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An Interview with

MRS. JIMMIE H. WESTON

April 14, 1978

Interviewed by

Daisy M. Greene

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Washington County Library System
Oral History Project:
Greenville and Vicinity

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Interviewee: Jimmie Weston

Interviewer: Daisy Greene

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interviewed by Daisy Greene

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Scope Note: The Washington County Library System, with assistance from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, conducted oral history interviews with local citizens. The project interviews took place between 1976 and 1978. The interviewees included long-term residents of the Greenville-Washington County area in their late 50's and older.

April 14, 1978. This is Daisy Greene interviewing Mrs. Jimmie H. Weston - J-i-m-m-i-e, for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and the Washington County Library System. Her address is 566 East O'Hea Street.

Mrs. Weston, I would like to interview you concerning your husband who worked here a number of years. Tell me something about his background - when he came to Greenville and where he was from.

WESTON: T. L. Weston came to Greenville from Learned, Mississippi on September 18, 1922 to teach in the Number Two School and serve as assistant to the late Mrs. L. W. Coleman. He received his B.S. degree from Rust College and his M.S. degree from the Tennessee State University.

GREENE: Do you know anything about his parents, Mrs. Weston?

WESTON: His parents were farmers and they lived - his mother was Pearlie Weston and his daddy was George Weston ---

GREENE: P-e-a-r-l-i-e?

WESTON: Yes.

GREENE: Do you have Mr. Weston's date of birth and death?

WESTON: He was born November 29, 1898 and died January 10, 1965.

GREENE: And he was born on a farm in Utica, wasn't he?

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WESTON: Learned is just out from Utica.

GREENE: Didn't he work at Utica sometimes?

WESTON: Yes, he taught there.

GREENE: At one time I thought that Mr. Weston worked at Number Two School with Mrs. Coleman. Is that true?

WESTON: Yes. When he first came here he worked with Mrs. Coleman as an assistant to her.

GREENE: Do you know why he was transferred to the school on the south end?

WESTON: Well, I think that the principal resigned to live in Vicksburg, her home. Then they appointed him at Number Four School. In 1930 the late Mr. E. E. Bass, Superintendent of Schools, appointed him principal of Number Four School. It was an eight room frame building with eighteen teachers. The pupils went outside to the rest rooms. There was no cafeteria, library or office. His desk was in the corridor next to a closet store room.

GREENE: Anything else about the school?

WESTON: Well, not too much about the school, but the pupils were well disciplined. There was very good cooperation between the parents and the teachers. Number Four School and Lucy Webb were featured in Ebony Magazine in December 1949. It made a comparison of the two schools. It gave the headlines of Lucy Webb being the South's finest negro school. My father, James Hayes, was the contractor for the brick masonry.

GREENE: That's interesting. I didn't know Mr. Hayes

worked on the building.

WESTON: He contracted for all of the brick masonry. The school featured well lighted classrooms, corridors, modern sanitary facilities, roomy offices, teacher's lounge, clinic, cafeteria, auditorium, library and eighteen classrooms.

GREENE: Where is Lucy Webb School?

WESTON: It's on South Harvey in Greenville.

GREENE: Is that the same school where they had that tragedy one winter?

WESTON: It is.

GREENE: Will you tell me what happened?

WESTON: The following winter after the school was opened, Greenville had an ice and snow storm. Schools were closed. The next morning the janitor found that the roof had fallen in the auditorium. My husband thought he mean't the ceiling. When he arrived there was no roof at all. Fortunately, school had dismissed the day before. Had school been in session, music classes taught by the late Daisy Anderson would have been in the auditorium at that time.

GREENE: Well, what caused the roof to fall?

WESTON: Well, they never did really understand what caused it. They said it was the concrete roof on top; the slabs on top of the roof weren't slanting enough. They did not put concrete slabs on it when it was repaired.

GREENE: Well, that's the year they had a heavy snow.

WESTON: Heavy snow and ice. The concrete slab and

heavy snow and ice, that caused it - the falling of the roof.

GREENE: Do you remember the superintendents under whom Mr. Weston worked?

WESTON: Mr. E. E. Bass, Dr. Forest Murphy, Mr. R. J. Koonce, Dr. Buchanan, Dr. Thompson.

GREENE: Mr. Weston was noted for his droll humor. Do you remember any of his witty remarks?

WESTON: He would often say, "Cast your bread upon the water and many days it will return", so he always referred to that as a school, Lucy Webb School - his dream came true.

GREENE: Did he say it would come back with butter on it?

(Laughter)

WESTON: He didn't say butter.

GREENE: Someone told me about Mr. Weston and that butter coming back ---

Now there is a building here in town named for Mr. Weston. Where is it?

WESTON: In 1964, after his retirement, he attended the open house dedication of T. L. Weston Junior-Senior High. Today it is a tenth grade school. He retired on June 30, 1963 after 41 years of service.

GREENE: Have you children?

WESTON: Yes. He was married to Jimmie Hayes, and they have three children, Gerald, Teresa Ann and Delbert. During the choice of school, Teresa Ann attended Bass Junior

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High. On registration day Mr. Herman Solomon, principal, told her, "Live up to your father's expectations." Well, I guess she was trying to do that, and she received the first Black D.A.R. award at Bass Junior High, and was second in her senior class at Greenville High when it was a choice of schools. There weren't as many Blacks there as there are today.

GREENE: I thought she got that D.A.R. award from Greenville High School.

WESTON: No, it was from Bass - the first year at Bass.

GREENE: Did there seem to be any halting about giving it to a black girl?

WESTON: Well, I don't think it was until they found out that it was a black girl that won, so they gave two, one to a white boy and one to her.

GREENE: What about your older son?

WESTON: Well, he finished at Coleman High School and at that time he took examination for a college entrance test. He had the highest grade that had been made at Coleman. He had the opportunity to enter the Freshman class at Tennessee State University, but he wouldn't accept it. He wanted to finish at Coleman. He received his B.S. degree from Howard University in Washington, D. C.

GREENE: He is in Counseling now?

WESTON: Yes, he's in Counseling.

GREENE: And the younger boy?

WESTON: He's in Washington working part time in a shoe shop.

GREENE: Now are you active in community affairs, Mrs. Weston?

WESTON: I belong to the Moderne Art and Civic Club and I belong to my church club, Courtesy Club. Those two keep me very active - and Retired Teachers Club.

GREENE: Are you a registered voter?

WESTON: Yes, I am.

GREENE: When you registered did you have any difficulty?

WESTON: No, I didn't. I didn't have any difficulty at all. I would like to bring this in. Once someone told me that my grandfather was in line for registration. The young white woman looked at him and said, "I can't find your name." He told her, "Well, my name should be there because it is upstairs in the attic in some of those books. You haven't been in Greenville long."

GREENE: Did she find it?

WESTON: Well, yes, she found it.

GREENE: Was that your grandfather? Was he a brick contractor too?

WESTON: Yes, he was a contractor.

GREENE: That was your father's father.

WESTON: Yes, Hayes. As long as I can remember, I remember him voting.

GREENE: Your grandfather.

WESTON: My grandfather, registering and voting.

GREENE: That's unusual.

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WESTON: Yes, it was.

GREENE: Your grandfather.

Is the old home house still standing?

WESTON: Yes, it is. It was sold; Dillon Funeral Home bought it. The Hayes had seven grandchildren but I was the only one born in that house. The house was so large - the old King's Daughters was near it. If we were out front and there wasn't an adult at home, people would bring their sick to the porch. We'd let them go on ---

GREENE: You mean they'd get the wrong house?

WESTON: Yes, they'd get the wrong house.

GREENE: Well, as you were growing up, do you know anything about that Colored King's Daughters?

WESTON: Yes, but I was young then, and didn't pay too much attention to it other than doctors, ambulances and people going there. It would stay crowded.

GREENE: You didn't tell me anything about Mr. Weston's hobbies.

WESTON: He loved to play tennis, and later he was very fond of making a garden and growing flowers. We kept a beautiful yard because he liked to go out there and work in the yard.

GREENE: Mr. Weston would never tell anyone what the "T." in his name stood for. One lady told me that since he wouldn't tell, she just called him Titus.

WESTON: No, it wasn't Titus.

GREENE: What was it?

WESTON: It was Thulla.

GREENE: Thulla, and each of his friends gave him another name for that "T".

WESTON: It was Thulla.

GREENE: Your younger son, Delbert, had a speech defect, Mrs. Weston. Did you have any trouble finding a tutor for him?

WESTON: Yes, I did. At the age of three he still wasn't talking. He was babbling. I took him to the doctor here, but they never did tell me exactly what was wrong with him. So again at the age of four I took him to the Health Department to see what they could do for him, and they sent me to Greenwood for a test. At Greenwood he was examined and said he needed speech therapy. They sent me to Jackson for a test at the University Hospital. I came back and tried to get a speech therapist here. The told me there was one private tutor. I went by and talked with her, but she told me she couldn't because she was ill. She said, "I'll tell you, I'll give you one of my books." She found out I was a teacher so she said, "You read that book and you just go by that book". But just taking a book and reading it over - I knew I couldn't teach him and give him the proper lessons that he needed, so I wrote to some cousins in St. Louis, and one came in contact with a specialist who was a pediatrician. She told me to bring him at once. I carried Delbert and the pediatrician examined him and made the contact for me at the school, one of the largest schools in the state. When I arrived

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at the school they examined him - a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist examined him and said, "You are from Greenville, Mississippi". I said, "Yes". He said, "Why ---" He looked in his book and found that we had a number of speech therapists here in Greenville. He said, "Why have you come way up here and left your family and there are speech therapists there," but I said, "He couldn't attend the schools, he's black." So he said, "Okay, we'll get you one," and they did. I hired a private one because the school was out, you see. I had to pay for that in St. Louis. At that time it was \$6.00 an hour and that was pretty steep for me.

GREENE: \$6.00 an hour!

WESTON: Yes. I would go every other day. The instructor had me to listen while she taught him. That was one of the rules, the parent had to sit and observe, and the next day I would teach him at home and all during the conversations with him I would speak slowly and pronounce each syllable. We stayed in St. Louis for about a month and a half. They gave me material to last a year until I returned. The next summer I carried him back but I couldn't stay but one month. I told them that I had to leave because my daddy was very sick, so she had me to teach the last lesson so she'd be sure that I understood and they gave me material that would last, oh would last, over a year. When I arrived home - that was about the last of the trains running - my husband told me that my daddy was dying, my mother had cancer, and I didn't have a chance to go back. Well, during that time -- after that, it was during the winter. I was in a store and

a white woman who knew me tried to talk to Delbert. She couldn't understand him. She knew my condition and that sickness was in the family, so she said, "We have speech therapists here. You shouldn't have had to leave your family. I'm going to speak to my husband and we are going to see what we can do for you," so they did. In about three or four months they had me go to the police station. At that time they were marching.

GREENE: Demonstrations. That was in the 1960s?

WESTON: Yes, we went to the auditorium of the police station, and it was filthy and polluted, but the speech therapist met us there. She was from one of the white public schools. At that time it was segregated.

GREENE: Did you have to pay for those lessons?

WESTON: No, I didn't. We went there after school about thirty minutes, but I couldn't sit with her. I had to sit some other place while she taught. We did that for the rest of the school term.

GREENE: Was it more effective when you sat with the teacher?

WESTON: Well, I could understand, and I could teach him at home better. That was the requirement in St. Louis. They didn't teach a child unless one of the parents was present, and I observed while there that sometimes when the daddy wasn't working, both parents would observe in order that the child would get the correct instructions at home.

GREENE: So, from what you say, the lessons here weren't

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as effective as those in St. Louis.

WESTON: No. So the next year the white lady asked me -- She saw me down town and she asked me if Delbert was still receiving his lessons in speech therapy. No, not yet; so she said, "Well, go to the superintendent and see him." I was reluctant because I didn't want to go back to the police station. The next time she saw me she said, "Have you been?" and I said, "Not yet." She said, "Well, go." So I went and talked to the superintendent, and he told me to take Delbert to Ella Darling School on Central - after school. I would go twice a week for about twenty minutes. I sat outside in the corridor, and the teacher carried him in her office and taught him for about twenty minutes. So the next year a speech therapist was hired for the public schools of Greenville and he was included in the class.

GREENE: Had integration taken place then?

WESTON: Yes.

GREENE: He would go to his school, Armstrong I suppose?

WESTON: Yes, Armstrong, and go to class with a speech therapist so many minutes a day.

GREENE: So you really think he got his best start with the material they gave you from St. Louis?

WESTON: Yes, I do.

GREENE: And what you did in the home?

WESTON: Yes, that's right. In the home I would speak slowly to him and pronounce each syllable. When I went to

New York I was talking slowly and pronouncing each syllable. My cousins said, "Why do you talk like that?" I said, "Well that's the way I have to talk to my son. He really started talking then. I could understand every word he said. Before we went to St. Louis, I didn't know what he was saying and my daughter, Teresa Ann, was not quite two years older, but she could understand every word so he depended on her for everything.

GREENE: She was the interpreter.

WESTON: She was the interpreter for him.

GREENE: Did the rest of the family cooperate in speaking slowly?

WESTON: Yes, they did. I had to remind them of it - to have a little more patience with him and talk slowly.

GREENE: Well, your effort has paid off.

WESTON: It certainly has and I'll tell you I prayed, and God has answered my prayers. He is now working in Washington, D. C. and going to school at night, still for speech and English.

GREENE: Were you given any aid for this handicapped child?

WESTON: No, every penny I spent on him it came out of our pocket, and I asked one of the Social Workers that was working with the negroes to see if she could get him in a school when he was about five. She told me, no. That was when he was about six. She told me that they couldn't take any child that couldn't learn. That's how she felt about him without going

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through any test, so I didn't bother any more and yet I know that they had sent -- At that time it was integration and they were sending boys and girls out of the state ---

(End of Side One, Tape One)

I was determined for this child to learn so I spent my own money for him.

GREENE: Didn't you tell me that you don't contribute to some fund here in town because of that?

WESTON: Well, that was the Community Fund and I felt that I had spent enough on my child, and I just couldn't contribute any, so I was still spending as much as I could on him.

GREENE: You didn't mention this white couple's name that referred you to the speech therapist. How do you feel towards them?

WESTON: I consider them among my best friends I have. They have been very, very nice.

(End of Interview)

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September 14, 1978.

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