

# Perspectives on school desegregation: Fran Jackson

COMMENTARY AND SIDEBAR NOTES BY L. MAREN WOOD

Fran Jackson interviewed by Christa Broadnax, March 23, 2001. Interview K-0208. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## As you read...

Fran Jackson was born in Durham and raised in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Jackson attended an all-black elementary school, but when she began junior high, her parents decided to send her to a newly integrated school. She was one of only a handful of African Americans in her junior high school, and she remembers feeling lonely and isolated.

By the time Jackson reached high school, Chapel Hill had integrated its black and white high schools. Yet, despite the fact that there were more African Americans in her classes than before, Jackson still felt marginalized (made to feel like an outsider) in her high school because she was black.

In this interview, Jackson describes her memories of the integrated high school in Chapel Hill. Rather than seeing the integration of the two schools as an opportunity for African Americans, Jackson believed that the process of integration erased many of the traditions of the African American community.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why did Jackson's parents decide to send her to an integrated school?
2. According to Jackson, what resources did the all-black school lack?
3. How many black teachers were there at the integrated junior high school?
4. When the high schools integrated, what positions were filled by African Americans? Why did Jackson believe these African American teachers were given these jobs?
5. What happened with the sports trophies and paraphernalia from the African American school when it integrated with the white school?
6. How did Jackson describe the process of integration? Did she see integration — as it occurred in Chapel Hill-- as positive or negative for African Americans?
7. How did Jackson's experiences at the integrated schools affect her choice of where to attend college?

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**Christa Broadnax**

Did you have any friends that went to school with you that you were close to like your best friend. Did they go...? I know they said that some students were chosen hand picked to move into the integrated schools. Did you have any friends to go with you or were all the students just, all the students just moved?

**Fran Jackson**

Let's see. What happened in Chapel Hill was that the first African American student he was like maybe a couple years ahead of me and he went to Chapel Hill High when it was located on Franklin Street. Where you now have the CCB Bank and I think there's an ice.... Swensen's and those places. And after he and then a year after Stanley [Vickers] there were several other African-American students. I don't recall people being hand picked to attend but that may have been the case. And as I said earlier we sort of self-identified and were among the first to go to the integrated school. And then I think that the schools completely integrated in 6.... The first integrated class was in sixty-eight. [Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

**Christa Broadnax**

Okay. When you talk about, what did you say his name was Stanley other friends that you had, how did they and their families feel about integration? Did you all discuss it or....

**Fran Jackson**

I don't know if my parents discussed it with the Vickers family much. But I think the consensus within the African-American community at that time was that the desegregated school would offer great opportunities because there was a sharp contrast in terms of facilities between Chapel Hill High and Lincoln High. They had better textbooks and it was just pretty well known and my parents from their experience where they were in school and had textbooks with pages torn out because they were used textbooks from the white students. So they just made the natural assumption that it would be much better for us if we went to an integrated setting. So that was.... And I am sure there were, there might have been some discussions within the community but I think a large part of the decision making was based on their own history, what they knew from their experiences.

**Christa Broadnax**

And do you recall any black teachers being at the integrated schools when you went?

**Fran Jackson**

When I first went to the integrated school there were no black teachers. When the schools actually merged in about sixty-seven there were a few black teachers, but a very few. And I do recall that the principal Mr. McDougle from Lincoln High School when the schools merged he became the assistant. And I think the biggest shock in the community was that we loved Coach Pierman who had won all kinds of state championships in the segregated Lincoln School. I think he became an assistant

coach. And so.... And when they merged the schools the mascot was the Chapel Hill High mascot, which was the Wildcat. I think in recent years they now changed it back to the Tigers. But essentially everything about Lincoln High School was erased. And now that I think about it's almost comparable to the whole slave trade actually during the middle passage particularly in North America. The purpose was to erase people's connections to Africa. They mixed the slaves up from different groups so that they couldn't communicate with one another. Now it didn't happen like that but the fact is that when you merge these two schools and all of the symbols from one school were just completely taken away and everybody was reduced to a subservient position. So I don't.... So that is what I do recall.

**Christa Broadnax**

I recall Bob Gilgor telling us about how the archives from Lincoln High and all the sports trophies and all the momentos that had been saved were actually put in a dumpster somewhere. How do you feel about that?

**Fran Jackson**

Well it's what I was saying earlier. It's just there was a deliberate attempt and I don't know if people did it consciously. I just think that, that the racism was so deeply embedded that everybody believed, including blacks, believed that the best way was to start in a whole new system. But their idea of that was to get rid of all that was black, all that came from the black system.

**Christa Broadnax**

That's interesting. What about the white teachers. What were your experiences with the white teachers when you first integrated?

**Fran Jackson**

When I first integrated? For the most part I felt that the white teachers were rather insensitive. And in retrospect I don't necessarily blame them because I think that we are a products of our, of the context with which we live in. And they were just.... They basically ignored.... Now I know some of my friends can tell you some pretty blatant kinds of things that happened but from my own perspective I feel that for the most part the more subtle racism that they simply ignored and did very little to cultivate any type of relationship with us. So that was.... And as a result of my experience at Chapel Hill High I vowed that I would not go to a white, historically white college. And I must tell you that that was a time in sixty-eight when a lot of colleges were trying to quote "become more diversified", and they actively recruited African American students. But in my class of all the students that went to college, the majority students who went to white institutions did not graduate. And I know.... I can count, I know of at least four. And they were really, really bright people, really smart but they did not finish.... Three of them, two at least went to East Carolina. Maybe I shouldn't mention the institutions.

But yes and I went to Johnson C. Smith.

**Christa Broadnax**

Okay

**Fran Jackson**

The best decision in my entire life.

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