

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Horace Wilkinson IV

COLLECTION: 4700.1266

IDENTIFICATION: LSU student body president in 1962

INTERVIEWER: Jennifer Abraham

SERIES: University History – Student Government Association Past Presidents

INTERVIEW DATES: February 22, 2000

FOCUS DATES: 1950s-1960s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1853, Side A

Introduction; narrator is fourth man of same name in his lineage to attend LSU; family story about great grandfather writing check for LSU's current campus; his predecessors all served in legislature and on LSU Board of Supervisors; attended University High School; born in West Baton Rouge, where family has lived for six generations; attended Port Allen Elementary; mother remarried after father died; father died of stroke at forty-eight while giving a speech at Capitol House; narrator was in hospital for infected lung when father died; transportation to and from University High; downtown Baton Rouge's Paramount Theater; rise of shopping centers in 1950s decreased number of businesses in downtown Baton Rouge; businesses that used to be downtown; old African American preacher who lived in cardboard house; dispersal of siblings; plantations family owned; descended from General James Wilkinson; family goes way back in Louisiana politics; cousin has traced family back to Charlemagne, sixteen co-signers of the Magna Carta, and George Washington's sister; also descended from Biddles of Philadelphia; grew up on sugar plantation, which was like feudal system; some of the quarters the workers lived in still survive; special relationship with African American people who grew up on plantations; description of a worker's cabin; animals kept by workers; people still living on plantation until five years ago, long after the mill closed; family had understanding with workers that they could live on plantation; cousin broke this understanding and kicked everybody out; used to have Plantation Lights celebration at Christmas, decorated the slave cabins with lights; half the viewers of Plantation Lights were African American; very popular attraction at a dollar a car; summers on Cape Cod at Camp Namequoit; worked six summers as camp counselor there during high school and college; at camp, got to know what Northern rich people are like; campers were neurotic and out of control; some kids hardly ever saw their parents; after high school, expected to become Episcopal priest; attended Sewanee: the University of the South freshman year of college; transferred to LSU, where he majored in English and minored in French and history; attended a year of law school, found out law has nothing to do with right and wrong; father wanted him to go into insurance and make a lot of money; father wanted him to take advantage of many personal relationships and sell them insurance, but he couldn't bear to; took job at Louisiana National Bank instead; became marketing manager, stayed nine years; the

bank turned into just another big corporation, and he was miserable; was LSU student body president in 1962; before that, had job as morale commissioner; LSU was very conservative at that time, whereas Wilkinson was liberal; contrasting himself with previous student body president; Wilkinson proposed series of famous liberal and conservative speakers to address student body; enlisted General Middleton's help in bringing speakers to campus; took issue to Board of Supervisors, who voted to invite all the conservatives and none of the liberals; student elections mostly of interest to sororities and fraternities then; Wilkinson was president of his fraternity, Alpha Tau Omega; all social life in those days focused on fraternities; lots of University High graduates were fraternity presidents at the same time Wilkinson was; differences between University High and other area high schools.

Tape 1853, Side B

University High had high teacher to student ratio, five to one; best high school around, across the street from fraternity houses; got football tickets on fifty yard line, and front and center seats for basketball since father was on board of supervisors; Wilkinson knew almost everybody in the fraternities and sororities; drank a lot to try to cope with father's death; father believed in segregation, but even more in educational opportunities for everybody; because he had same name as father, people assumed they were just alike; argued with father over selection of John Hunter for LSU president; stumped by father's friendship with Willie Rainach, a segregationist; mother was student body president of Newcomb College, came to LSU to do graduate work in French; mother also in politics, despite opposition by Wilkinson's father; mother served on school board and in civic activities for many years; household had many servants; grinding season on the plantation; operation ran all day and night; apartment in mill for whichever family member was in charge at that time; never saw father, who was busy running the mill and politicking; workers paid in script which was only good at high-priced plantation commissary; describes himself as socially liberal and fiscally conservative; fraternity activities: dances, keg parties, South Island Weekend; separation between girls' and boys' dorms; the "Ole Miss Riots," which started when a panty raid went awry; Wilkinson's jaw broken in riot, spent a week in hospital; fire engine stolen during riot; Wilkinson had undiagnosed concussion, headaches got so bad he temporarily resigned from school; campaign his opponent ran in race for student body president; Wilkinson supported by sororities and fraternities; while serving on interfraternity council, Wilkinson made himself unpopular by trying to ban drinking at rush parties; Wilkinson stopped hazing in ATO while he was in fraternity; examples of hazing practices; at Sewanee, everybody belonged to a fraternity; reaction to hazing experience at Sewanee: "If this is what friendship and brotherhood is all about, I'm not going to do it."; cyclical nature of hazing; disciplining of students who broke rules; relationship with Arden French, dean of men; impressions of Troy Middleton; explanation of Boyd Professor title; admiration for T. Harry Williams, both as man and teacher.

Tape 1854, Side A

Teaching style of T. Harry Williams; Williams' graduate student who disliked Southerners and wrote hard tests; Williams' dislike of Governor Jimmy Davis; people's attitudes toward him as descendent of slave owners; friends who enjoy introducing him as descendent of slave owners to African American party guests; bank where Wilkinson worked gave William's *Huey Long* biography as Christmas presents to important clients; Wilkinson has uncorrected page proofs of

book; family used to own Woodland Plantation, which is pictured on Southern Comfort label; relatives living in New Orleans; most of his friends were in Sigma Chi fraternity, but he wound up joining ATO; his college roommates; unpleasant landlord on East Roosevelt; other extracurricular activities; still keeps in touch with many people; his children and grandchildren; friends with Kerry Pourciau, LSU's first African American student body president; Pourciau's career working for Russell Long in Washington, D.C., then Ernest Morial in New Orleans; Pourciau's father worked as plasterer and bartender; acquaintance with Russell Long; Wilkinson's great grandfather worked to impeach Huey Long; Huey took control of government away from plantation owners; grandfather double-crossed by Earl Long; grandfather so furious he had a heart attack, which left him unable to climb stairs, installed an elevator in the plantation house; most influential people during his LSU days: Arden French, T. Harry Williams, Caroline Durieux; graphic artist who illustrated *Gumbo Ya-Ya*; how LSU experience contributed to his ensuing years; very happy to move away from home and escape stormy familial relationships; T. Harry Williams told story about playing leapfrog with New Orleans fire plugs; inscription Williams wrote to Wilkinson on page proofs of Huey Long biography.

TAPES: 2 (T1853, T1854)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 52 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 75 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Consent form; Correspondence

RESTRICTIONS: None