

An Interview With
Lonnie King

Interviewed by
Rhonda Wilson

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Interviewee: Lonnie King
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Scope Note: Murrah High School students, with assistance from the
Mississippi Department of Archives and History,
conducted oral history interviews with local citizens
involved in the Jackson Public Schools integration. The
interviews were conducted in the spring of 1978 by the
eleventh grade advanced history class led by Diane
Canterbury.

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WILSON: This is Rhonda Wilson and I am with Mr. King, Mr. Lonnie King. Mr. King is principal of Brinkley Junior High School. Mr. King, I will be asking you some questions concerning some changes in the Jackson Public School System in the last ten years. First of all, where did you attend college?

KING: Tougaloo.

WILSON: And how long have you worked in the Jackson Public Schools?

KING: About 16 years.

WILSON: During that time, what positions have you held?

KING: Social studies teacher, assistant principal and principal.

WILSON: Mr. King, I understand that there has been a change in the racial ratio in the Jackson Public Schools. Why has this change come about?

KING: In the last ten years it has come about primarily because of the white students who still live in the Brinkley - Jackson Public School district - have enrolled in private schools.

WILSON: Would you say that bussing has failed to integrate the schools _____?

KING: This is a difficult question. I don't think

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bussing will bring about a tense situation in the schools. I don't think it had any great impact on it except that some whites probably took their children out to avoid bussing. However, I think the majority of whites who are sending their children to private schools are sending them there because they would prefer their children attending private schools not because of bussing. I think bussing has had not so great an impact on the large number of whites in private schools.

WILSON: Would you say that some whites _____ their prejudices by sending their children to private schools?

KING: I think some whites do have their children in private schools because of their feelings about blacks and it could be prejudice. A number of whites have their children in private schools maybe do not necessarily have negative feelings about blacks. A few feel that their children can be best educated in private schools and certainly _____ their feelings about blacks.

WILSON: Do you think that this will affect the quality of education for the black child?

KING: I don't think the fact that some whites are in private schools should affect the quality of education right yet. The whites who have their children in private schools and those whites who don't have children but support private schools are certainly not that supportive of public education. Therefore public education will not have the total support of this segment - sometimes influential segment -

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of whites. On the other hand the teachers are dedicated and concerned about a thorough education of all the students and I don't think that the fact that the support is not there or a certain number of children may not be there or a certain

_____ classes are composed of a larger number of black children and some classes are all black children doesn't have a negative effect on the quality of education

_____.
WILSON: Mr. King, do you think that the movement of whites to the suburbs has any effect on the racial composition---

KING: Yes, it does. Look at the movement from certain areas of north Jackson to the Reservoir area, Rankin County area. The whites are not living in the school zones where they project _____ and this impact has a great deal to do with the racial composition, however, this is not the total cause of the _____. The fact that a lot of whites have moved out of the district has reduced the racial balance.

WILSON: Would you consider this a major problem or a minor problem?

KING: I think that the moving of whites to other areas outside the district has been a cause for concern on the part of the city officials and the school board, the school administrators. I think the district still has the task or the job of educating those pupils who remain here and this

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should be the primary concern so as far as not overemphasizing the fact that there is concern over the basic problem.

WILSON: Do you have any solution to the problem?

KING: I don't think that the movement of whites to the other areas has changed a great deal. I think people are not moving just because of school integration. They are moving for a number of reasons _____.

WILSON: Mr. King, I understand that there has been some change in policy in the last ten years for high school girls who are pregnant. Do you think this will help the individual child to continue their education?

KING: What changes - I'm not sure about policy - I think any student can attend school as long as health permits regardless of whether or not she's pregnant or expecting. The district once operated a Teen Pregnancy Center where girls enrolled when they reached a certain point and they were allowed to continue their education and receive prenatal instruction and health care and social services and still get their grades. I think this was a fairly good program. Not that that program has been phased out---I'm not---I don't have the information to indicate that girls expecting would be hampered a great deal because of the fact that they are pregnant. They do not receive the same benefits that they did when the Teen Pregnancy Center was set up but I don't think they're required to drop out.

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WILSON: Do you foresee any changes that may take place in the school system?

KING: I think the school system is struggling to make themselves more _____ to the public. I think the school system is deeply concerned about the _____ in the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. I think the district is concerned about preparing the students for a more productive adult life. I think the district is concerned about discipline and I think the district is concerned about some of these other matters we talked about like white flight, changed patterns in certain areas that require that additional schools be built, the shift in student population. I think the district will make changes to try to deal with these things.

WILSON: Mr. King, thank you for your time.

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