:

smoke bombs anymore. They never mess with us anymore.
So, the school year went pretty good.

10:04

We were, I guess some what accepted, there were a lot of white kids who shunned us. They saw you coming down the steps, and they would turn and go the other way. If you were coming down the hall, they would turn and go the other way. Cafeteria, we all three of us set together there was not a lot of people who said, you know, talked to us. The teachers were pretty nice. There were some that you could tell were really prejudiced, but they tried to be cordial. The math teacher, Mrs. Pace, we took geometry, and that is really when I found out how far behind, we really were.

Because we had had algebra but did not realize that we really had not been taught algebra. So, when we started taking geometry, a lot of the stuff that she was teaching we really did not know. We did not have a clue, so she started having, we were not the only somebody who was having problems with the class. There were other white kids who were having problems with the class. So, she started doing help sessions during her free period, so we started going to her help sessions. That is what really got me through geometry. I managed to pull a "B" out of the class; it was tough. She really went out of her way to help us; she finally realized that yeah y'all are really behind. So, she helped us a whole lot.

The English teacher that I had, she was really good, but she was prejudice. She was real prejudice. Her husband was a policeman in the town over Oakland. Which I had heard of my daddy talked about him. He would talk about how low down he was that's the word he would usually say. But she was a good English teacher. I learned a lot of English under her. I never will forget when she started talking about diagramming sentences. I had never heard of it, so I went

Beth Whiting:

home that evening, and I told my mother. I said, "She is talking about diagramming sentence." I said, "Mama I don't have a clue as to what this lady is teaching." So, my mother had this old English book, and she gave it. She said, "Look in this book, and you ought to be able to find something on diagramming sentences."

So, that was my tutor at home, me and that English book. And I learned the parts of speech and all of that stuff from listening to her teach and doing the things that she said. And that really was the class that got me through English in college. And I didn't realize it at the time, how much of that information I was going to use when it came to writing term papers in college, but it did. I was grateful for that even though all the other stuff that you encounter that was some good stuff that came out of it.

History, I realize a lot of stuff in history we had not been taught at the black school. So, we learned a lot that year and one thing that the three of us decided going in that year. We knew what we were up against. The white kids wasn't going to like us or accept us. We didn't know how the teacher was going to treat us, but we said, "We don't know what they know about black people, but we are going to be the most intelligent, smartest black folks that they ever seen." And that is what we did; we went after that. I ended up being number three in the class when we graduated to me that was my preparation that year.

That one year for life, because I literally was all about white folks, I learned how they feel about us, what they think about us. I learned what they didn't know about us as well because basically, they were going off of what they had been taught about black folks. They had never been around black folks who were intelligent who knew how to act intelligent who

Beth Whiting:

were smart. When the white teachers would say, “You guys are really smart.” For a while, we could not figure out why do she keep saying that. Then we realized the that was a stigma that they had in their head that black folks were lazy, and we were not smart. So, we decided there we were going to be the best that we could be.

15:08

My senior year was, I don't know if it was as difficult as 11th grade year, but that was the year that full integration happened. There were four high schools in one which was a mess. Our all-black high school from Oakland, the white school from Oakland, the white school from Coffeerville, and the black school from Coffeerville. There was a lot of tension; a lot of the black parents were mad. They didn't want their kids to integrate as well as the white folks. A lot of the parents kept their kids at home for almost the first semester; it was like my daddy and another guy who filed this lawsuit for forced integration.

Because white folks said that they were not going to do it, so they filed a lawsuit. And finally, the lawsuit came down. I think like in October when the court mandated that you had to integrate. So a lot of the black kids then came on to school. By then, a lot of them were behind because the semester was almost gone. So, our class was supposed to be 200 something to graduate, but it was only like one hundred and something that actually graduated because the others had to go to summer school to finish. Or some of them never finished, and some did eventually go back and get that GED.

My spring of 1970 and I knew I wanted to go to college. I just did not know where. I did not know how because my parents were poor; we didn't have any money. My brother had gone to Northwest junior college at that time, of course, he had got him a job at night working. And he had him some grant

Beth Whiting:

money, so that is how he was putting himself through school. I didn't know how I was going; I just knew I wanted to go to college somewhere. The counselors at the school would meet with the white kids, and they would talk to them about college. They never would talk to us, and taking the ACT test in all of that, we didn't know anything about that. We did not know what was required to get into college.

I started listening in on their conversations and trying to learn, and I would go home and tell my mother, "Well, I heard them say so and so." So, she say, " Well, look this up see what you can find when you go to the library." I've started doing my research myself, and I didn't realize that I had to take the ACT test to get into college. I had no clue what that test was. I've never heard of a SAT test then. I did get the form to take the ACT test at the same time I heard the white kids talk about Ole Miss. Ole Miss this Ole Miss that, and I was like, ummm, that must be a good school. All are there, the smart white kids rather, talking about going to Ole Miss, so I asked my mother about Ole Miss.

And she said, "Yeah, you remember that is the school that James Meredith went to." and I said, "Oh. Okay. I want to go there." She said, "Well, we don't have the money for you to go to Ole Miss." And so said okay, and I started doing my research again. I realized that yeah, it costs more than what we had, but I said, "I want to go there." The recruiter from Ole Miss came to school, I guess it must have been in like April of the year, 1970. And so, they had everybody if you were interested in Ole Miss you could go down and talk to the guy. All got in line lined up and talked to the guy. Well, when it is my turn I said to him, "Well, I am interested in going to Ole Miss," and before I could say another word, he looked at me and said, "You will never go to Ole Miss." and I was like,

Beth Whiting:

“Okay,” and he turned in start talking to one of the other white kids.

So, I went home that evening and told my Mama. I said, “This guy said that I would never go to Ole Miss.” And she said, “If you want to go, you will go.” I said, “Well, I don't know how I am going to get into Ole Miss. We don't have the money.” I started looking at Mississippi State, and I actually did get a chance to go down to visit Mississippi State. And I like the campus, but I didn't like where it was. I didn't want to go down to Starkville. I decided, well my grades wasn't, how was good, but I didn't score high enough on the ACT test to get into Ole Miss directly. I had heard some kids talk about provisional admission. Some schools would allow you in if your grades were real high and your ACT score was decent, and I missed it by two points on the ACT test.

But I didn't have the money to keep applying to Ole Miss, then apply somewhere else. So, then I decided that well my brother was at Northwest, and he say it is a pretty good school. He liked it. I say well I will go to Northwest because he was saying that a lot of students leave Northwest, they transfer into Ole Miss or Delta State. So, I say, “Okay.” I will go to Northwest which I did June of 71, right out of high school, I am enrolled at Northwest. I did really good. I was not sure what my major was going to be.

I knew in high school one of the teachers, she was teaching bookkeeping. And I loved the bookkeeping class, but they would not let us take it. I was listening and watching and listening to her teach, and I thought that is interesting. I like that, but they would not let us take the class. So, what she did, she had a little room that was kind of like a storage room off from her classroom. And I had talked to her, and so she said, “You really want to learn bookkeeping?” And I said, “Yes

Beth Whiting:

ma'am." So, she said, "Tell you what you can do, the class meets at the time when you are in the library. If you want to come you can sit in there [closet], and you can sit and listen." I said, "Okay." And I did that for the whole semester, and she would give me little worksheets just like she was given the other students. I would work on my little worksheet just like they were doing, and I thought, okay I like this.

So, I asked her what was her background, and she said that she was an accounting major in college. I said, "Oh, so this is what I can do in accounting?" And she said, "Yes." So, I said, "Okay." So, I done some research again at Ole Miss, and I say, "Oh, they have a good accounting department over there." So, when I got to Northwest, I started taking business courses; I took two accounting classes. They told me if you take the second semester accounting classes; they are not going to transfer Ole Miss will not accept it. So, I said, "Okay."

I made my mind up that I wasn't going to stay in graduate from northwest. I went that summer year may of 72, and I went ahead and applied to Ole Miss. I got accepted Into Ole Miss; my grades, my GPA was like a 3.96 at Northwest. So, I did not have any problems getting into Ole Miss, so I went head fall of 1972, I transferred straight into Ole Miss as an accounting major

**Jasmine
Stansberry:**

Mrs. Whiting do you mind if I can ask, you hit a lot of important moments that happened while you were going through school as a younger person as a teenager, you mentioned that your father for example filed a lawsuit. And I want to make sure that I am understanding correctly. He filed a lawsuit so that black students could integrate the local school that you were attending?

Beth Whiting:

24:54

Well, yes. What the white folks had said that they were not going to integrate. So, what my daddy and another gentleman they were basically the two people that owned their own land. They were the only somebody that could really do it without repercussions. They went ahead and filed a lawsuit; it was an attorney that talked to them and said, "Okay, this is what y'all need to do." Because the law of the land says that integration is here, it is coming. Like I said, they sent all of their kids over to Coffeerville to keep from they thought integrating, but then integration came down, so you had to integrate the schools.

My daddy filed a lawsuit, and I think it was Oxford, they went to a court in Oxford. the court handed down the ruling that they had to integrate. They could not keep from it. Because they had closed their schools and sent their kids over to the other school. that is how we ended up with four schools and one because white folks said Well, they were not going to bring their white kids back to Oakland. So, we didn't have a choice but to go over to Coffeerville high.

Jasmine Stansbery:

So, your dad's, what was your father's name?

Beth Whiting:

Steven Brown.

Jasmine Stansbery:

So, you had that happen, you talked about the first time that you integrated the school that you attended in Coffeerville, correct?

Beth Whiting:

Yeah, Coffeerville.

Jasmine Stansbery:

It was three of you, young black female students, and you talked about that experience, I am also curious to know did you all feel a sense of, and you talked about some of the harassment that you all experienced. But I would also like to know what you all were thinking in terms of being young black women without any type of outside protection. I am just amazed that you all were determined to keep going. I just think that that is amazing, but what was that like?

Beth Whiting:

27:15

It was scary; I am not gonna lie. It was scary. I think it was just the three of us banded together and said that we are going to stick this out regardless. I think we, I guess the three of us had the personalities, but we knew how to be nice to people and smile. But like you said, we made up our mind that we were going to be smart. so we worked hard, and I think that that really pulled a lot of the attitudes over to our side because it was enlightening to them that these are some smart black girls. I don't even think that it dawned on us that we didn't have any black boys around to kind of protect us. I think that we were disappointed in the fact that the others didn't follow through and come with us. Once we realized that it was just gonna be the three of us, we decided that we were going to tough it out. I believe that my Christian upbringing and faith keep me; I mean I know it did kept me and help me be strong. I think the fact that I knew my parents were backing us, backing me and them all the way. One girl she played basketball, so she actually went out for the team, and it was like oh, once they realize oh she can play basketball. Their attitudes started changing again, so you know. we both, well all three of us basically found our own little lane there. And

did the best we could in our little lane, and that kind of brought a little light onto us. Okay, maybe they are not so bad after all, you know. not that they were saying all black folks was that way, but I think that is the way that they thought about us. So by the end of the year, we had a lot of students who came around, and they talked to us. And they befriended us. Which we get off to ourselves and be like, when we first started this girl almost walked into the wall to keep from facing us. We would laugh about it, but a lot of them did. They came around and tried to be friends as much as they could. We knew the ones who were coming from homes where the parents didn't want them to associate with black folks we could do tell, easily. And we knew the ones whose parents were okay with it. I think it was just the three of us together as a unit, we toughed it out.

Jasmine Stansbery:

You all must have had so much courage to be able to do that, in then considering how you talked about how on Wednesday nights there would not be Bible study because how dangerous it was.

Beth Whiting:

Honestly, I think if we had really thought about it, we probably would have done what those other black kids did. Just did not go. I think it was divine, I always tell people that it was divine intervention. We didn't, as the mothers [of the church] would say sometimes, we didn't have sense enough to know the danger that we were in. Because we were on that bus going 20 miles one way, 20 miles going back. anything could have happened to us on that bus ride. I remember the first day of school when we were riding and, I thought, when we get there I wonder what's going to happen. I thought people may be standing there with bats, rocks, and guns. I did

not know; we did not know. But none of that happened, there were no hecklers. We got off the bus; the principal and one of the teachers meet us and guided us into the school. We didn't encounter that, so when I read about and heard about some of the things that black kids went through when they integrated their high school. I tell myself; I can't identify with that because we didn't have that. We didn't have police escorting us. Nobody escorted us not even the bus [laughter] going or coming that day. I still say it was divine intervention, it was meant to be. And it was meant to be the way that it happened. God protected us that is all I can say. He did; he protected us.

Jasmine Stansbery:

Yes ma'am. So, you talked about how you transfer to University of Mississippi in the fall of 1972, correct?

Beth Whiting:

Right

Jasmine Stansbery:

OK, so can you tell me about, your experience transferring to the school like what do you remember about first arriving at the University of Mississippi.

Beth Whiting:

33:20

Being lost, completely lost. [Laughter] coming from a small college, Northwest was really small, I think maybe like 200 students, 250. it was really, really small. I had never been on the campus of Ole Miss, so when we drove on the campus I was like, wow. Did I want to come here? I don't know what I'm going to do on this big ol' campus. There was another girl who had went to Northwest who had transferred too Ole Miss, and so she asks me, "Do you want to be my roommate?" So, I said, "Okay." I will be your roommate at least I know

somebody there. Of course, my brother was still there [Ole Miss] he graduated the following semester. He had transferred to Ole Miss as well, so he graduated the following semester.

So, we were in a dorm, then it was called new dorm. I think they have changed the name; it was actually a very new dorm. The newest dorm. I think it was the twin towers, but it was very beautiful. Stuart Hall was right across from us and there was another dorm called Brown Hall. I think they either changed the name of that one or tore it down because it was a very old dorm. We were the only two blacks on our floor. It was interesting how the white students would get up early and go take their showers, so they wouldn't encounter us. Even if they did not have an early morning class, they would get up 5:00 or 4:00 o'clock in the morning to get up and take a shower just so they wouldn't be in the shower when we came in.

There was not that much interaction between the whites and the blacks at that time. The little kitchenette area, if you went in and they were in there, they would immediately get up and leave. The elevator, if you were getting on the elevator, they would not get on. They would let you get on the elevator and gone down, then they would come on down. Or if you came in the dorm and you were going to get on the elevator to go up to your room, they would stand back and let you get on. They would not get on.

Classrooms, I guess, I told my husband not too long ago, I said, "Somehow I always felt kind of like this connected there." Because we were scattered across the campus, at that time Stewart Hall was where they put most of the black girls. New dorm, there were a few of us there, but it was almost the end of the year before you realized that there was a black girl or two black girls up on the 6th floor. You never saw them

Because you didn't know they were there. We were just that scattered.

Jasmine Stansbery:

Do you think that was on purpose?

Beth Whiting:

I always felt that it was. I always felt that it was because I noticed that they would put most of the black girls in one dorm. I think when I came in the real way that we got into new dorm was then you had a lot of the white girls joining sororities, and they were moving out into the sorority house. So, there were rooms that came open in new dorms because it was mostly all white girls in that dorm. my last year there, the fall semester of, no the spring semester of 74. I had a white roommate and white by accident. I didn't learn to later on about midway through the semester that she was over in Brown Hall; she had a black roommate.

She immediately went back to housing and asked to be transferred, and they put her in new dorm. But they put her in my room. I knew when she came in the door by the look that she had on her face that [pause] that she wanted to die because I was black. We didn't interact at all. Basically, she would get up. Well, I was in early morning person; I took all of my classes 8:00 o'clock in the morning, 9:00 o'clock. So, I would get up and go to class early, so when I come in from class she will be gone. She wouldn't come back until it was time for her to go to bed at night.

The way that I found out, I was talking to some black girls over in Brown Hall one day. They were like who is your roommate. I was telling them that I had a white roommate, and so one of the girls she said I was supposed to have a white roommate. But she moved out the first day, and I said, "She

did?" She say, "Yeah". She came in and took one look and the folks moved her right on out. They went back to housing, so I ask what does she look like. she described her, and I said, "That is the same girl." they deliberately one day, they say what time does she come to the dorm? They said, "They wanted to see." So they came over to the room one day and sure enough she came in the room and she saw the girl and she was supposed to be her roommate. And she almost died on the spot. [Laughter]

I think she thought we was gaining up on her, but they just said, "They wanted to see if it is the same one." So, they were surprised that she actually stayed, and I think that she went back over there [student housing] but they didn't have another room to put her in. I said, "So she stayed." So, she's saying semester and she left and moved out. I never saw her again I don't know where she went. My last semester there, the fall of 74 I had a room by myself.

Jasmine Stansbery:

Wow.

Beth Whiting:

They never moved anybody in the room with me, so I was still, as a matter of fact I was the only black girl on the floor. But it didn't bother me; I just went to class and did what I did and came back to the room, nobody ever bothered me

Jasmine Stansbery:

So you talk about this divided environment, even though the school was desegregated or "integrated" yeah there is still a lot of racial hostility, so as a black female student can you see anything at all what outlets did you have to help get you

through it? In terms of connecting with other black students on campus.

Beth Whiting: 41:24 Well, I had hey couple of girls that I hung out with, and one of them, and I don't know you may have heard oh the Drew nine that integrated the high schools in Drew, Mississippi.

Jasmine Stansbery: No ma'am I haven't.

Beth Whiting: They called it Drew nine. Well, I got to know her, and we started talking about our backgrounds and stuff. She started telling me about the Drew nine. I said, "I have heard of them." So she say, "That was my family." [Laughter] She said, "It was nine of us, and we integrated the high school in Drew, Mississippi." So, we got to be really good friends. We kind of leaned on each other; we hung out together and did a lot of stuff together. She Was an accounting major like I was, so in terms of social outlets, we basically hung out with and went up to the mall. Well, not really the mall but Uptown. We called it going up to the town of Oxford. we would go up sometimes. We didn't have a lot of money, so we would just go up and walk and shop and look. Every so often we would go out to eat.

There was a restaurant; I think it was called Pole Shack. It wasn't too far from campus that you could walk to. A lot of black kids went there and hung out there. We didn't do a lot of hanging out at the grill over there. Well, she and I both neither one of us liked hanging out over there because the black kids would hang out at the door. We just didn't like that; we were like okay that just does not look good on a all-white campus. A whole bunch of us clustered around the front door sitting on

the steps, playing cards that type of thing. When we went and got something to eat, we went in and spoke, and we came out. We didn't hang around.

My husband always said, my husband graduated from Ole Miss, we barely knew each other on campus, but we knew each other. He said, "I always thought that you were stuck up because I only saw you with a couple of people. The three of y'all just hung together." I said, "That is what we did." I said, "We hung together; we didn't hang with the crowd." There was a black house, a party house. I think we may have gone there a couple times, but we really didn't like hanging out. It was too rowdy up in there and too crowded.

So, we really didn't have a lot of social outlets there. I did join one of the business clubs, the accounting club there. Again, I was the only black in that, so that was interesting. They were nice in accommodating, but other than that, I didn't really have a lot of social outlets. You had the black student union, but other than that you really didn't have anything on campus.

Jasmine Stansbery:

So, were you a member of the Black Student Union, is that what you are saying?

Beth Whiting:

Yeah, I joined but I would go to the meetings periodically. I guess the thing that really turned me off was that it would be like a complaint session every time. Nobody was doing anything about it, and I'm like why are we meeting just to hear folks complain about stuff if you not gone do anything about it? So, as I think back, I say to myself I say to myself I should have been more involved, but I wasn't. I think I had reached a point the I just wanted to get my education and get out of here. [Laughter] You know.

Jasmine Stansbery:

So have you heard of, at this time, because you transferred in the fall of 72. Have you heard about the protests that happened on campus in 1970 with the black student union?

Beth Whiting:

46:08

A little and I think, I remember when I told my mother about the guy saying you will never attend Ole Miss. She said, "They don't want you to come there, that is why he said that." And she said, "they have had a lot of problems there with the black students. They don't want y'all coming." I remember saying what are the black students doing, you know. And she was saying that they had a protest and a lot of them got arrested. And they got expelled from school, and she said, "They really don't want y'all coming to Ole Miss." I never heard anything else during that time that I was at Ole Miss.

I never heard anybody even mentioned a protest. I remember seeing something some years ago; I got something about the Fulton Chapel protest. I remember somebody sending something; I actually had to Google because I didn't know what they were talking about. I never heard of this. And when I googled it; I remembered, okay, that is what my momma was referencing that is why they didn't want us coming to Ole Miss because the trouble that they were having, had had.

I was surprised because I remember James Meredith going there; I was nine years old. And I remember vividly when he went there, and my Mama was listening to the news. And how was listening to the news, and I would say, "why don't they want him there? Why don't they want him there?" I say, "He has to be smart" And she say, "That is not the issue; they don't want a black person a student on campus" Other than that, I never was familiar with the protests

Jasmine Stansbery:

So, you mentioned the black house and some of the parties and things that went on there. Could you describe in more

detail what you saw at the black house? What did it look like and was it just a place that black students went to just have parties or what?

Beth Whiting:

48:50

Yeah, they called it the black house that was the name that the students called it because that is where the black students went. It was just usually Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night; they would party. DJ playing music, and they would party. I think they were allowed to serve beer, you know, to the students. I was not a drinker, so I didn't drink. I never drink beer and stuff so. Basically, it was just, they danced and that was it. You just partied that is all.

There was a black church there, a Baptist Church Uptown. I think it was on Hwy 6 that everybody walked, the ones who went to church on Sunday. Well, actually I take it back it wasn't the Baptist church it was the Methodist Church. The Baptist Church was right across the street from the Methodist Church. They were not friendly to the black students at Ole Miss, so all the black students basically went to the Methodist Church. That was what we did on Sundays.

Jasmine Stansbery:

Did you hear anything about a like black students coming together to attempt to integrate one of the local churches?

Beth Whiting:

No, I guess that happened after I was gone. I didn't hear anything about that.

Jasmine Stansbery:

I also wanted to ask if you remember Reverend Wayne Johnson do you remember him? Or was he there when you were there?

Beth Whiting:

Yeah, Wayne was the minister at the Methodist Church, and he was maybe in his early 30s or late 20s. I know he was a young guy, and a lot of students rallied around him because of his age. And he could relate to the young folks on campus. My brother who was a minister got to be real good friends with him. Wayne was the one who basically influenced everybody to come to the Methodist Church because we felt accepted at the Methodist Church. I'm trying to remember what was his position. I can't remember what he did on campus.

Jasmine Stansbery:

I think he was an advisor.

Beth Whiting:

Yeah, he was an advisor, but I can't remember exactly what it was though, his title. He was on campus, and I talked to him several times just walking through campus. He was very nice; I really like Wayne.

Jasmine Stansbery:

Were you also familiar with for instance, and this happened before you got there? But have you heard the story about Willie Love Lady who drowned on campus? Or who was found did at the bottom of the campus swimming pool?

Beth Whiting:

I remember vaguely hearing that, but I don't know the details behind that. I remember hearing that on the news. I remember

vaguely hearing my parents mentioned it that probably was one of the things that they were apprehensive about me going to Ole Miss. They were backing me, but I knew that they were worried because they did not know what would happen At Ole Miss. Because of the history, but once I got there and got settled in my momma's mind kind of ease that I would be okay. I don't know the details about what happened there; I just remember reading about it.

Jasmine Stansbery:

And I have one more question, I would like to know what your thoughts are well not your thoughts. What advice you would give to black students today at the University of Mississippi?

Beth Whiting

53:53

I would tell students to, of course the reason that you are there is to get an education definitely get your education. But also get involved and some extra curricular activities on campus. volunteer if you can, wherever you can, to at least get some experience and possibly in your area of concentration if possible. That was one of the things that I found going from there to corporate America that I did not have it. I had the education, but I didn't have no accounting background. And when I was interviewing that was one of the things of course they used back then. What experience have you had in accounting? I've been in school all of my life, and of course, coming out of college I didn't have any. I didn't realize the importance of getting some experience.

I tell young people now; internships try to find an internship. I talk to young folks, and they say, "They don't pay you." sometimes you may have to take one that doesn't pay you to get the experience. I would say do your best academically. Get some type of experience under your belt work study,

extracurricular, volunteer, internship do that. I would also say get to know your professors if you can. Now I know sometimes at Ole Miss that was hard to do because a lot of them white professors they didn't deal with you. You saw them in class, but out of class if you went to the office and said, "Well I need some help can I ask you?" They wasn't going to talk to you. They didn't deal with you. So, I would say, if at all possible, get to know your professor if you can.

Jasmine Stansbery:

Yes ma'am, well Mrs. Whiting I would like to thank you for allowing me to interview you today. and I am going to stop recording.

[End of Interview]