

O.H. 78.20

JACKSON STATE COLLEGE
Jackson, Mississippi

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

I, JIMMY L. CURRY, in view of the
(Interviewer, please print)

historical and scholarly value of the information contained in the
interview with Mrs. Julia B. Young, knowingly and
(Interviewee, please print)

voluntarily permit Jackson State College, Jackson the full use of this
information, and hereby grant and assign to Jackson State College,
Jackson all rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information,
whether or not such rights are now known, recognized or contemplated.

Jimmy L. Curry
Interviewer (signature)

O.H. 78.20
Interview Number

Date

O. J. 8.20

Biographical Sketch

Mrs. Julia Young is an elderly black woman who reports her age between seventy-five and seventy-Eight years old. She is originally from Churchill Mississippi. At four year old her parent left Churchill where they established in New Orlean, but because the climate was giving her chill every day her parent left New Orlean and bought a home in Jackson, Mississippi. She now resides at 2803 Smith Robinson Street Jackson, Mississippi.

Mrs. Young attended Champbell College in Jackson, Mississippi. After college Mrs. Young persued a long career in the teaching profession, Including working at Smith Robinson form 1951 until closing.

Summary of Interview

The Interview with Mrs. Julia Young was conducted by Jimmy L. Curry, a gradulate student, on Monday June 19, 1978 at 3:30 P.M. The interview took place in Mrs. Young's home. During the interview Mrs. Young indicated how Smith Roberston was between 1951 and the closing date. Mrs. Young had first hand information because she serve in the position as principal's secretary and teacher. Mrs. Young related how the property around Smith Robertson was own by outsiders and how it had a deteriorating affect on Smith Robertson School.

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

THE FARISH STREET COMMUNITY
Jackson, Mississippi

INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Julia Young
INTERVIEWER: Jimmy Curry
SUBJ: Farish Street Community
DATE: June 23, 1978 (Date of Interview)

This is an Oral History interview with Mrs. Julia Young at 2803 Smith Roberston Street. We are trying to establish some of the history of Smith Roberston School. You are aware that this information will be used in Jackson State's Oral History Project and will give you give us permission to fo so.

Y: Yes.

C: These are some general questions concerning your history background. First, did your grandparents stay in the Jackson area?

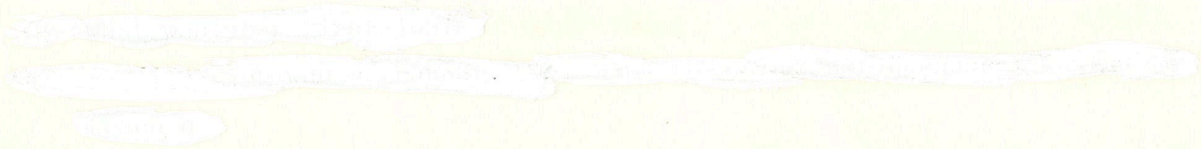
Y: No, my gandmother lived between FAYette and Natchez, Mississippi in a place called Church Hill.

C: Did your parents live in the Farish Street Community?

Y: No, not in the Farish Street Community. We lived in West Jackson, down beyond where the college is. We lived closer to Christ the King Church.

C: You were born in that area.

Y: No, I was born back in Church Hill. At an early age my father got a job on the railroad and we went to New Orleans. Everday I was in New Orleans I was ill. When my mother carried me to the doctor he said the climate there was below sea level and I couldn't take it. So, they had to bring me back tp the Hills. Then my father transferred to Vicksburg. When we got there I was of a school age, but I was too far away from school. I was alone and there was nobaody to go with me. So, then my parents found out that we could buy a home here and we moved here around 1908 or 1910.



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C: What was your first job?

Y: My first job was a teacher. I became a teacher not because I wanted to teach but because of circumstances. When you're poor and you have to work and there isn't anybody who can hire you in the field that you want to work you gotta find something to do. So I took the examination in the sixteen subjects and made a first rate license and I taught school.

C: Do you have any former teachers or classmates that live in the Farish Street Community?

Y: Let me think. The ones that I know best they have moved out in these sub-divisions and other different places. For instance, Lawyer Tucker's mother, I know her very well. She has moved out into the area near Brinkley. I taught her.

C: What are the basic activities that you have been involved with outside your home recently, say the last year or two?

Y: Within the last year or two I have been confined strictly to bookkeeping. Bookkeeping is my choice. However, I am a pretty good accountant.

C: Have you ever been involved in politics?

Y: No, not too much other than politicians would come by to ask me if I will help them. They would give me some literature to distribute among my friends and they will ask me if I would use my influence to help them get elected. I have done that. Especially with Douglas Anderson. He is very gratifying. He asked me and then the present Mayor asked somebody on his committee to ask if they could put a sign on my door or something like that and I gave him permission to do so.

C: What are some of the factors that you feel have contributed or were most helpful in the Black community in Jackson?

Y: Some of the younger people are getting positions equal to only what Whites use to get. That is an encouragement. There was a time when you didn't use to see a Black face in any office. I've been here long enough to know that all the faces were White.

C: What civic and religious activities have you been involved with?

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Y: I did sing in my church choir from the time I was about 15½ until 1944 when we moved here. I stopped going because it became a little dangerous to catch a bus and go because sometimes my husband would be out of town, and people started snatching your purse or something like that. That was back in the thirties and forties.

C: What were some of the economic institutions in this community that have flourished from time to time?

Y: You mean Black economics or what?

C: Right.

Y: All of the little stores around are Black. Well, they're community stores really. They were Black owned, they were Black operated. Most of them had sense enough to get a bookkeeper or some type of accountant to do their work so that if they are called up by the IRS or the State of Mississippi, they would have someone to back up what they say. So, that's primarily what I am, a Bookkeeper.

C: What are some of the power structures in the community that affected the Smith Robertson School?

Y: You mean that made the school close down?

C: Right.

Y: I think it was somebody in the community started throwing bricks and knocking the windows out. Naturally when the windows are broken. . .

C: From prior years in history, what basically has been the means of employment in this community?

Y: In other communities employment as teachers or employment period.

C: Employment period?

Y: Alright, employment when you go you naturally have to give your background on any job. Your background counts for what you have already done, what you have already accomplished counts, all of those questions that are asked. If you can answer them to their satisfaction they sometimes will put you on a trail basis and you do your very best. I did my very best when I first started teaching on a trail baiss. I was working my way through college. I was working at Jackson College at the time. I would

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- Y: teach each day and when teaching hours were over I would go to the office and do the clerical work there, the bookkeeping work there. Then we had night classes and they lasted until 9:00 P.M. I would go home and sometimes I would be so worn out because I wasn't but about 19. My mother and father were both living at the time. I would be so worn out sometimes when I got home I could hardly eat, let alone go to sleep because I had to get my lesson for the next day. After that I would make out a lesson plan in order to teach the next day. Your qualifications sometimes were the things that made you great. I was asked by the Superintendent, who was Mr. Bailey at the time, (this school over here on State Street, Bailey Junior High is named after him) to come and work in somebody's place that was ill. I had a friend who was already working for the City and she told me to apply. I applied and I got the position.
- C: Would you describe any type of government programs that existed for Blacks?
- Y: Government? I don't know. Later this agricultural program came along.
- C: Do you feel that these programs discriminated in anyway?
- Y: Well not too much. I wasn't involved, that's why I couldn't say yes definitely.
- C: Do you feel that Blacks were given equal aid to that which was offered by members of the White Community?
- Y: Not way back then.
- C: What church domination do you say played the most important role in community development?
- Y: I tell you I would say the Catholic Church. There was no difference in the Catholic Church. I think the Baptist Church and the Methodist Church both allowed civil rights leaders to meet there and sometimes they would boycott.
- C: What type of peer groups existed mostly in the community? Were there gangs or any type peer groups?
- Y: Oh I don't know about gangs. I don't think we had gangs. If we had gangs they were little kids, they weren't crazy or anything like that.
- C: How wholesome was the community in terms of learning activities for students?

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Y: It was wholesome. I don't think Black children had access to some of the books that the White children had but they had pretty good teachers.

C: How strong do you identify with members of this community?

Y: Very strong. The people in this community looked up to my husband and I so they still look up to me because they figure that whatever he knew, I still know.

C: Can you describe some of the activities that you were engaged in within the community?

Y: Well the precinct meetings. I enlisted in it not too many years ago. I belonged to almost all the clubs and organizations in my church.

C: What was the structure of Smith Robertson School like?

Y: You mean the physical structures?

C: Right.

Y: They were very good. There was upstairs and that consisted of a few classrooms and they were pretty well equipped. They had blackboards and erasers and supplies for blackboards. The desks were adequate and they were nice. They might have been a little hard sometimes but you sat on them all day. You had good teachers.

C: Just in addition to what you said, what are some of your early recollections of Smith Robertson?

Y: Smith Robertson has always been a very proud school. In fact, that was the school that started all of the Black children going to school, they came from every where. They came from out this way, far out this way as they could come. They came from across the river to Smith Robertson School. They came from out west where there were no schools out there. Everybody who wanted to finish High school out on Pearl Street they would go all the way across town to get to Smith Robertson School.

C: Do you know in what year Smith Robertson was established?

Y: I don't exactly. I don't know because it was already established when I started to teaching. It was renovated in 1939, that's when they put that very good structure there. The foundation was good.

C: How large was Smith Robertson at the beginning stage?

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- Y: At the beginning I think it was about eight classrooms. I don't think they had a lunchroom. You brought your own lunch from home and you ate it. They did add a lunchroom to it and there was a lot of room added to a very good part of it. I understand it was used after the school closed for feeding the senior citizens at one time.
- C: How large was the school staff at that time?
- Y: You mean when it closed or when it started?
- C: When it started.
- Y: Oh, let's say about 12. Now that includes the principal too.
- C: What grades was Smith Robertson?
- Y: They went from one through eight.
- C: How did the facilities of Smith Robertson compare with the institutions for other groups in the City, namely White?
- Y: Well, Central High School, that was a high school. Smith Robertson was just elementary, but it was the oldest one for Black people in the City. I haven't been in Central for a long time but the facilities were pretty much the same. They didn't differ too much. They had the same old fashioned desk where you put your books under and you sit one behind the other, one desk right behind the other. That same thing existed there that exist today. Central was the oldest high school for Whites. Now remember Smith Robertson is an elementary school. Now the oldest high school for Blacks was Lanier.
- C: Do you think that the moral in the community was high as from the beginning stage of Smith Robertson?
- Y: It was higher at the beginning. Now there are too many rented places around. When you rent places sometimes the tenants aren't always desirable.
- C: That's right.
- Y: Now if you understand what I mean, now sometimes you get very good tenants. If you're renting a place you don't know who you are renting it to, you don't know until after they are in there unless you can get a reference from their former landlord.
- C: Did the school offer any additional services other than college preparatory courses? Were you knowledgeable of a PTA being operated?

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- Y: Yes, they had a PTA. I didn't attend but I knew about all of those meetings because all of those things came through Mr. Cobbins office and I had access to all of those. Let's see I knew when they were going to be, what time, I knew all about the reports, what teachers were there and what went on almost daily. They would have to make their reports to him and they would come through
- C: How good was school maintenance during the time that you were there?
- Y: It was good. There were men who were just ordinary janitors. They had no special training but they kept the place up. They kept it clean. They kept it pretty nice.
- C: How would you rate the support given to the school by the community?
- Y: Fair because as I said, there were a few homeowners around, you know homeowners are not like tenants.
- C: Was the school state supported or parochial or what?
- Y: No, it was a city, the City supported it. It was a City school, strictly supported by the City.
- C: Do you feel that the state or city could have given the school more financial support?
- Y: I think the state had. I think maybe both the City and the State could have given more. I say the City first because it was first a City school and I believe that if it had been given some state support it could have operated well.
- C: What was the attitude of the students in terms of preserving the facilities of the school during your employment?
- Y: Well they had to preserve it. It was mandatory. If you tore up something you paid for it. One way or another you paid for it.
- C: Are you knowledgeable of any addition that was added to the school?
- Y: I remember when they added some more to it upstairs in the back. I think it was in 1939. Mr. Jackson was principal at that time.
- C: Did enrollment ever entail some addition?

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- Y: Yes, most classrooms were full. There was no thirty-two or thirty-five. If fifty came you had to keep fifty. You couldn't teach but you'd keep them. I can tell you because at the end of the month I had to give a report of the number of the students in each classroom that came to Mr. Cobbins office. I could very well see that some rooms were just full, crowded and some children were just kept. They weren't taught. We couldn't teach them. They'd just keep some. I encountered that much myself when I was in Reynolds.
- C: What was the average class size at Smith Robertson?
- Y: Let's say about forty. Some had more than that. The ADA was around thirty-eight or forty.
- C: What type of classroom discipline existed at Smith Robertson?
- Y: You were allowed to do the spanking so, if they got to the place where they needed it, they got it. Very few teachers took their children to the principal's office for any kind of action unless the student attempted to jump on the teacher. You'd have to do something then to get them out of there.
- C: In what year did fire destroy Smith Robertson?
- Y: That I'm not quite clear on. Somebody said that they had the fire in 1958 or 1959. It seemed to have started. . . it did more damage to the back part of the school than it did to the front. We could see where the smoke came from under where they have. . . what do you call it. . . we could see where smoke had come through that. I call it a little vent maybe, I don't know.
- C: Where was school conducted after the fire happened or was it ever discontinued?
- Y: Smith School was discontinued. I don't know whether the fire discontinued it but it was definitely suspended.
- C: In what year was Smith Robertson closed?
- Y: It must have been 61 or 62. It might have been 1959. Well, let's say somewhere around 1959 and 1961.
- C: What are some of the factors that you would list that caused Smith Robertson to close?

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- Y: Well, the community and the inhabitants plus the fact that Sun-N-Sand was right behind there. I think some of the people may have complained.
- C: Was there any resentment from the community?
- Y: I think so. I don't know whether there was resentment because the school closed but there was some resentment right now.
- C: What reason did the City administration give for closing Smith Robertson, do you know?
- Y: No, I sure don't. I was really surprised to know that they had discontinued classes at Smith Robertson. Perhaps Mr. Jackson would know.
- C: Did you feel that the school administration was justified in closing. . .
- Y: I believe that it would have taken some regular guards around the clock to keep it from being torn or what do you call it?
- C: Vandalism?
- Y: To keep vandals out of it.
- C: Were you employed at Smith Robertson during the closing?
- Y: No, I was out.
- C: Are you aware of any groups in the community that were formulated to protest the closing of Smith Robertson?
- Y: No, I'm not. . . Now some people at the "Y" now remember now the YWCA on Farish Street and there are workers there who wanted to see, . . . among them was a woman named, her husband use to be head of _____ Dr. Mosley's wife. She is closely associated with the "Y" and Farish Street Baptist Church. They wanted to do something about it. The letter I received this morning from the City Council has agreed that they would rehabilitate or whatever they needed for this school to be put among the archives. What do you call it? What is the thing?
- C: Art museum?
- Y: Yes, that's what they said. See they have given their agreement. I was on the committee and naturally they sent all of one. I couldn't attend the last meeting but I got a report on what was done at the last meeting.

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Y: Mr. Rundles called me and I told him that I was very sorry I couldn't attend because I couldn't get up the steps. See we were having meetings up the steps. Dr. Baham who was at the college, was a member of the committee. I'm one, Mr. Rundles, assistant to the Mayor; Dr. Harrison. Dr. Baham as I told you and they have Dr. Aaron N. Jackson, that's A. N. Jackson, he's a member of the committee; Mrs. Mosley is a member of the. . .but my name isn't on there but they sent me a copy. I told them why. I went to every meeting. Now this was brought out. HUD had given \$320,000.00 for them to rehavilitate or to make it into something like what is it to shine on the natural art or what. . .but my interest, being in the business world, was why don't you use the monies that you have and let them know that you are going to do something, because when the fiscal year closes and you have not done anything, Hud's going to ask for that money.

I didn't leave very much off because I was trying to geel her out. Now one committee like I say, I would put up, we would put up something to let them know that we intended to do so and then we were going to tear it down. I said that's foolish. Why put up something and you know that you've got to tear it down. Why spend that money needlessly. So several of them agreed with me. One or two of them looked at me and said, "I see you've got a head for business." I said well. I sat close to this reporter who does this Metro. He told me he was with the Clarion Ledger or Daily News. I don't remember his name. I'd sit next to him or pretty close to him and a lot of times he didn't agree with what they were saying. He'd say that doesn't sound like it should be done. I'd say no. Why are we going to put it up if we're not going to do anything with it.

C: What is the basic reason you would say that Smith Robertson is in its present condition?

Y: I'm going to blame the community then I'm going to blame the City of Jackson. I may get run out of town because I believe that if they had done just a little more. Now not this administration _____, but I believe if the City had jsut done pushed us a little harder it would not have closed. As I told you, the community has a lot to do with it.

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- Y: We find very few homeowners around there. Whereas, these schools, take the school up here, Walter's School, it's almost surrounded by homeowners. You don't have but just a few people who rent their homes. Not too many students go there who came from homes that are rented. Most of us around here own our own homes. Now I didn't have any children but my neighbor's children went there and I figured those were my children.
- C: Do you feel that the citizens in this community are concerned enough about institutions that make up the community?
- Y: Now the people around the "Y", but now around the immediate school in the front and on the side of it, I am not too sure. Close around the "Y" around the church and all of that, now they had their questions, they may disagree with some of the things that the committee would like to see done. They may disagree with Rev. Hickmon Johnson and I understand the principal over here at Rowan School. I don't think he wants to see it done because it means putting some of his students out I would imagine and sending them back to the general Smith Robertson School. I notice all of the. . . I was in the hospital and there was another Black patient. There were four of us. It wasn't a private room. This lady had, I guess she was a diabetic. She had her leg amputated. The welfare was in the process of giving. . . she went home home before I did. . . but any, they were in the process of getting her a new leg. Now she lived on Kane Street, which isn't too far away, it is out near Brinkley School. Those children that live out there use to go to Smith Robertson School, all the way back up here to Roann. That's a pretty good piece.
- C: When was the committee formed to preserve Smith Robertson as a historical landmark?
- Y: I was asked, I can't remember the exact date but I have. . .
- C: How long has this committee been in operation
- Y: You mean the Smith Robertson Committee or _____, which one are you talking about?

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C: The Smith Robertson Committee.

Y: We started last year. I got a letter from the Mayor and somebody had recommended me. I met the Mayor personally. I am an Eastern Star and I'm just an appointed officer in the Eastern Star. I am not elected. I am appointed. He came and gave the recommenders to the Eastern Star Chapter out on Lynch Street. He came out by himself. He didn't send anybody else. He came. When I came in he was already there. An officer was sitting in the back of the auditorium. So I said, "Good morning officer." He said, "good morning!" I said, "Why are you here, to keep order?" He said, "no," and pointed. I said, "I'm so sorry and I went down toward the front and of course when we were through (he stayed until the meeting was over), he announced who he was.. Everybody was asked, all the appointed and elected officers were asked to please stand and give their official position. I'm appointed as the auditor for the accounts. So when I didn't say what I do the head man who is the head of the Eastern Star, we call him Patron, the Grand Patron, David Thomas from Vicksburg, Mississippi. He sees whether or not our books are right and whether we have the right amount of money or whether we have the amount of money that we say we have.. So from that he looked at me. He kept looking at me. He was trying to get off state to get close to me. So, finally I just stood there and so finally I said that I was just going to stay right here until you pass. So he got there and he just reached his hand, you know, and said, "How are you, I understand that you keep up with their money." _____ he said, "well you look like a balance sheet. I said, "well, maybe I am. Then he said, _____ please tell me where you live. I said I live _____ and he said, well I am going to call on you. I said, "well alright, call on me any-time. Now you know I am a senior citizen." "That's alright, I don't care anything about that," he said. "I'm sure going to call on you." He asked, "What Representative is in your district? I said, well, I have two, Douglas Anderson and Rev. Buckley, said, "I'm going to call on you to see Dougals Anderson.

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C: What individual is responsible for initiating this Committee?

Y: I think Mr. Rundels. Let me give him credit for that. Mr. James Rundles now he's Black and I believe somehow or other some pressure came through him from Dr. Hickman Johnson, who is the Pastor of Farish Street Baptist Church and Mrs. M. C. Mosley, Sr., who is a _____ member, I think of Farish Street Baptist Church.

Now I think, among other people, they are the ones who started it. Now I got roped in, Dr. Baham got roped in, Professor Jackson got roped in. Now, H. M. Thompson, who is the Grand Master, and who use to be an instructor at Jackson State, he is a friend of mine also; he came in because you see he was in the process of building some more onto the Temple and somebody asked him if he would come in and explain how he got his plans all worked out. So he came with us.

C: What has been the extent of your activities on this committee?

Y: No more than advice. I have just given whatever advice I thought was necessary. It wasn't always taken but it was always to the point. I didn't ask too many stupid questions because if I remember, I can remember if you got a bird in the hand, don't let him get over there in the bushes. You use what you have, take what you have and sometimes you can make what you want out of what you already have. I have always believed that. If I got three hundred and some odd, \$320,000.00 or \$300,000.00 and whatever it is, alright let me use that, don't let HUD come and ask me what did I do with it and if I didn't do anything with it ask me for it. That is exactly what they are going to do. That was my bone of contention. I didn't have too much to say when they were asking questions, making it a natural shrine or whatever that title is suppose to be. I didn't ask too many questions about that.

Let's take what money we have and use it. Use it wisely and then maybe we will be in line for another or something else within a year or two. Maybe that's a crazy philosophy but that's mine. I believe in, alright if I got \$20.00 let me use that wisely and maybe you give me another twenty

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Y: you see I didn't make a monkey out of myself with that you see I can soon get some more money and something else constructive with it. Don't just stand and look at it. That's not doing any good. You keep them books, you sit there and look at them books all day and you don't write anything what good does that do?

C: What notices or progress has been observed?

Y: I haven't seen any. I haven't been out very much now since March. According to this letter we are nearly . . .there said that the City had given . . . Dr. Harrison was advocating the City giving its okay to Smith Robertson to becoming a whatever it is, it is on there. . .National Register of Historical Places. Now they have given their consent we didn't have that at first. I am looking for another committee soon and I am going to ask them if they can't meet somewhere where I can go so I can find out what they did with the money they already had and whether we are using it or not. I didn't know this, somebody said that we have until the first of September. The first of September will soon be here and HUD when they ask for what we have done with it, we haven't done much with it, they are going to ask for their money. I would thank that an organization like that would too, maybe I am wrong.

C: The money is already allocated from the Department of HUD?

Y: Yes and a representative was there to say so. He was asked if we used that how soon could we make another request for some more money. He said it would take us maybe about a year from that and then we could ask for another allocation. If we had used that wisely, we possibly could get that and more.

Dr. Harrison also said that there was some money from the National Register or whatever the name is. She said that that particular organization would also give you some money for that same type of thing.

C: Do you think that government agencies contacted by this committee are showing enough concern for the project?

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Y: Well, I think they are the very fact that they gave something shows that they did have some interest. Now just how much interest I am not able to say. But, the very fact that they contributed something must have shown some interest. Now that is the way I feel about it. They must have been interested in some way or another. Now just how I couldn't tell you. Now HUD is a government agency isn't it?

C: Right.

Y: If they gave us \$320,000.00 or whatever it was if they gave that they must have had some interest, don't you think?

C: Well would you just make a general overall statement of what you think as a summary statement of Smith Robertson?

Y: Well, I really think it would make a nice place for us to show that it will be some type of cultural something. Even if we didn't have anything but the front part of that, that would show that it was some type of monument there. It would stand as something that Black people had long time ago. However, I suggested that if we get enough money, let's fix the upstairs and we can rent out to some other organization you know like, I don't say the A.A., everybody who comes to A.A. comes to be helped. I don't say that they are always drunk. There are other things that could be like rented out like office space and I think that _____ could be rented and the downstairs apt could be used to feed Senior Citizens or to have recreational facilities/activities for them.

However, ramps would have to be made for them, because like me, they have, they can't get up the steps, see. I really think that we could make a nice place and if we didn't have anything but just a natural, National Register of Historical Archives, it would show that we had some culture somewhere. Now so far as culture is concerned, I am just about lost on that. I like to see pretty things but I don't know how to do it. Now if I see somebody has done it I can criticize, I can say well I like it or I don't like it. I would like to see something there not just a building with the windows all broken out like it is now. I was really hurt and I

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Y: was surprised when I went there because Mr. Jackson always comes and pick me up, Professor Jackson. I knew him a long time. In fact, when I was teaching at the old Lanier High School, he was a student there. He went on to college and graduated from college. He has a son who is a M. D. in Washington, D. C. Professor Jackson, if you want to call him that or Dr. Jackson, it doesn't matter. I think that we would like to see something like that. He and I had discussed it quite a bit and after he knew I was coming and he was coming by this way, he would always call me and tell me well I'll pick you up Mrs. Young, don't worry and I'll bring you back and we would talk on our way there and on our way back. He was quite nice about that. I would like to see something there. I am glad that the City and all of the members must have stamped their names on there if they did not write it that they want this National Registry, let them have it.

I would just like to see something there. I just wouldn't like to see the place like it is now. It is the shambles now.

END OF INTERVIEW

WMM