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## The University of California Black Alumni Series

### Ida Louise Jackson Overcoming Barriers in Education

With an Introduction by Garff B. Wilson

An Interview Conducted by Gabrielle Morris in 1984 and 1985

The Bancroft Library  
University of California, Berkeley

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## Project Description

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the Nation. Oral history is a modern research technique involving an interviewee and an informed interviewer in spontaneous conversation. The taped record is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The resulting manuscript is typed in final form, indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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## Cataloging Information

JACKSON, Ida Louise (b. 1902)

Educator

*Overcoming Barriers in Education*, 1990, vii, 80 pp.

Experiences of an African American student at the University of California, 1918-1923, founding of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority; teaching in Oakland and El Centro, California; doctoral studies, Columbia University; dean of women, Tuskegee Institute; establishing summer teaching and health institutes in Mississippi; racial discrimination at the UC Berkeley and elsewhere; other family and community recollections.

Introduction by Garff Wilson, Professor of Rhetoric, Emeritus, UC Berkeley.

Interviewed 1984 and 1985 by Gabrielle Morris for the University of California Black Alumni Project. The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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Anonymous

Robert Beck, in memory of Catherine Harroun

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## Preface

In America education has long been an important avenue of opportunity. From our earliest years young people and their families have looked to the nation's colleges and universities to provide the knowledge and experience that will enable the new generation to take its place in the world of work and government and creative activity. In turn, one measure of the quality of American universities and colleges is the breadth and diversity of their students, including how well they reflect the mix of social, racial, and economic backgrounds that make up the communities from which they come and in which they will take part as graduates.

On the West Coast, the University of California at Berkeley has from its beginnings in the 1860s welcomed the sons and daughters of small farmers and shopkeepers, railroad workers and laborers, as well as the children of lawyers and doctors, corporate executives, from many ethnic and racial groups. About 1915, as far as we know, the first black students enrolled at Berkeley, pioneers of yet another group of Americans eager to seek the best in higher education and to broaden their participation in the life of California and the nation.

Those first black students to come to Cal were indeed on their own, with few fellow black students and no special programs or black faculty to guide them or serve as role models. During the Great Depression of the 1930s a few more came, maybe a hundred at a time in all. The education benefits of the G.I. Bill for men and women who did military service during World War II opened the doors to many more black students to attend Cal in the late 1940s and early 1950s. A census taken in 1966 counted 226 black students, 1.02 percent of all the students at Berkeley. By the fall of 1988, there were 1,944 black graduate and undergraduate students, 6.1 percent of the student body. With changing population and immigration patterns in recent years, as well as active campus recruiting programs, for the first time there is not a single majority ethnic group in the entire undergraduate student body at Berkeley.

Looking back from the 1980s, those early trailblazers are very special. Though few in number, a large percentage of them have gone on to distinguished careers. They have made significant contributions in economics, education, medicine, government, community service, and other

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fields. It is fitting that a record of their initiative and energy be preserved in their own accounts of their expectations of the University of California, their experiences as students there, and how these experiences shaped their later lives. Their stories are a rich part of the history of the University.

Since 1970, the University has sought to gather information on this remarkable group of students, as noted in the following list of oral histories. In 1983, the UC Black Alumni Club and University officials began planning an organized project to document the lives and accomplishments of its black graduates.

With their advice and assistance, and the support of other alumni and friends of the University, the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library is tape-recording and publishing interviews with representative black alumni who attended Cal between the years 1920 and 1956. As a group, these oral histories contain research data not previously available about black pioneers in higher education. As individuals, their stories offer inspiration to young people who may now be thinking of entering the University.

Gabrielle Morris, Program Director  
University of California Black Alumni Project  
Willia K. Baum, Division Head  
Regional Oral History Office  
November 1989  
Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library  
University of California, Berkeley

## **University of Black Alumni Series Interviews completed or in process as of August 1990**

### **Walter Gordon**

*Athlete, Officer in Law Enforcement and Administration, Governor of the Virgin Islands, 1980.*

### **Ida Jackson**

*Overcoming Barriers in Education, 1990.*

### **John Miller**

"Issues of Criminal Justice and Black Politics in California," in *Legislative Issue Management and Advocacy, 1961-1974*, 1983.

### **Tarea Hall Pittman**

*NAACP Official and Civil Rights Worker, 1974.*

### **Marvin Poston**

*Making Opportunities in Vision Care, 1989.*

### **Emmett J. Rice**

*Opening Doors as a Professional Economist, in process.*

### **William Byron Rumford**

*Legislator for Fair Employment, Fair Housing, and Public Health, 1973.*

### **Lionel Wilson**

*Legal Practice and Political Leadership, in process.*

## **Introduction — Garff B. Wilson**

I did not have the privilege of knowing Ida Jackson during the years when she was a teacher, a counselor, a dean and, most important of all, a crusader for human rights — especially the rights of black people. She was angry at the racial bigotry and injustice which she encountered everywhere. She did more than fulminate against it; she acted to change it.

I have known Ida only as a retired person — a loved and honored lady, elegantly gowned when she attends a formal University function, and greeted with hugs and kisses by the many friends she has made at the University. She is a lady at peace, a Berkeley Fellow and a member of Phi Beta Kappa. But during her active years she was, and had to be, militant. As she herself says in the pages which follow, "As I see it now, I must have been pretty militant. .. as a child I rebelled at almost anything that seemed unfair. So much so that my brother William nicknamed me Emma Goldman."

Her militancy, her courage, her persistency were rewarded and made it possible for her to entitle this oral history, "Overcoming Barriers in Education." She was the first black teacher in the Oakland public schools; she organized the first college sorority for black women at Cal; she organized health clinics, dental clinics,

teachers' clinics. The list of her achievements, as recorded in this memoir, is long and impressive. She can look back on a long life of struggle rewarded with overcoming barriers not only in education but in the lives and careers of her people.

I am reminded of a sad little song I learned as a boy. Why or how it happened that I learned it, I do not recall. It was a song about a lonesome little black boy who lived in a neighborhood where he had no playmates. His mother — his "mammy" in the song — would hold him on her lap and croon comforting words. The refrain, which I have never forgotten, was "Honey don't cry so hard/ You can go out and play just as much as you please/ But stay in your own back yard."

If Ida Jackson had been in the area, she would have done more than croon. She would have moved into the neighborhood, organized an integrated playground, and made sure that every child had attention and playmates.

Such action for human betterment characterizes the life of this great lady.

Garff B. Wilson  
Professor of Rhetoric, Emeritus  
July 1990  
Berkeley, California

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## Interview History — Ida Jackson

When the Regional Oral History Office began planning a project to preserve a record of the experiences and accomplishments of minority students who attended the university in the early years of the twentieth century, Ida Louise Jackson's name was high on the list of potential interviewees. Her account tells of a lifetime of determination in which she has surmounted unnumbered barriers to education and citizenship, as a student, a teacher, and a community leader. Most recently, her generosity of spirit has included establishing a sizable scholarship fund at her alma mater.

A tall, friendly, gracious person, Miss Jackson spent the mornings of November 30, 1984, and January 28 and February 4, 1985, talking about her family, her career in education, and her personal philosophy. The interviews were tape-recorded in the living room of her big, comfortable home in Oakland filled with antique furniture and family mementos. She later reviewed the transcript of the interviews carefully. Like the good teacher she is, she patiently noted punctuation and grammar she wished to be changed and provided additional information about her family in chapter one.

Special thanks for their assistance in completion of the interview are due to Ruth Acty, the first black teacher in the Berkeley public schools, and Norvel Smith, former vice chancellor of the Berkeley campus. In 1969, Miss Jackson wrote an account of her student days for *There Was Light*, a collection of reminiscences compiled in honor of the university's centennial.<sup>1</sup> A detailed study is also being written of Miss Jackson's teacher-education work in Mississippi.

Miss Jackson was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1902. Her father, Pompey Jackson, was a minister, farmer, and businessman. Her mother, Nellie Jackson, was a homemaker. After the young Miss Jackson had received a teaching diploma from New Orleans University (now Dillard University) and a certificate in home economics from Peck School, she and her mother followed brothers William and Emmett to California. They settled in Oakland in 1918, and new friends from their church helped them find a home and introduced Ida to the

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1. Edited by Irving Stone, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1970.

university.

Soon after starting classes, she organized the Brathwaite Club and then, in 1921 the Rho chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first black sorority on the Berkeley campus. She graduated in 1922, received her master's degree in 1923, and began work on her doctorate. After some

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struggle and the intervention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), she became the first woman of her race to teach in the Oakland public schools and to receive a California Secondary Education Credential.

For nearly thirty years, Miss Jackson taught junior and senior high school in Oakland. She was repeatedly denied an administrative position, because "Oakland was not ready for it yet." She provided academic counseling and taught afterschool drama classes, and stood fast for the needs of her students in the face of discrimination.

In 1929, she organized the graduate chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha at Cal, and from 1934 to 1938, she served as national president of AKA. With the help of sorority sisters, she organized a summer school for teachers in Mississippi, and later a health clinic, for which she received recognition from First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. The next year, she took a leave of absence from the Oakland schools to serve as Dean of Women at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

In later years, she continued to work with AKA and the NAACP Educational Committee and helped to found a low-cost dental clinic in Oakland. After World War II, her brother Emmett bought a 1280-acre sheep ranch in Mendocino County, California, which she helped him run for a number of years. In 1973, she returned to the family home in Oakland, where she continues to be active in many civic organizations and to help the University of California in encouraging young people to complete their education

Gabrielle Morris  
Interviewer-Editor  
July 1990  
The Bancroft Library  
Berkeley, California

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## **Biographical Information**

Regional Oral History Office  
Room 486 The Bancroft Library  
University of California  
Berkeley, California 94720

(Please print or write clearly)

Your full name: Ida Louise Jackson

Date of birth: October 12, 1902

Place of birth: Vicksburg, Mississippi

Father's full name: Pompey Jackson

Birthplace: Anniston, Alabama

Occupation: minister, farmer, businessman, carpenter

Mother's full name: Nellie Jackson

Birthplace: Canal Street, New Orleans

Occupation: homemaker

Where did you grow up? Vicksburg, Mississippi and Holly Springs, Mississippi

Present community: Oakland, California

Education: UC Berkeley, B.A. 1922, M.A. 1923; coursework completed for Ph.D. Teachers College, Columbia University

Occupation(s): teacher, administrator

Special interests or activities: Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority (founder); University of California Berkeley; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; YWCA; National Council of Negro Women

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## I Family, Childhood, and Education in Mississippi

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**Morris:** Let's begin at the beginning. You were born in Vicksburg, Mississippi?

**Jackson:** Yes, on October 12, 1902.

**Morris:** I'm told that you had seven brothers.

**Jackson:** My two older brothers were my father's sons by an earlier marriage. My mother kept them and reared them until they were married. Robert Jackson, the oldest, became a minister. John became a brakeman for the Y. and M.V. Railroad. I knew only John. He loved Mama and visited us often in Vicksburg.

**Morris:** Seven brothers, and no sisters?

**Jackson:** No sisters. I'm the youngest, and the only girl. My brothers are Alonzo, James, Samuel, William Edward, and Emmett Lee Jackson.

**Morris:** Does that mean that the brothers helped bring you up?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. The youngest one was my best friend and pal. He saw me through the university. He and my mother. Also he was my companion or pal in every move I made until he passed. My mother's name was Mrs. Nellie Jackson.

**Morris:** Now, what was his name?

**Jackson:** Emmett. Emmett Lee Jackson.

**Morris:** And how much older was he than you?

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**Jackson:** Five years.

**Morris:** Did you and your mother and Emmett come to California together?

**Jackson:** No. My brother William came out first. My mother had sent him from Vicksburg to live with my aunt, Mrs. Ida Lizabeth Young, whose home was in New Orleans, Louisiana in the downtown area.

My parents had always talked of living in California where there were more opportunities for Negroes. William was employed as a cook for Tranchini's Restaurant, which then was second in popularity in New Orleans. Antoine's was considered the most outstanding restaurant in New Orleans and was patronized largely by the wealthy white people.

William quit the job as cook for Tranchini's and wrote Mama he was leaving for California. The Southern Pacific Railroad Company was hiring more Negro men as cooks and waiters and Pullman porters at that time. He assured Mama that as soon as he could save enough money he would arrange for Mama and me to come to California to live. This he did.

**Morris:** About when was that?

**Jackson:** He came first in 1915, the year of the World's Fair. He sent for my mother in 1917. He had my mother come out and bring me.

I had been in boarding school at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi. I had left Vicksburg at age fourteen to go to Rust.

Rust College was one of several colleges established for Negroes after the Civil War, largely throughout the southern states. I believe Rust was established in 1868 (the same year that UC Berkeley was opened for students). It was organized by the various church denominations: Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, and others, through the American Missionary Association.

Although many were college level, there were those that had elementary classes. And students paid tuition and room and board.

**Morris:** How far away from Vicksburg was that?

**Jackson:** We traveled by railroad trains. It was at least a four-hour journey. Rust College was northeast of Vicksburg. I attended school two years at Rust. I finished high school at Cherry Street High School in Vicksburg when I was fourteen, and then went on to Rust College. My father Pompey Jackson, died when I was ten. And my mother let me choose my own plan of education. My mother and my father put education ahead of everything. They wanted all of us to have an education. My father used to say, "Get an education. It's the one thing the white man can't take from you."

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He had suffered losses through the system that existed at that time, racism, in the southern states, Alabama and Mississippi. Those were the two worst states, I believe, where blacks were concerned. A man had to be pretty strong to hold on to anything that he had that was of value that somebody else wanted.

**Morris:** Because if a white person saw that you had something of value he would try to get it away from you.



**Jackson:** Right, and succeeded.

**Morris:** Was your father in business?

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**Jackson:** No, my father was a farmer, carpenter, and a minister. So when he wasn't working at one he was working at the other. Maybe both, two at a time. My father built a small store on the lot next to our home. My brothers worked there for a short time. They gave so much to the people and allowed their friends to "charge" or carry accounts (which they never paid) so Papa had to close the store. The losses were too great.

**Morris:** How did you happen to decide that you wanted to go to boarding school?

**Jackson:** My parents wanted each of us to get an education as they had little or no opportunity and my friends were going to Rust. My mother always said I could go to school as long as I wanted to get an education, but when I wanted to "court"—to use the expression we used then—when I wanted to court then her help, that help for my education would end, because "boys and books" didn't mix.

**Morris:** I see.

**Jackson:** I wanted an education. My mother and father both wanted all of us to get a good education.

**Morris:** How far had your mother and father been able to go in school?

**Jackson:** Neither one finished high school. How far they went, I don't know. But anyway, I've often thought how much better it would have been if my mother had had the opportunity that I had. She was a good mother and manager.

**Morris:** You really admired your mother?

**Jackson:** Yes. She was a wonderful person and gave all of us all the love and care possible. My father died when I was ten. And my mother left a four-bedroom furnished home that we owned and came to California and started from scratch out here. We came in 1918. And she didn't sell the home until '29.

**Morris:** The home back in Mississippi?

**Jackson:** Yes. She didn't rent our home in Mississippi at once. When we were out here two or three years, she let a friend, who owned no home, move in and take care of it. Mama let her stay in the house a period of years before she began collecting any rent.

I marveled at the pioneering spirit my mother had, when I think of what she gave up to come out here so that my brothers and I would have opportunities that we did not have in Mississippi.

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My mother sent my brother William to New Orleans to live with my aunt. William secured a job as a cook at Tranchini's Restaurant. He then left New Orleans and came to California, so she sent my youngest brother to my aunt to live. But neither brother seemed to enjoy living with my aunt. So they both came on to California. Then they told my mother to bring me on out here that I could get a better education in California free than she was paying for my going to the boarding schools in the South. I had transferred to New Orleans, to what is now Dillard

University, when Mother notified me that we were moving to California.

**Morris:** Did you also stay with the aunt in New Orleans?

**Jackson:** No, I stayed in boarding school there. I stayed in the dormitory at New Orleans University.

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## II Coming to California, 1917; Studying in New Orleans; Family Values

**Morris:** Did you take the train to California?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. My mother and I came in February 1917. She notified me at school, at New Orleans University, to get ready. I'm ahead of my story. I stayed two years at Rust College. And the third year I asked my mother to let me go to New Orleans, now Dillard. They called it New Orleans University then. I had friends there. And she was happy to do it because I would be near my aunt, her only sister, Mrs. Ida L. Young. I never knew any of my father's family.

**Morris:** They were not from Mississippi?

**Jackson:** No, they were from Louisiana and Alabama. We were very fond of my aunt. So I transferred to New Orleans, and graduated from the normal department, got a certificate in teaching, a diploma in the normal department. The matron who was at Rust the last year I was there went to New Orleans and became superintendent and director of Peck School of Domestic Science and Art, which was a part of New Orleans University, but set apart as a division just for girls. The matron was Mrs. Fisher. I communicated with her. She wrote Mama to let me come to New Orleans.

I liked my physics teacher, but for the rest of the people at Rust, they and I didn't get along. I found excuses to get back home. I shouldn't tell you this, but I lied to my mother about a toothache I had. I told her the doctor said the tooth had to be extracted and the roots were around the jaw. He told me all of that. But the part I added was that he would have to lance the gum. I painted the picture so that Mama would see him leaving a scar on my face. So she let me come home so the dentist there could take care of it, and so I could recuperate at home.

Dr. Foot told Mama, "Well, I think this is an ordinary extraction." Of course, they didn't bother about trying to save our teeth then. There was one black dentist in the community in which I grew up. It was a matter of extracting. If one had a toothache, the tooth came out.

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So, anyway, I was enjoying myself so much at home. And my mother said, "Sister, it seems to me you're all right. Now isn't it time for you to go back to school?"

I said, "I don't want to go back."

She said, "What?" So she said, "Pack your trunk, you're going back tomorrow."

So I did. It was embarrassing because I had told all the kids on the campus, "I'm going to leave this place."

**Morris:** Was it the girls you didn't like as well as the faculty?

**Jackson:** I had many friends there. But I couldn't stand certain members of the faculty. The dean of women I couldn't abide. So I left. You see, this school was controlled by the Methodist Church. So Mother let me leave Rust, and one of the first persons I met when I got to New Orleans was the dean. That Dean Neff who had been at Rust— The Methodist Church used to transfer their faculty from school to school. So one of the first discomforts I had was when I looked up and saw Miss Neff, and I learned she was dean. But I was only at New Orleans University for one year. I made senior class in the normal school when I got to New Orleans University.

**Morris:** And there she was.

**Jackson:** Yes. I didn't have to have any subject matter with her. She taught some classes. But I didn't have to have any with her. I graduated, as I said, that year.

Then I was offered a teaching position by Dr. Melden, who was the president of New Orleans University. I was to teach two classes. Mrs. Fisher offered me a job as teacher of a class in the school at Peck Home to teach clothing, because I had gotten the certificate in domestic science and art. While I got my diploma at New Orleans University, I had gone to night school at Peck Home and studied domestic science and art. And I got a certificate in that at the end of the year. So on the basis of that she offered me a chance to further my career in the college department by teaching two beginning classes in sewing in Peck Home.

**Morris:** Is that the kind of thing you wanted to do?

**Jackson:** Not especially. But everyone who knew me said I should teach school, so there was nothing else to do. I was always interested in law. But, as you may know, black lawyers had very little chance in the courts during that period. And a woman—it was out of the question, in terms of making a living.

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**Morris:** In Mississippi.

**Jackson:** Yes. There weren't too many opportunities other places because good old California proved not to be as liberal as my brother had thought it was, or painted the picture to us. Because people are people. And there is a great deal of racial bias across the Mason-Dixon Line, I'll say that.

**Morris:** It isn't just in the South?

**Jackson:** It isn't just in the South. We've encountered racism in California even. I think it's one of the most liberal states in the Union. There *was* less of it here, largely because there were very few Negroes here, very few blacks at that time. We're called "Blacks" now.

**Morris:** Yes, the changes in terms have been very interesting.

**Jackson:** Yes, Negroes, colored, black, now "Afro-Americans."

**Morris:** Do you have any preference?

**Jackson:** I prefer black. I feel quite at home with that.

**Morris:** More so than with colored?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes, because there are many colored people. Indians, East Indians, who I really think should be classified as colored, and others. They are colored people, if color means what it is supposed to mean.

**Morris:** It is a very general term. It's not very specific as to what kind of origins your family had.

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Did your brother settle in the Bay Area?

**Jackson:** Oh, they all eventually came here.

**Morris:** All five brothers?

**Jackson:** Yes. My brothers William and Emmett were out here, sent out by my mother to get them out of Mississippi, because it was more healthy for black boys with the home training we had had.

**Morris:** Expecting to get an education, and to do well.

**Jackson:** And to live a normal life. My mother taught us that, and my father as long as he lived. My brothers had more of the influence of my father than I did, because, as I said, he died when I was ten. And Emmett was fifteen when he died. The other brothers were more mature.

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We were taught that no man was our superior unless he was more honest, had a better education and character. Those are the guidelines by which we were brought up. We were taught to protect ourselves, and rather die than be humiliated by being a coward and not standing up for our rights. So very soon my mother realized that due to that kind of training, teaching, my brothers should leave the South. She felt I would be all right. A black woman had more of a chance in the South at that time, than the black man.

**Morris:** But a young man who had pride in himself was not going to get a chance in the world of work?

**Jackson:** No. And then too, we lived in a neighborhood that was predominately white in Vicksburg, primarily because my father, when he bought the land on which he built our home, it was in the country. And the wealthy whites moved out there as I was growing up, it came to be suburbia. It was a desirable tract. It was a hilly area, and very beautiful.

**Morris:** Sounds like nice country.

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** And did those new neighbors make life unhappy?

**Jackson:** No, that was the thing about it. They were very friendly. And after my father died, they were very kind to my mother. When Mama got ready to leave to come to California, and it was known throughout the town, it was surprising to us at the number of whites who would stop by and talk with her and try to discourage her from coming to California.

The mayor lived right across the street from us. And he came over and said, "Jackson, it's foolish of you to go out there. You have a home here. And your girl is educated." Now imagine me educated. [Laughs] "And you have your home. Go out there following these boys? They're going their way. They're going to get married. And there you will be alone out there."

Mama thanked him and said she was thinking it over. She was packing at the same time. So we arrived with, I think, four barrels of dishes and two trunks.

**Morris:** You traveled with a good supply of things.

**Jackson:** Mama said she had worked too hard to try and acquire some of the silver that I polished when I was a child. So Mama said she was not leaving without it. My brother told her not to bring any quilts, that it was warm out here, that she didn't need them.

**Morris:** He must have come in the summer.

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**Jackson:** The climate has changed a great deal. But behind that was the fact that my mother had a lot of quilts. They used to have these quilting parties where the neighbors would come. If this neighbor was making quilts, her friends would find time to come to our house and help do the quilting. And they would have lunch. They would eat there, and they would visit and enjoy themselves. It was my mother's habit each year to make a different child a quilt. That was their possession; nobody else could have that quilt.

**Morris:** Those are treasures.

**Jackson:** We didn't value them then. My mother brought two or three out here that had things wrapped in them. But my brother William had instructed her she should leave them in Vicksburg. It was primarily because he didn't have the appreciation of what they were.

**Morris:** Did he think that something store-bought was better than something handmade?

**Jackson:** Yes, you should have comforters. He did not care for or realize the value of the hand-made quilt.

**Morris:** That sounds like a young man, yes.

**Jackson:** And he was very proud. It may have been false pride, but he had it.

**Morris:** He had a good sense of himself.

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### III Getting Settled in Oakland, California

**Morris:** Had he found a place for you to live in Oakland that was big enough for all of you?

**Jackson:** Interestingly enough, William worked on the railroad.

**Morris:** Which railroad?

**Jackson:** Southern Pacific. And he was on his way out for, as we called it, a "run." He was going to be traveling between New Orleans and California. He was due to go out that day. He told a friend of his who was in business in Oakland here, he said, "You know, I have a feeling that my mother and sister might come while I'm away. And if they do, I have given them your address to send my mail. I don't think my mother's going to wait too long. So you look out for them if they come while I'm away."

So he was on his way to the pier—they called it the "mole" then—to get the train that he was to go out on. When the "Sunset Limited" came in and Mama and I stepped off, he said, "Oh, my God, there's my mother and sister now."

So this fellow took us to a place and we got a room and Mama and I stayed there a week until my brother came in. Emmett in the meantime came back. They had passed each other on trains.

And William told him Mama and Sister had arrived.

**Morris:** Emmett was also working for the railroad at this point?

**Jackson:** Yes. He was sent to New Orleans to attend Straight College, which later combined with New Orleans University to become Dillard University. [from AKA archives] And he went to school one week and then went to work. He was going to work to see that his mother and sister didn't have to work.

**Morris:** That's a good sense of responsibility.

**Jackson:** Well, he did his part. He certainly sheltered me and was responsible. I don't want to fail to give credit to all who contributed to my livelihood. But he was the one who stood by me in everything.

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**Morris:** That's nice to have that close kind of relationship.

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. We were almost like twins.

**Morris:** How many black people were in Oakland when you were first living here? So few that one could really know everybody in the community?

**Jackson:** Well, you knew everybody. There were about five thousand, I would say. But I would say five thousand was a generous number. That's including Berkeley.

**Morris:** Up into Richmond?

**Jackson:** Berkeley and Richmond.

**Morris:** Some further south in Hayward?

**Jackson:** Vallejo and San Francisco. Now, there were more in Los Angeles than there were here because most of the blacks that came from the South stopped in Los Angeles and just stayed there.

**Morris:** Some of the train companies were advertising.

**Jackson:** Yes, bringing them out as workers. I don't know that they offered cheap land in the Bay Area. But the war was on, workers were needed in the fields in Fresno and Bakersfield during World War I. So that's how a great many got out here.

**Morris:** But your mother's purpose in coming was to see that you got a good education?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Even though you already had a teaching certificate?

**Jackson:** Yes. Well, she said I "didn't know anything." [Laughs] She was right. I knew nothing about the world. I had had a very sheltered life.

**Morris:** Did California seem really strange to you?

##

**Jackson:** When we came out, we knew a member of one black family that lived here. And through that family we met another family who was from Vicksburg. I remember being at one of their homes and the sister of the man and wife that we came to visit, who were friends of my brothers, said,

"Well, what are you going to do here in California now that you have *all* of your education?"

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I said, "Oh, I'm going to teach."

And they burst into laughter, and said. "The day that you apply for a job, the *Tribune* will carry the news, 'Burly Black Negress Applies for Job in the Oakland Public Schools.' "

At the time that's the way the *Tribune* referred to us. We were Negresses when they said anything about a black woman, or as niggers.

**Morris:** Where did black children go to school in Oakland?

**Jackson:** They went to the public schools here. They went to their neighborhood schools. Most of them settled in West Oakland because they knew somebody there, and they found a place with these friends until they could rent or buy places of their own. We stayed for a week in West Oakland. And then my mother said, "I have never lived in anybody else's house but my own." And she sent Emmett and me out to find a place for us to live.

So we found a place. But she didn't like it. Of course, she was a religious person and believed in attending church. So she had brought a letter from the church to which be belonged, which was the Methodist church there. Methodist Episcopal then, now it's United Methodist. And that first Sunday we went to church, we were introduced. The black community considered me an "educated person," as I had attended college.

**Morris:** The pastor introduced you to the whole congregation?

**Jackson:** Yes; oh, yes. And then we met several of the leading people in the community there. And among them was one black real estate dealer.

**Morris:** Who was that?

**Jackson:** E. B. Gray. He had his office downtown, and was very successful as a businessman and a real estate dealer. So he found us a place to stay out on Fifty-Eighth Street, which my mother bought. The home on Fifty-Eighth Street was owned by a black woman. And she had a little cottage on one lot and then this three-story house next to it. Her name was Ridgeway, Sarah Ridgeway. She was one of the early settlers. I think she was born in Oakland. She had several children.

**Morris:** So she would have been born in the 1860s, '70s?

**Jackson:** Oh, easily. Easily the '60s. She had a daughter. And when she saw Mama, right away, she called her "Daughter." She said she looked more like her daughter than anybody she had ever seen. And she called me "Baby." So she just adopted us, so to speak. As I told you, after a week Mama sent Emmett and me to look for a place where all of us could live as a family. And Mr. Gray fund this place for us. So Mama said, "We're going to move."

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So we moved that same day. And I remember Mrs. Ridgeway said, "Well, Daughter, when is your furniture coming?"

Mama said, "I don't have any furniture. Everything we brought is in our trunks and barrels." They had brought the trunks out from the train. She said, "We'll manage. I have some blankets

in the trunk."

So Mrs. Ridgeway said, "Send your sons over." She found a cot for my brothers to sleep on, and she found a bed that was for Mama and me. She said, "You and Ida can sleep in the bed. But I don't have but one cot."

Mama said, "That's enough. We'll manage with that. Oh, yes, we'll manage." We had fun—

**Morris:** Camping out?

**Jackson:** It was a new experience. I can remember Mama and I going to bed and my brother Emmett or William would say, "I'm ready to turn over, Mr. Blackbird Are you ready to turn?" And they turned over. It was fun. It's remarkable the pleasure one can get out of little things.

**Morris:** With a whole new experience like this.

**Jackson:** The cottage was at 621 Fifty-eighth Street. We rented there for three months. Then Mrs. Ridgeway said she didn't need all the space in her big house, since there was just herself; so she sold the house to Mama and we moved in there and Mrs. Ridgeway moved into the cottage.

That was 623 Fifty-eighth Street and the house is still there. It's a big house with three stories. And that's where Alpha Kappa Alpha was born and where we had our parties and dances.

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## IV University of California, 1918-1923: Studies and Friends at Berkeley

**Jackson:** Yes. We were in our own place. My mother bought that house. And I enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley in 1918.

**Morris:** You didn't feel like you had an education even though you had received a diploma and a teaching certificate?

**Jackson:** Oh, no.

**Morris:** Why not?

**Jackson:** Well, I knew there was so much more to explore, so much more to learn. But very frankly, when I visited the University of California— I'm ahead of my story. One of my professors at New Orleans University became very interested in my coming to California. Mr. Morrison and Dr. Forbes suggested that I send a transcript of my record from New Orleans University (now Dillard University). I wrote to Rust College and asked them to send my transcript. My transcript was sent to the University of California before I came out here.

A young man, Alvin Nurse, whom I knew at N.O.U., was attending the University of California and he contacted me. (Alvin was one of the few black students at Cal at that time.) Of course, after our church experience, many people learned of our arrival. I went down to the county superintendent's office to get an application to teach. My friend said, "What are you going to do with *all* your education now that you are in California?"

I said, "I'm going to teach." I went down to the county superintendent's office. I asked the conductor on the trolley where the board of education's office was. And he said "Down at Fifth and Broadway." I went there and got an application. Mr. Martin was county superintendent



of schools then, and he said, "I am giving you the application." He had asked for my qualifications, I told him I had finished high school in Vicksburg,

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Mississippi, and normal school or "teacher's course" at New Orleans University, and had left at the beginning of the semester where I was taking college courses.

He said, "Had you ever thought of going to the University of California?." He said, "You'll have to have California state history. But we often let teachers make up that credit. That is, take that course while they're teaching. That wouldn't keep you from getting a teaching job in the elementary school. But, you're rather young to start teaching. Had you ever thought of going to the University of California?"

**Morris:** He sounds like he was a friendly person.

**Jackson:** Yes. I gave attention to that. As I said, I met Alvin Nurse downtown. There were very few Negro or black people in Oakland in 1918. We were conspicuous. If a Negro was downtown, you would likely see him. There were so few in Oakland at that time. He said, "I thought you were going to the University of California?"

I said, "Well, I am. But I think I'm going to try to get a teaching job."

Alvin said, "Well, come on and go out and look the campus over, and ride out with me." He had a Model A Ford. I rode out with him. It was sort of dilapidated. The brakes were the hand brakes, at that time. Alvin said, "Now, you can help drive. Take this, and when I say, 'Horn,' stick the wire to a part on the dashboard." And that would sound the horn. He said, "I'll operate the brakes, you operate the horn." And in that way we got out to the U.C. campus.

Alvin said, "Come on and visit some classes. Let's go over to the administration building and see if you can register." So we went over. I've forgotten the name of the registrar. Anyway, he said I was too late to register, that classes had begun and had been going on for two weeks. So I said, "Well, I think I can make it."

He said, "I don't think you can. On the other hand, I'll give you this registration card. And if you can sign up in ten units of work, if that many professors will let you register in ten units of work, then I will let you enter."

Alvin said, "You've had a course in philosophy. Let's go up to 'Old Birdie's' class." They called Dr. [George] Adams "Birdie" because he would be lecturing in one tone of voice, then he would go to another voice change. So the kids named him Birdie, Birdie Adams. Alvin said, "Go up to Birdie's class and see if he'll let you register in philosophy." I was permitted to register. That

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was a two unit course. So Alvin said, "I'll take you over to anthropology, and maybe [A. L.] Kroeber will let you register." Anthropology I was a five-unit course. It met at eight o'clock in the morning; a five-unit course met every day. So I registered in anthropology. And that meant I had seven units.

Alvin said, "Since you're going to teach and you finished the normal school, I imagine you can take a course in education." So he took me around and I met Professor [Herbert] Bolton who was teaching history of education. He let me enroll.

**Morris:** And you did this all in one afternoon?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. We went from place to place.

**Morris:** What a good friend!

**Jackson:** I registered in thirteen units of work. By the time midterms came, I found that I should have taken the advice of the registrar and register in only ten units. So I dropped a three-unit course in order to finish enough work to pass and get the credits of the other courses.

**Morris:** Did you find that the courses were much different from the courses you had been taking in New Orleans University?

**Jackson:** Oh, definitely, because you got a bibliography, a list of many authors or writers in every class. The first class, I had a list of more authors than I had dealt with throughout my career. Many of the black colleges at that time didn't have the library facilities that compared with those of other large colleges and universities. You bought your books. And books that you couldn't afford to buy, you used the library. But as I said, they didn't have extensive libraries. I soon found that it would be all I could do to handle those ten units of courses.

**Morris:** Did you ride back and forth with Mr. Nurse in his Model A often?

**Jackson:** Oh, no. I got the Telegraph Avenue [street] car. If it was too long coming, I would get the Shattuck Avenue, which was very slow, and I would have to walk all the way across the campus, you know, a block or two to get to my classes. So it didn't help me to get the Shattuck Avenue cars, I soon found out. So I would let the Telegraph Avenue car catch me, because I would start walking. And sometimes I was too near Sather Gate to bother with the trolley.

**Morris:** How many other black students were there on campus at that point?

**Jackson:** I think in all, there were eight. Vivian Marsh was getting her master's when I entered. Walter Gordon was there. I think he graduated that year and entered law school. And George Johnson,

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Alvin Nurse. Ellis Knox, who became a teacher at Howard University. And let's see. Howard Ingram became a physician. How many have I named?

**Morris:** Six, with Alvin Nurse, and you, which was seven.

**Jackson:** And Belinda Davidson was getting her master's that year also. She didn't identify with us. Oreathial Richardson, Ruby Jefferson. How many?

**Morris:** Counting you, it's ten.

**Jackson:** And George Johnson and William Johnson. He was one of four brothers who graduated from the University of California.

**Morris:** That's quite a record.

**Jackson:** George finished law. Bill finished medicine and went to Ann Arbor, Michigan. Kenneth, I think Kenneth finished dentistry or medicine.

**Morris:** Is Kenneth later or earlier?

**Jackson:** Bill and George were my contemporaries. Kenneth is younger, but he was going to school before I graduated. They were all graduates of the University of California. And Lonny, the

youngest boy, went to UCLA and graduated. I think he was an optometrist. I'm not sure.

George was the first black to get his J.D. There weren't many whites that got a J.D. from Boalt Hall when he got his.

**Morris:** That's a degree that's coming back, I understand.

**Jackson:** Yes, Doctor of Jurisprudence.

**Morris:** Were these all people who had lived around here, or were there other people like you who had come to California in order to go to Cal?

**Jackson:** No, I think the Johnsons' family lived in or near Bakersfield first. They were from Bakersfield. And they had come in from the South, somewhere in the South. I think the parents were born in Georgia. I don't know how many of them were born in California, if any. And Ellis Knox, I don't know from where he came. Belinda Davidson is the only native daughter that I know. Her brother was born in Nevada. She may have been born in Nevada. But all of the rest of us were largely from the South.

**Morris:** Well, that's very like California.

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## V Starting a Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, 1921

**Morris:** Were these primarily people that you socialized with?

**Jackson:** Yes. I am responsible for bringing Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority out, which is the first black sorority in the nation, and first at the University of California.

**Morris:** Before you started Alpha Kappa Alpha, you mentioned something called the Braithwaite Club.

**Jackson:** Yes. At southern colleges, you had clubs of different sorts, so we organized the Braithwaite Club on the Cal campus.

**Morris:** Was that something you had in the South?

**Jackson:** We had had clubs. I don't know that we had the Braithwaite Club. But at that time we were very conscious of blacks who had achieved. So we named it the Braithwaite Club.

**Morris:** That's why I wanted to ask you. I'm familiar with Yvonne Braithwaite, who was one of the first women and, I think, the first black woman in the state legislature. And I wondered who the Braithwaite was that you named the club after. The same family?

**Jackson:** I'm trying to think if it was a famous musician or a scholar. I'm rusty on that. But anyway, he was one of the Negro greats in our opinion, I think nationally recognized as such. So I got the women together and we formed the Alpha Pi Club. There were seven of us on campus who went around together, and we formed the Alpha club so we would know each other better. There was an eighth woman on campus, who was not part of the group because she was working for her master's. A professor I had had at New Orleans, a professor of English, Dr. Morrison, had the drama group to which I belonged at New Orleans. We were doing a play, the annual senior class play. I don't remember the name of the play, but I do recall that there was a fraternity and a sorority in it.

**Morris:** In the play?

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**Jackson:** In the play. So he called us together at the original meeting. He said that we were going to make a few changes in the play, that instead of using the names of the white fraternity and sorority that the script had, we would change the name to Alpha Kappa Alpha, and Alpha Phi Alpha, because Alpha Phi Alpha was the first black fraternity. He was a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. And he said, "There is a black sorority known as Alpha Kappa Alpha. So we will use those names in the play." Then he told us about these fraternities. So I wrote him when I got out here. I wrote him at Sumner High School and asked him to put me in touch with the leaders of the sorority he had mentioned in New Orleans.

Dr. Morrison gave my letter to Erma Clark, who was also teaching in Kansas City. At the time they were both teaching on the same staff. And he later went to Sumner High School in St. Louis. So he gave her my letter. And it so happened that the sorority was having its annual convention in Kansas City. And she turned my letter over to Lorraine Green, who was the Basileus, like the president, of Alpha Kappa Alpha. Although basileus means keeper of the flame of love. So she sent us an application blank.

Now the Delta Sigma Theta had sent us an application blank and an invitation to join that sorority.

**Morris:** Another group, already?

**Jackson:** Yes. But I asked them to hold, not to join until I could find out about this other sorority. My reason was that some of the famous black women then, Dean Lucy Slowe and Maudelle Brown Bousfield, Dr. Bousfield, and several of the outstanding women of the nation at the time in the field of education were members of Alpha Kappa Alpha. Dean Slowe was the original founder of AKA. So the majority of us decided we wanted to join AKA. This sorority required us to get the dean's approval before they would accept our application. So I made an appointment to see Dean [Lucy] Stebbins.

That same day, Vivian [Osborne] Marsh, who was far more alert and critically minded and sophisticated than I was—I was sort of the leader of this group—she got Louise Thompson [Patterson] to withdraw. She and Louise withdrew from the group. We didn't know that they weren't going along with us. And the day that Dean Stebbins was to sign our application blank, Vivian had it appear in the *Daily Californian* that a sorority had been formed with Vivian Marsh as president, Louise Thompson as secretary, and Elizabeth Fisher as treasurer. Well, Elizabeth Fisher wasn't on the campus at the time. She became Walter Gordon's wife later.

**Morris:** She wasn't a student at that time?

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**Jackson:** No. She was attending San Francisco State. I don't think she ever went to Cal. Walter graduated the same year I did and got his AB. And then he went into law school.

So Vivian Marsh and Louise Thompson were the only ones that they had for the Deltas. They were the only two bona fide students on the campus at the time. After we had organized, Vivian persuaded Talma Brooks, who was also a student on the campus at the time, to join the Deltas.

**Morris:** Now, why did she do that?

**Jackson:** Well, they needed numbers.

**Morris:** Why did Vivian withdraw from your group and get a charter from a different sorority?

**Jackson:** Well, Dean Stebbins— I'm ahead of my story. Sadie Tana Moselle was national president of the Deltas. And those of us who formed this Alpha Pi Club had our pictures appear in the *Crisis* magazine, which at that time was, I think, it was about the only—if not, it was the most respected periodical put out by Negroes. Dr. DuBois was editor of it then. Dr. W. E. B. It was "something" to get your picture in the *Crisis*.

We members of the Alpha Pi Club sent our picture to the editor of the *Crisis*, and Sadie Moselle saw it. She didn't know us. I don't know whether we gave our name or not. Anyway, she wrote the dean of women and asked her to give her letter to anyone she saw of the group whose picture was in the *Crisis*. So Dean Stebbins—at the time didn't even know there were any black women on the campus—sent this application from Sadie Moselle to Vivian by Margaret Murdock, who was working in the dean's office. That's how they got in touch with these other women.

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On the day that we were supposed to go see Dean Stebbins, Vivian, being smarter, she had this article appear in the *Daily Californian*. You know, I have named all who were on the campus at the time. And no sorority could start without five members, a minimum of five members. They didn't have the five. She only had two. But nobody investigated. They weren't concerned. Proof of the fact that Dean Stebbins wasn't concerned was when she said, when we went to get her signature, she said, "Why don't you girls all join one sorority? There are so few of you."

We had difficulty convincing her that we had different standards and we were sold on being Alpha Kappa Alpha women. So she put us on probation for a semester. She checked our grades. We had a C average. She said if we brought up our grade points and

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qualified with a C+ average, she would sign our application, since we were determined that there would be two sororities and not one. We finally convinced her that there weren't enough blacks to make up two sororities and we were going to stay in Alpha Kappa Alpha. And we had five. Only two other black women students were on the campus. She didn't bother about doing any research to find out how many. She just felt being black, we all should be one. Colored, or Negroes, or whatever we were then. We were equally determined.

A year or maybe two years later, a woman by the name of Ida Mae Miller, who was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania came out to organize a chapter of the Deltas. The reason I was so well-informed about it, I have a friend, an older woman, who is my mother's contemporary. She was a member of the church when my mother and I joined and what not, we formed a friendship. This friend Mrs. Miller knew Miss Ida Mae Miller through the Methodist church. Miss Miller had been out here lecturing as an evangelist in the AME church, and she and Mrs. Miller became friends.

So Miss Ida Mae Miller told Mrs. Miller that she would come out to visit. She was going to be preaching at the Methodist church. And she was going to organize a chapter of her sorority while she was out here. I had a car. And Mrs. Miller arranged for me to meet Miss Miller at the train and bring her to her house.

I didn't tell Miss Miller that I was an AKA. She knew I was a student at Cal. So she just started talking to me about how the Deltas got in touch with Vivian. I guess it was wrong for me to

deceive her but—

**Morris:** It sounds like this was—

**Jackson:** A rivalry. So I didn't inform her that I was not one of the ones that she was going to induct into the sorority. She found out later that we had a chapter of AKA on campus, that I was not one of those that she would be inducting. In that way I was able to verify the fact. Dean Stebbins, as I said, didn't do any research or follow up work to see how many of us there were actually on the campus. I don't mean to discredit her. When we went to her, I became the spokesman of the group. Although, you know how when you are young, groups of you get together, possibly, and one's going to say this and the other is going to say that. But when we got to her office, nobody said anything but me. I got outside and said, "Why didn't you say something?"

But anyway, that was my introduction to the officials at the University of California.

**Morris:** And to student rivalries.

**Jackson:** Yes.

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**Morris:** Had you and Vivian had disagreements?

**Jackson:** No, we were good friends until that time because Vivian's house and my home were the only places that black young students had to go because the others attending the university were rooming with people, and we had homes. So the social gatherings were at our two homes. Vivian and I were very good friends.

**Morris:** Why did she not want to stay with the Alpha Kappa?

**Jackson:** You see, we were young, although she was getting her master's degree. And she was important in that the dean's office had sent her this communication. She began communicating with Sadie Moselle, and that made her a very important person. In a sense, she and Louise were together naturally. I hadn't thought about who was leading whom, that didn't occur to me. But I think she realized that she would be the leader of this group, which she did become. I later became national president of my sorority. And in a year or two, she was elected national president of the Deltas.

**Morris:** Over in the current student affairs office, they found a copy of the original charter, and I brought a copy over for you now.

[See illustration next page]

**Jackson:** Well, isn't this interesting. Where did you find this?

**Morris:** In Sproul Hall, the Student Activities office.

**Jackson:** These are they! Coral Johnson, Myrtle Price, Virginia Stephens, and Oreathial Richardson [Tatum].

**Morris:** I thought maybe you could tell me a little bit about those ladies and what kind of people they were.

**Jackson:** Ruby Jefferson became secretary of the YWCA in Los Angeles.

**Morris:** That means she was the staff head, the director?

**Jackson:** I don't know that Ruby was ever the head. I think she was assistant to the director of the YWCA in Los Angeles.

**Morris:** Was she studying social work when you were at Cal together?

**Jackson:** I think she graduated in the field of education. But she didn't intend to ever teach. She may have taken social work at USC because USC had a department there.

**Morris:** Did they?

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**Jackson:** I think they had a department of sociology. And Cal didn't have a department of sociology then. I'm not sure about that, but I think that is the case. And, going on down the line, Coral Johnson was in the field of music. She left in her senior year, got married and moved to Los Angeles and completed her work down there, at USC, I believe. And Myrtle Price went back to Texas. Virginia Stephens became the first black woman to pass the bar to practice law in the state of California.

**Morris:** Really? Good for her. Did she go to Boalt Hall?

**Jackson:** She graduated from Boalt Hall.

**Morris:** How long did it take her to do the law school?

**Jackson:** I don't think she did any extra years, I think she did the full year course and graduated from Boalt. And then she later coached prospective lawyers for the bar exam.

**Morris:** That's a very special skill, to prepare people for that.

**Jackson:** And Oreathial Tatum graduated from the school of education, and she married.

**Morris:** Did she teach?

**Jackson:** No, she passed away at a very early age. Shortly after marriage.

**Morris:** What a pity. Several black women have told us that they were active in the university YWCA while they were students. How about you and your friends?

**Jackson:** There were no blacks at the YWCA when I was at Cal. My first experience with the YW was when the women's gym burned. We were sent to the Oakland YW for our swimming classes. They said we couldn't use the pool, even when we asked if we could come before the water was changed, on Friday night.

I was instrumental in organizing a branch YWCA in Oakland for a group of girl friends. We were permitted to hold meetings at the Central YWCA and formed a basketball team, but we were not permitted to use the swimming pool.

Harry Kingman, who was the head of Stiles Hall, heard about our experience through Ellis Knox, Lee Purnell, and the Johnson brothers, who spent a lot of time at the campus YMCA. Mr. Kingman talked to Len Richardson, a lawyer who preceded us at Cal, and he got the YMCA in San Francisco to invite us to use their pool. But I had to turn it down. I never did have the opportunity to learn to swim. When I was a child, Mama wouldn't let me go out of the yard when my brothers went to swimming hole.

Later on, during my niece's generation at the university, she and her friends used to eat their lunch at the Y House. I did become friends with Lillie Margaret Sherman, who was their

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executive director for many years. Through her I was asked to go to Asilomar to take charge of a seminar on race relations. I was the main resource person for the meeting, and George Johnson, who went with me, was also an important resource. Asilomar was a very beautiful place, I remember.

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## VI Brothers' Influence; Working at the Post Office; Being Left out of the Yearbook

**Morris:** Did you find that books and boys mixed better at Cal than they had in New Orleans?

**Jackson:** I can't answer that question because nobody became particularly interested in me.

**Morris:** I can't believe that, having seen that picture of that pretty young woman. [interviewee laughs]

**Jackson:** Nope, I didn't. And then, too, my mother and brothers were putting me through school. I had grown up with these five brothers here in California. I learned that they were rather protective of me.

**Morris:** Oh. They didn't like young men coming to call on you?

**Jackson:** They had to screen everybody, you know.

**Morris:** That can discourage a young man.

**Jackson:** My brother William was the one that made a great deal of fun in the family. And he used a certain kind of psychology where I was concerned. For example (this isn't for the record) one of my boyfriends had developed a chemical compound. He had worked with a man in a drugstore and this man had mentioned he was working on this compound that would kill ants, if he could get it developed. And my friend learned the formula from him—he was also from Mississippi, from Meridian, Miss. He developed the chemical, and instead of—he worked as a custodian, but he developed this ant-killer chemical on the side. So now he started dating me. I got a job at the post office, I forgot to tell you that.

He was my first boyfriend. I'm nineteen or twenty, and my brother William would come in and say, "Is Andy the ant-killer coming tonight?" And that just got me. Of course, he expected it. And he *never* referred to him as Anderson. "Andy the ant-killer" was always my brother's name for him.

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**Morris:** Oh dear. That will discourage a romance very quickly.

**Jackson:** So I began to see his defects.

**Morris:** Yes. That's too bad. And I suppose your brothers all married perfect women? [laughter]



**Jackson:** I have one niece. My brother Sam married. They all came out here. And William and Emmett never married. James married, and he and his wife came to California after my mother did. James was the father of one daughter, who also is a graduate of Cal, Nellie. She was named for my mother.

I got a job at the post office, I forgot to tell you that.

**Morris:** While you were going to Cal?

**Jackson:** Before I went to Cal. When I left the county superintendent's office—you know how you read the bulletin board? That day was the last day for women to sign up to take the civil service examination—I guess it was *anybody* to take the civil service examination. And I signed up for it and took the examination and passed, number thirteen on the list.

**Morris:** Good for you.

**Jackson:** I got a letter saying that I could have an interview with the Superintendent of Mails at such-and-such a time. I went over and they hired me. They told me that the only opening they had I might possibly not want, because it was in San Francisco and it was a job that would cause me to be working at night, from four in the afternoon to eleven at night.

He said, "You live in Oakland, so you'd have to get the ferry and go back and forth. And getting off at eleven thirty, you'd have to make the last ferry," which left at eleven forty-five. So I said, "That's fine, I like that!" So, I would be *away* from home at night! I didn't have to be home at night. I loved it! It was San Francisco. I worked at the Ferry Building post office, I would take my lunch and meet another woman. I was the only black in this group. They hired three of us, and two of us would bring our lunch and get the trolley and ride up Market Street and look in the shop windows.

**Morris:** Oh, that would be fun.

**Jackson:** It was wonderful, and I didn't have to be at home at night, you know? I was away from home and in San Francisco. I was *living!* When I first came here I said, "Oh, if I can just get a good job in San Francisco and live in Oakland." I got that. And that was my first job, clerking in the post office.

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**Morris:** Did all three of you that were hired from that civil service test get put on the four to eleven p.m. shift?

**Jackson:** No, only one. The other two were white.

**Morris:** Did you think maybe they offered you this four to eleven p.m. job thinking you wouldn't take it?

**Jackson:** I think he was pretty sure I wouldn't take it, because I lived in Oakland. But I said, "That's just what I want," and it was. I'd get out of the house. But my brother Emmett met me at the train. See, we lived on Fifty-eighth Street, and I got the D train (I think it was D) which stopped at Fifty-fifth and Shattuck, and we lived at Fifty-eighth near Shattuck.

**Morris:** That's just a couple blocks away.

**Jackson:** So my brother met me every night.

**Morris:** Was your mother as protective and strict with you as your brothers seem to have been?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. See, it all started from her: "Protect your sister. Take care of little sister". The earliest, "Take care of the baby".

**Morris:** When you first got to Oakland, you mentioned that a family friend called you "Baby." You were seventeen or eighteen at that time, and people still called you Baby?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** What got you interested in starting things? Was it when you discovered that you really liked to be out on your own?

**Jackson:** As I think of it, I've always—I was taught to express myself, all of us were. My father is responsible for our thinking that education would do so much for us, and I thought that too. He just really believed that if blacks were educated, better educated; if they had a chance for education, *that* would solve the racial problem; they'd have a chance to get ahead. As I see it now, I must have been pretty militant. I'm pretty sure if I'd been a man and living in the South I would not have survived.

**Morris:** Would you have stayed and kept the struggle going there, or would you come North or West?

**Jackson:** I probably would have done what I could there. See, my mother had always wanted to come to California. She was interested in *everything* in California. So I might have come on to California anyhow. But I do know I rebelled; as a child I rebelled at almost

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anything that seemed unfair. So much so that my brother William nicknamed me Emma Goldman. [laughs] (And you know, I must get that book. that's just been published, a biography of her.) I just loved it. When I thought of her, I chuckled.

**Morris:** Did you find it was difficult keeping up with your school work, with all the assigned reading, when you were also working nights at the post office?

**Jackson:** No, because my folks were very good to me. I loved to read and I had a natural curiosity. And I was tremendously interested in the University of California, because my brother had pictured it to us. And the fact that you could get an education free.

In thinking back on it, of course, I'm responsible for the Jeffersons coming to California. Ruby and I were in Rust College together, and I wrote her and told her about the opportunities out here. Her family was moving from Coffeetown, Mississippi, to Denver. And I wrote Ruby in such glowing terms about the University of California, and Ruby being the only girl—I think there were three brothers. I know two of them became judges in Los Angeles. Edwin was the first judge who was black there. Anyway, she was the moving factor in her home. She said she thought that she'd come to California instead of going to Denver. So they did come out here. And I wrote her that she could stay with us.

**Morris:** Oh, that's wonderful. The whole family, or just her?

**Jackson:** Well, I guess I issued a general invitation, not consulting with the rest of my family. So Ruby came out and stayed with us until her family could move out. She stayed here and went to the University of California and graduated from Cal. Then the mother decided to move to California, but she moved to Los Angeles. The boys wanted to go to Los Angeles.

**Morris:** So the boys went to UCLA.

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** So they would be amongst the first black students at UCLA.

**Jackson:** I'm pretty sure they went to UCLA. At that time it was called the "Southern Branch." Some of them may have gone to USC.

**Morris:** You had some really fine professors; Professor Kroeber and Professor Bolton.

**Jackson:** Dr. [J. V.] Breitweiser was very much interested in my career, J. V. Breitweiser was, he gave me a lot of encouragement. And Dr. Lee, who was in vocational education. And Dean [William] Kemp, dean of the School of Education. He's the one who was responsible

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for my going to Tuskegee as dean of women. The president of Tuskegee—Patterson—got in touch with him and asked him if he knew of a black woman graduate of Cal that would qualify for serving as dean of women at the school. Dean Kemp recommended me and called for an interview. What was it—I went to Dean Kemp for something and he said he had had this communication.

He said, "I think you'd make a marvelous dean of women, but I *don't* think the South is the place for you." He said, "I'd hesitate to recommend your going to any place below the Mason-Dixon line."

**Morris:** Why did he say that, do you think?

**Jackson:** I think because I was so outspoken on my views of race and what-have-you. I often wondered about that. You see, there weren't many blacks on the campus. This gets me into another category—as soon after we organized as a chapter of AKA sorority, we decided we wanted our picture in the *Blue and Gold*, so we went up and paid the forty-five dollars. Again, my folks had to get the money together. My brother Emmett helped us to get that. We each put in an amount and went up and paid it at the ASUC office, and they sent us to the photographer. We went down as a group and had our picture made. When the *Blue and Gold* came out, we weren't in there. It just was a terrible thing.

We went to Dean Stebbins and she couldn't tell us anything about it, so we went to President [David P.] Barrows. And in each case, I became the spokesman of the group. I'll never forget when we left Dean Stebbins' office, I made an appointment to see President Barrows. So I said, "You're going to say so-and-so and all of us are going to ask different questions." I got there and nobody said *anything*. [laughs] We wanted to know *why* we did not appear in the *Blue and Gold*; we met the requirements, we had paid our fee and had our picture made, and why weren't we in there? So he told us we "weren't representative of the student body." President Barrows told us that. Now when I said that Irving Stone got me to withhold that remark in the interview I did with him because some of President Barrows' descendants were connected with the University of California, and it might hurt their feelings; Ella Hagar, for one.

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**Morris:** What about the hurt to your feelings? You young ladies who had put together a campus sorority?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. He told us we weren't representative of the student body. That's why our pictures didn't appear, so there was nothing else we could do.

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**Morris:** What about your pictures as individuals in the yearbook when you were seniors?

**Jackson:** No, they didn't appear. We didn't make any further effort to get in there. I doubt if any of us of that generation appeared in there. Now, Walter Gordon may be in there because he was an athlete.

**Morris:** In the 1929 *Blue and Gold*, there is a very pretty young black woman. That's several years later.

**Jackson:** About nine years later. So things had changed. I had taught in Oakland. I taught in Oakland in '25 and '26, and I think by then (to use an expression that my people use a great deal when racial attitudes change) we said they had gotten religion. [laughs]

**Morris:** Yes, I know that phrase. Were there white students who were friendly in some general campus activities that you did take part in?

**Jackson:** Not especially. Now the fellows, Walter Gordon being an athlete, he had recognition. At Boalt Hall, George Johnson became friendly with Earl Warren, who became governor of California. And with Roger Traynor; they were two contemporaries of George. I'm not sure, but I think George had studied with him. But I do know they became friends of George Johnson, who was attending Boalt Hall while I was going to Cal.

**Morris:** Did you think at all of trying to go to law school?

**Jackson:** No, I never did. California state law is the only course I had in law at all. I abandoned the idea because I knew I had to make a living, and there was no opportunity. But many years passed before I started trying to get an education for the sake of an education. It was purposeful at first; it was in order to make a living. And then, by the time I had gotten my master's, then I could study some courses just for the sake of knowing. I remember how happy I was when I went to Columbia and didn't have to study for units and could study for the sake of learning.

**Morris:** Prerequisites for this and that. What kind of courses did you study when you were taking things just for your own interest?

**Jackson:** Oh, I think I took some courses in psychology, and I went to evening school here and took courses in real estate, and I went briefly in the field of vocational guidance and education. I think basically they were largely courses in psychology.

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## VII First Experiences in Teaching

**Morris:** Am I right in thinking, talking to you this morning, that you picked education as your career field not so much because you loved teaching as because there were some things you wanted to teach?

**Jackson:** Well, I tell you, I must have loved teaching because I remember when I was fifteen—a year after I came back from Rust—people persuaded my mother to get me to help their children with their work and to coach them.

I remember when I went to private school, the first day I was there Mrs. Bell had me take some of the larger girls. She was embarrassed that they did not know how to read. And she gave me the job of teaching these girls their alphabet and how to read, and they were much older than I was. Mama sent us to this private school, I guess, so that she could "keep her eye" on us as long as possible. And then where we lived, my brothers would have had to attend the county school. And my father said that he and Mama could teach us as well as the county teachers, they were no better prepared than they were. They wouldn't let them go to the county school, they sent them to this private school.

One day, when my brother Emmett came home to lunch, I followed him back to school. And the teacher wouldn't excuse him from his class to take me back home, she let me stay in school. Now, she was a friend of my mother's and she knew me very well, so I wondered why she said, "Oh, and who's this little girl you've brought?" He says, "She's my sister. Can I take her home?" She said, "Well, I want to talk to her first." She said, "So you want to go to school?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Do you know your alphabet?" I said, "Sure, I can read in Sam's book." You know, the grade was judged by the reader. I said, "I can read in Sam's book." She says, "Oh, you can?"

So she got the fifth grade reader. And I said, "I know my times table too, up to twelve." I guess I was quite a nuisance.

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**Morris:** A bright little sister, yes.

**Jackson:** I don't know about that, but I know I was curious. I wanted to do everything they did. When they came home, they looked after me while Mama got dinner. So anyway, in order to get their lesson, I would say it. I would want to read, I mean, in their books and that sort of thing. My brother James was interested in geography, and they'd get together around the table and discuss people and school and what-have-you. And James was busy with his geography, and he was talking about commerce and different ports, and that sort of thing.

I often think what a marvelous scholar he would have been if he'd had a chance to go to school. I think that most of them would have made better students than I did, as I think back on it, because they had so much to offer, I mean, with the limited education they had.

**Morris:** Did they all work for the railroad out here?

**Jackson:** James became a car repairer for Santa Fe railroad, and Sam did catering work and any other kind of work he could get. Emmett became a chef. Emmett and Sam became chefs, and William continued on the railroad.

**Morris:** Were any of them active in any of the labor organizations that were getting started then?

**Jackson:** Emmett became a union member.

**Morris:** Yes. In the sleeping-car porters or the Cooks and Stewards? There is a Cooks and Stewards Union too.

**Jackson:** Yes, that's the one. I was looking at his card, a membership card I found, the labor-union membership card. But I've forgotten which one it was.

**Morris:** Were any of them involved in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People?

**Jackson:** Membership only.

**Morris:** Membership only. That kind of political action was not something that interested your family particularly?

**Jackson:** Well, yes. When I applied for a teaching position and was not accepted, the man who built this house, Walter Butler, was president of the NAACP. I didn't think I'd ever forget those people's names, there were one or two influential whites who were active. Anita Whitney was a member of the NAACP. And Mr. Butler and some members of the board of education; they had gone to high

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school with Mr. Walter Butler here in Oakland. So he interviewed those men on my behalf when I applied for a job. And Miss Anita Whitney, being a member of NAACP, also intervened for me.

**Morris:** Was there a regulation that there would not be a black person hired, or was it just that no blacks—?

**Jackson:** Generally accepted, you know. It was an unheard-of thing. And apparently it was a deep-seated feeling that no blacks should become teachers in the Oakland public schools, because there were very few blacks in the schools and those that were there, were not being trained to further their education.

**Morris:** The black children in the Oakland schools were not going on through high school?

**Jackson:** Well, nobody was encouraging them to go through. And there were very few parents, if any, who had a college education at the time. When I was teaching at Prescott in Oakland, I remember encouraging some of my more brilliant students to go on to college. And when they would go to the counselor that they had then, she would tell them, "Now, don't think you can go into the teaching profession. Don't think because Miss Jackson is teaching that there will be other black teachers. So don't plan a career teaching." And that was in '25 and '26 and '30.

**Morris:** And you got your teaching job and your teaching credential from the city; there was no state credential?

**Jackson:** I got a state teacher's license early on. I've forgotten what year I got the state credential, but it was very early in my teaching career. Shortly after I got my master's I had a state credential when I went to Imperial Valley to teach in 1923.

Will Wood was state superintendent of schools, and it was he who sent me the telegram when he contacted the placement office at the University of California, asking if they had a black graduate who would—a "colored woman"—who was qualified to teach English and something else. Oh, English and the main thing was foods. In El Centro.

The blacks in El Cerrito had decided that since they could not attend Central Union High School, they didn't want white teachers in the black school, East-Side school. So then the state superintendent of schools became involved with the issue, and he began searching for a black woman qualified to teach home economics, as they called it then—foods and clothing. The person who was head of placement at Cal discovered that I had a Domestic Science Certificate that would permit me to qualify. So she gave Will Wood my name, and I

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got a telegram from him offering me the job as clothing teacher; the "foods classes" were added later. Teach clothing and English; so they added the foods later.

**Morris:** And why did you take that job?

**Jackson:** Because I wanted to work. It meant a job and teaching, and I didn't know about segregated schools then.

**Morris:** How long had that been a segregated school?

**Jackson:** Well, I guess they were just about starting in that area. They just had a group of students who were qualified to go into the high school department. Negroes had moved into El Centro. There were some very brilliant students in Imperial Valley. They had a progressive principal at that school, and these students were qualified to go on for college preparatory courses; they hadn't had such before. So Mr. Wood notified me and told Mr. Payne, who was the principal of the high school, about me, so he also wrote.

**Morris:** At one point there was a black elementary school in Oakland, too, and I wondered how that came about?

**Jackson:** It wasn't a school. I mean, what the woman told me is that they had three or four black students and they got Mrs. Grassis (that was her name), they got her to teach these students, to keep from having them in the Oakland public schools. She taught a private school. She taught them at her home; Kate Grassis' mother (let's see, what was her first name?). Anyway, she was Mrs. Grassis, and she told me about it herself.

**Morris:** And that was before you and your family came—

**Jackson:** Ever came to California. That was in the early days.

**Morris:** Well, I think that's a good place to stop for today. I don't want to wear you out.

**Jackson:** Well, I'm wearing you out, I'm rattling on and on. I brought in a lot of things that weren't essential.

**Morris:** Well, they're certainly fascinating to hear.

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## VIII Oakland Schools in the 1920s, Church Drama Classes, and Other Activities

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**Morris:** I wanted to go back a little bit. I did an interview with Dr. Marvin Poston a couple weeks ago and he told me that he went to you for drama classes, that you ran the drama group for the church in the '20s. How did that get started?

**Jackson:** Well, I was director of the choir. And until the time I came along, black children rarely had an opportunity to get on the stage in the schools. If they were there in a singing group they were far back. Of course, those of us who fool with music know you put your best voices in the back row, so we tried to make ourselves believe that [laughs] they put them in the back row because of their voices, but that wasn't entirely true.

I had profited so much by the experience I had had as a child doing things in the neighborhood before people and that sort of thing, and I realized its value, so very shortly after I got in the school department I decided to do something about it. I was working with the choir. So each year I would have an operetta or drama, something of that sort, but most years it was an operetta. I gathered all of the black children from the high-school groups and it made it interesting for them, they looked forward to it. The rehearsals were a social gathering. So both of us got a lot of fun out of it.

**Morris:** Did you do this outside of the regular school program?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. This was my own.

**Morris:** And did it work through the schools or the church?

**Jackson:** Well, we had our rehearsals at first in the basement of the church. And then towards the end, so they could get the feel of performing, I'd take it to the school auditorium. So we did one or two at University High, and Prescott.

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**Morris:** And you collected black students who went to University High and Prescott and the different schools?

**Jackson:** We had students from Tech, Berkeley High, and Prescott. I don't know that we had any or many from McClymonds. We did have quite an interesting group.

**Morris:** What kinds of things did you do? Gilbert and Sullivan? Or the *Student Prince* and those kind of things?

**Jackson:** Nothing so fabulous as that. I can't even think of the names of them now. I don't know how I got off on that. Some of the youngsters are still around. Whenever we're together, we talk about the fun they had at the rehearsals.

**Morris:** Student dramatics are a lot of fun. It takes an awful lot of time, particularly on top of teaching all day long.

**Jackson:** I'm searching my mind while I talk trying to think of the names. I don't know how I happened to bring that up. I haven't thought of it for years.

**Morris:** Well, Marvin Poston recalls that he was about seventh or eighth grade when he took part. It obviously still is something that he remembers.

**Jackson:** It was a very refreshing experience for them because, as I said, they had little or no opportunity to do stage work. There was one family that were all brought up to the tune of music, you know. The Davis family. They either played or sang, or that sort of thing. People like that were quite an addition to the group because they knew how to read music. But the mass of them didn't know how to read music.

**Morris:** So they learned a little about that too?

**Jackson:** Yes, but we did much of it by rote. I didn't do the piano work. I had someone else do it. And then the last few rehearsals, we rehearsed with an orchestra. Ethel Terrell was the pianist that I used at the time. She's passed away now.

**Morris:** Did you get some of the parents involved to help with costumes and things like that?



**Jackson:** Later they came to give moral support, a few of them. But I found it more difficult to do a job with the youngsters if the parents were there. Very often I had one or two of my associate teachers who would sit in sometimes at rehearsals. I had no problem; the youngsters enjoyed doing it so much. There were one or two problems with the children. Everywhere you find that.

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**Morris:** And what do you do with them? Do you put them in the back row in the chorus?

**Jackson:** No, they'd do more damage back there. [laughs] Let them come out and rest a while and look at the stage. That does it.

**Morris:** Were any of them ever so naughty that they had to be excused from being in the play?

**Jackson:** I don't think I ever had to dismiss anyone. I don't think so. They enjoyed it so much, I had very little discipline problem.

**Morris:** Did any of them go on into any kind of entertainment as a profession when they got out of school?

**Jackson:** One or two who were good at dancing. But the opportunities didn't exist for them then as they do now. And I talked against their trying to make a career of it.

**Morris:** You did?

**Jackson:** Because opportunities were so narrow, so few, that I always taught that you had to be prepared in several lines in order to get a job. The counselors in Oakland, and I disagreed on this, they had a narrow view. One counselor, for example, told some of the black students not to plan on teaching and not to think because I was teaching that there would be more black teachers. I tried to convince them, where I could, where they were friendly enough to talk with me. But we couldn't plan for localities. If we had the gift, the talent, and cultivated it, we might end in New York, or Chicago, or someplace else where there was a large black community, and then where people were more open-minded in hiring blacks than they were in the West.

**Morris:** Your feeling was that there were other parts of the country where there was more opportunity for blacks?

**Jackson:** Yes. And sometimes they'd need a certain thing that we could provide. So we just had to prepare. Whatever gifts we had I felt we should cultivate.

**Morris:** So while you were teaching you were also working for more opportunities for black people?

**Jackson:** Oh, I've always done that.

**Morris:** Did you work with the NAACP and the National Council of Negro Women?

**Jackson:** I helped organize the National Council of Negro Women with Mrs. Bethune. Dean Lucy Slowe from Howard University and Mrs. Bethune and I met. And Lucy Slowe and I drew up the constitution for the

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National Council of Negro Women and helped to divide it into zones, areas, regions, whatever.

**Morris:** I've heard people say that the NAACP helped the National Council get started.

**Jackson:** I was on the board of directors of the NAACP when I was 19. I was going to Cal then. They formed an education department. Walter Butler, the man who built this house, was president of the Bay Area Chapter of the NAACP. The board members invited me to come in and create an Education Department there.

**Morris:** What was the purpose of the education department?

**Jackson:** Encouraging more blacks to get higher education, and to sort of fight the prejudice that was in the schools.

**Morris:** This was by talking to people on the school boards and principals, and people like that?

**Jackson:** Yes. That's true. You see, some of the people on the school board had gone to school with NAACP members. Walter Butler was in school here with Campbell, who was on the school board at the time I was appointed, and several others.

**Morris:** So that they had personal contacts with some of the people in authority?

**Jackson:** I know before I was appointed as a teacher, Mr. Butler went to the board of education members that he knew and called their attention to me.

**Morris:** You mentioned that it took thirteen years before the next black person was hired as a teacher in Oakland. Why did it take that long?

**Jackson:** You're not familiar with the routine that we've lived through. The average white man at that time just didn't think in terms of blacks *ever* being a part of the mainstream of things.

**Morris:** But there were more young black people coming out of college, and some of them, you would think, would want to be teachers.

**Jackson:** Yes, but more went to San Francisco State, and they were encouraged to take positions in the South, in the schools that were separated by race in the Southern states.

**Morris:** But if they had been raised in California, you'd think their first choice would be to teach in California.

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**Jackson:** The first black woman that I remember who graduated from the University of California was Berlinda Davidson. And I believe she and her brother were born in Nevada and reared here in California. Her brother was an early graduate of the medical school in San Francisco. When she graduated she had to go to one of the Carolinas to get a position to teach.

**Morris:** That's amazing because there were more black people moving to California.

**Jackson:** But not rapidly. You see, that's the thing. When I say the white man, I mean the masses, they've never thought in terms of a black being able to teach them anything. Maybe cooking. [laughs] We like seasoning, and maybe they thought we could teach them something there. But it wasn't a part of the general consciousness.

**Morris:** Even though they had someone in the school, somebody like you who was doing all these extra things, and obviously doing a good job teaching.

**Jackson:** For a long time, most people didn't know that I was teaching. I remember when I had reason in '40 to seek out the help of an attorney and some help on a financial matter. When I called him

on the telephone and told him that I was black, "colored" then, that I was colored, and that I was a teacher in the schools, he said, "Well, just a minute." I'm summarizing, he said, "I can tell by your speech you were a trained person, but I didn't know you were black, and I didn't know we had any colored teachers in the school department."

So I said, "Oh, yes, I've been a teacher for seventeen years."

**Morris:** But he took your case and won?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes.

**Morris:** When did you move from teaching into being a counselor?

**Jackson:** I didn't. I had a couple of periods for counseling. And I taught classes just the same. I was never a full-time counselor.

**Morris:** Were there full-time counselors by that time?

**Jackson:** White, yes.

**Morris:** Was it the colored students who came to you for counseling, or black and white?

**Jackson:** No, I've never fostered segregation. I was given a certain class to counsel, and of course, they were predominately black. But at the time there weren't that many blacks in the schools, in the entire school department.

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[phone interrupts]

**Morris:** You mentioned Berlinda Davidson. Is she still living in the Bay Area?

**Jackson:** No, she passed away.

**Morris:** Did you know Louise Patterson, who was in the class of 1923?

**Jackson:** If that was Louise Thompson; there was a Louise Thompson there. I think she moved East. We sort of lost sight of her. This isn't for the record. When they were seeking out Communists in the the campus, she and John Pittman were outspoken and with that group on campus but sort of went underground. So I don't know whether she married and became Louise Patterson, whether that's the same person.

**Morris:** She's recently moved back to the Bay Area. It sounds as if she's been involved in very activist causes of one sort or another.

**Jackson:** Yes, that sounds like the same person. She and Vivian Marsh organized the Delta Sigma Theta sorority. So I think that's the same one.

**Morris:** That sounds like the same woman. You haven't had much contact with her in the years in between?

**Jackson:** No, I haven't. The different interests naturally kept us apart.

**Morris:** I know about the concern about Communism on the campus in the '40s, I didn't realize they were looking for Communists on campus in the '20s.

**Jackson:** [laughs] Not such a vivid search as was being made in later years.

## IX National AKA President, 1934-1937; Teacher Training in the South

**Morris:** How did you manage to be national president of your sorority when you were teaching school and running drama classes and doing all these other things?

**Jackson:** I don't know. Since I've gotten old, I have wondered how I did all the things that I did then. When a group of us on the campus organized the Alpha Pi Club and we were invited to come into Delta Sigma Theta sorority, I asked the group not to accept that invitation for a while until we investigated another sorority about which I had heard. So the majority decided to wait, and then we got an application blank from Alpha Kappa Alpha.

Delta Sigma Theta had a beautiful pin. You know, during that period a Greek letter pin meant "everything". The pin, and the chain! Alpha Kappa Alpha's insignia was an ivy leaf. They had this little green enameled pin; it wasn't impressive at all. That was the only thing I didn't like about it. Their pin wasn't impressive or Greek enough. And then when we were designated as Rho Chapter, what are you going to do with rho? There's nothing Greek-looking about it. Now, pearls have been added to the pin.

**Morris:** Then when you became national president—?

**Jackson:** I was responsible for their coming to the West and forming the first chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. Then the national body had my name and my address. When they divided the organization into regions, I was the person they remembered out here, so they appointed me regional director of the Far West. I helped organize chapters out here in the West.

**Morris:** Do you remember some of the schools that you organized?

**Jackson:** I organized the undergraduate chapter, Alpha Gamma chapter, at UCLA; and a chapter in Arizona; and the chapter in Spokane, and Seattle.

**Morris:** They were people going to the University of Washington?

**Jackson:** Yes. We still have a chapter there.

**Morris:** Was that still in the '20s?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Did you have national conferences?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. They had regional and national. The national convention was known as Boule, so they had that once a year, every year. In recent years, we have it every two years.

**Morris:** Where did the idea come from that it would be good to have a teacher training institute in the South?

**Jackson:** I guess it originated with me.

**Morris:** I thought it might have.

**Jackson:** [laughs] Who else would be crazy enough to go there? When I came up north, I felt that black men needed more courage to fight prejudices and discrimination. You see, I was born in Mississippi, and I came up with five brothers. I felt that if the black man had more courage, he could fight, he should stand up and fight. I guess, if I had been a man, I wouldn't have survived.

**Morris:** As a little girl, did you want your brothers to be more active in speaking up for their rights?

**Jackson:** Yes. I didn't realize all that it required. How are you going to get out there and change things? How are you going to fight? With picks and hoes when other people have guns and cannons? It was so inconsistent. I hadn't thought the whole thing through.

**Morris:** But as you got older, you still thought it was important for people to struggle?

**Jackson:** You see, my father always preached to us to get an education, get all we could, although my brothers quit school at an early age, most of them. We weren't financially able to have them go on, if they had wanted to go. Yet probably a way would have been made had they wanted to go. But it was such a fruitless sort of thing for a black man then. My mother had visions of coming to the West. But she didn't upset our thinking with it.

When I began teaching, I felt that if rural teachers—most blacks lived in rural communities then—if the black teachers were better prepared, they could inspire the youth to break the shackles

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and to get an education. At that time I thought an education would do it. If more of us were well educated we could compete on a better level with the white man.

**Morris:** Were there black men teaching in the rural schools in the South?

**Jackson:** A few, very few.

**Morris:** Mostly women?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Did black men not like teaching?

**Jackson:** In the colleges, yes. They were in the colleges, the few that acquired an education. Comparatively few.

**Morris:** And they had mostly gone to black colleges in the South?

**Jackson:** Where they had migrated to the North, there were a few who had attended Northern universities.

**Morris:** I'm interested in what you were saying earlier that some black people who got their education at San Francisco State, went back and taught in the South.

**Jackson:** Yes. That was the feeling, that if you wanted a job teaching, you would have to go to the South, where there were schools for blacks.

**Morris:** And did you talk to some of those people from the Bay Area who had gone south to teach in starting the summer school project?

**Jackson:** No. In starting the summer school for rural teachers, that was still based on my opinion that they needed to have the education to help the race, because the masses then lived in rural areas.

If the teachers were better prepared then they could inspire the youth to go ahead and get an education.

**Morris:** How did you convince your sorority to take this on?

**Jackson:** I did it myself. As soon as I was elected president, I sent out a call for volunteer teachers to go in the South and teach at the summer school. It was a plan of my own. I didn't dare take it up with the national at the time because everybody wasn't seeing things as I saw them. I sent out a circular letter when I became Basileus (national president). I guess I got about thirty responses, but I could only take about eight. I think eight was the number that I was able to take. I had heard this woman, Dr. Arenia C. Mallory, who was president of Saints Industrial School, a school run by what is now the Church of God in Christ.

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**Jackson:** It was a school for blacks in the rural South. And it was almost as bad as it was during the slavery days, so I met her and made an appointment to talk with her. She presented such a gloomy picture of conditions that I visited her campus, I think it was '33, on my Christmas vacation. I saw enough in visiting the local nearby towns and plantations that made me feel that we should try to do something about it.

**Morris:** Did you go out into some of the small rural areas?

**Jackson:** I got a chance to see Mound Bayou on that trip. We visited many of the plantations and saw the kinds of schools, the one-room shacks and shanties, usually churches.

**Morris:** That during the week were used as schools?

**Jackson:** Yes. Anyway, I circulated a letter to the chapters and got my staff for the summer school there. So Dr. Mallory housed us. I used my money to finance the transportation. I did it this way: I chose three people from St. Louis and one had a car. So you see, I only had to pay for the gas and oil.

**Morris:** That's pretty clever.

**Jackson:** And then I took my niece, Nellie Jackson, and another friend, Robertha Wells, who had graduated from Cal. They went with me in my car. And then there was a group in Cincinnati that had a car. In that way we didn't spend much money.

**Morris:** Was that one of your criteria for choosing them? If somebody had a car?

**Jackson:** No, it just so happened that these people volunteered and said that they would ride down. The music teacher and the math teacher came from Cincinnati. As I said, a group came from St. Louis. Then the others from here. Then we did pretty much the same when we started the health project. All were college graduates.

**Morris:** And did the eight of you all stay in one place and the teachers would come to you?

**Jackson:** They came to the school.

**Morris:** At the campus in Lexington?

**Jackson:** Yes, in Mississippi. And the children came. And these teachers that were there attending the summer school taught them in the morning. And then in the afternoon, my staff taught the teachers.

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**Morris:** And where were the Southern teachers in the morning observing the youngsters?

**Jackson:** Yes, they were the ones. The Southern teachers were the ones that were teaching the children there. You see, we conducted a summer school for children. And Dr. Mallory helped me to recruit them. And my staff taught those teachers in the afternoon.

**Morris:** How many little children did you have in the school?

**Jackson:** I can't tell you now. I don't remember the number. We must have had, I guess, better than fifty, because some of the classes were larger than others.

**Morris:** Of all the grades?

**Jackson:** No, because, as they grew older, they were getting out of school. That's why we were interested in them. They were working in the farms.

Some of the teachers that came to us had to work on plantations too. And they couldn't give too much time to going to the school because they had to do this work in order to survive. There was no welfare for blacks in that area.

**Morris:** That's really remarkable. Were they all teachers from around that area?

**Jackson:** Yes, they were from that area.

**Morris:** And did you have the same teachers and the same children come back from year to year?

**Jackson:** No, we did conduct the health clinic for eight years, but we had to discontinue the teacher training school.

**Morris:** Why did you have to discontinue that?

**Jackson:** Well, it was largely a financial thing.

**Morris:** Did you have any support other than what you were able to take out of your savings?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. The sorority gave a thousand dollars the second year. I had demonstrated this before. I'm a little rusty on that now.

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## **X Child Health Clinics in Mississippi and Oakland**

**Jackson:** When we started the health project, Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, also AKA, coming from Washington, used her car. She brought people to work in the clinic when she came down. So we could only conduct the summer school for two years, and then the other six years were devoted entirely to health and health education.

**Morris:** What was your concern about health?

**Jackson:** When we conducted the school, we saw the children were emaciated. We visited the homes, and they had routine diets, you know. I'm saying "you know," and yet you may not know.

**Morris:** I'm surprised because I think of people living in rural communities usually being able to grow a fair amount of their food.

**Jackson:** That's comparatively recent with blacks. We found that in some instances the cotton was grown right up to the door and they didn't have space for a garden if they had wanted to have one, in many instances. Now, in some places where people owned a little land, they had gardens. We added the nutrition class. Ella V. Paine was our teacher. We added the nutrition class because these people needed to learn how to use the things that were available, that they could grow.

**Morris:** By then, were there any government surplus food programs to help if there were people without enough to eat?

**Jackson:** Mrs. [Eleanor] Roosevelt helped us. I believe that came after our meeting with Mrs. Roosevelt.

**Morris:** There are a lot of the records of the summer school, I understand, and the health program. You've written about some of those things, haven't you?

**Jackson:** I don't seem to have them in mind today.

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**Morris:** I'm asking you things that you've already written about. So you don't need to remember every single detail.

**Jackson:** Have you seen any of the bulletins?

**Morris:** No, I haven't. I understand there's a young man named Jackson who's writing a book.

**Jackson:** James Jackson [no relation].

**Morris:** And he's using all of those bulletins to write the book.

**Jackson:** I was surprised that he should be able to find some of the records in the Library of Congress, so he told me.

**Morris:** I should be very proud that they're there.

**Jackson:** Yes. He came out and showed me and told me some things I had forgotten of that period.

**Morris:** So Mrs. Roosevelt heard about you and came to see what you were doing?

**Jackson:** No. She invited us to the White House. We met her there. She was very interested. I don't remember how it came to her attention. I was invited to the lighting of the Christmas tree. I got an invitation to come to Washington to the lighting of the Christmas tree there during the Roosevelt administration. That was the first time I got near Washington.

**Morris:** That must have been quite an experience.

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** And then after the Christmas tree lighting, you had a chance to talk with her?

**Jackson:** Some members of the board of education sent my name in as a guest for that Christmas tree lighting.



**Morris:** From Oakland?

**Jackson:** No, not Oakland. No way. [laughs] No, not Oakland. The Washington, D.C. board of education. They sent my name as a guest.

**Morris:** Did some of them help with your Southern health project?

**Jackson:** No. But the founder of the sorority was very much interested. Incidentally, she passed away last week. Norma Boyd was very much interested. She called attention to it.

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**Morris:** I see, and she was a Washington person?

**Jackson:** Yes. She was born near Washington, D.C. A very alert and brilliant mind.

**Morris:** I know that the White House conferences on youth go back into the '30s, and I was wondering if maybe you were involved in those.

**Jackson:** No, I was never in on that.

**Morris:** Did Mrs. Roosevelt herself have time to come see what you were doing in the summers?

**Jackson:** No. I'm pretty sure not. But she was tremendously interested and in some way helped. I don't want to say what isn't true. But I do know that she was very much interested in what we were doing. Oh, yes, we got publicity about my going into the South and starting this summer school for rural teachers. I didn't do it under my name. I did it and financed it, but I gave the sorority credit for it because I used all AKA teachers. All of my teachers were members of the sorority. It was published as Alpha Kappa Alpha summer school for rural teachers. That publicity focused attention nationally.

**Morris:** And did you get some publicity in some of the white newspapers and magazines and things like that?

**Jackson:** It seems to me that something appeared in *Banta's Greek Guide*. Do you remember that?

**Morris:** I'm not a sorority girl.

**Jackson:** *Banta's Greek Guide* carried an article on this summer school, pointing it up that this was a departure from the routine in the sorority and fraternity world, that a sorority would do this kind of thing.

**Morris:** I think it's marvelous. I know there was the Southern Tenant Farmers Union that was getting started in those days.

**Jackson:** Oh, yes.

**Morris:** And they were working with both white and black people, weren't they?

**Jackson:** Yes, that's what caused Sherwood Eddy to be jailed. I had the privilege of meeting Sherwood Eddy.

**Morris:** Why did he get jailed?

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- Jackson:** Because he was trying to start this Tenant Farmers Union. It was with black and white alike. That was against the grain of the average Southern white man.
- Morris:** Were there any rural white families or white teachers that came to any of your summer schools?
- Jackson:** The Providence Cooperative Farm was started by Sherwood Eddy and Sam Franklin. Franklin worked with Sherwood Eddy.
- Morris:** So there were other people from other parts of the country who were in the South trying to help the rural people.
- Jackson:** I have no doubt that they were. Sam Franklin and Sherwood Eddy tried to organize the Tenant Farmers Union. And they got into difficulty. Sam Franklin was jailed too. And I wish I could think of the man's name. I heard from him three or four years ago.
- Morris:** There was a man named H. L. Mitchell, who was a union organizer, who was involved with the Tenant Farmers Union for a while.
- Jackson:** I don't remember him.
- Morris:** Didn't the Tenant Farmers Union provide any help? They were busy trying to keep their own project going?
- Jackson:** Yes. They had organized Providence Cooperative Farm. That was in Shelby, Mississippi. Toward the end of our stay there we conducted a clinic out there on the Providence, and met the staff. They gave us encouragement and what not.
- Morris:** That was quite a hard-working way to spend your summers.
- Jackson:** The interesting thing about it, in telling about the things I actually experienced, we had people envy us our experience for going down there. They thought we were just having such a wonderful time! But when they found that we would have to go the distance from here across the street to a toilet, outhouses—
- This was not at the very beginning but during our stay there we had a large container put on a stand, filled with water. And the heat from the sun heated the water. And we had hot water for baths.
- Morris:** Were you doing the well-baby clinic kind of thing, or were you mostly teaching people about how to keep a clean house?
- Jackson:** We had clinics. Adults as well as children. We started out by having the children immunized against smallpox and diphtheria. But Dr. Ferebee would help whatever parents came. Most of them needed help. And then we added a dental clinic.
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- Morris:** What did you do? Did you do the paper work for the clinic?
- Jackson:** Paper work, and interviewing the parents, etc. Interestingly enough, I was in, I think it was Washington, Washington or Boston, a few years ago, and a young woman came up to me and she said, "You wouldn't remember me, but I was one of the first babies that you people vaccinated in Mississippi."
- Morris:** That's wonderful. It meant enough to her family to tell her about it.

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Did you talk to people out here in Oakland and at the University to get their interest and support in what was going on?

**Jackson:** No, I don't think that I did. I don't recall. Of course, I did a lot of public speaking then. And I probably appeared somewhere telling about it.

**Morris:** You were doing public speaking about education in general?

**Jackson:** Yes. Anybody that needed a speaker and had no money to pay, they thought about me. [laughs]

**Morris:** That's a hard job. And it's so important. Church groups and women's groups, and things like that?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** I'm not surprised you didn't get married. You never slowed down long enough to.

**Jackson:** I think back on it now and wonder how I did the things. Well, God has always been good to me. I'm a firm believer in prayer, and the only way I can account for the things that I did is that God just was helping me.

**Morris:** Was the health clinic also in Mississippi, in the same region?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Did you continue to live at the college when you were doing this work?

**Jackson:** No, when we went to Providence we lived in homes there, the last few years. We started in Holmes County. Then we went up to Mound Bayou. And some of us lived in homes of various people there, where they could accomodate us. I was lucky, I lived at Cleveland, which is just out of Mound Bayou. And the last year or two years I was there, I stayed with the Brookshires, in Dr. Brookshire's home. He's white. He had a black wife. (Colored.)

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**Morris:** Was that difficult for the two of them in the community?

**Jackson:** I don't know of any problem because he lived there in Cleveland and was the only doctor there. He let the people in the stores know that his wife was to be respected as Mrs. Brookshire. In a small town, they needed the money and they needed the doctor, so they didn't give them any trouble.

**Morris:** The records I have say that it was 1943 that you finally wound up the clinic. Was there some special reason?

**Jackson:** Money. It wasn't easy to get. You see, I was in the chair three years. The woman who succeeded me was interested and on down the line for these eight years. I don't want to— I mustn't say that.

**Morris:** Other people have other interests.

**Jackson:** That's right. And this was just a small core. But it had taken the attention of the general public. Human beings, you know, jealousy survives. But we found that in other cities where there were chapters of the sorority, they became interested in promoting better health among blacks.

**Morris:** In their own communities, in different parts of the country?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** That sounds like you set a very valuable example.

**Jackson:** Now, here in Oakland, they have a dental health clinic. It was named for me and started by Cornelia Logan, who was a teacher in the Oakland schools. The head of health in the public schools, Dr. Sweet, cooperated with us in the clinics here. And we worked with the city health director and I worked in night clinics here, tuberculosis clinics, with the city health physician. I've forgotten her name now. These things are unfolding, things I haven't thought of for many years.

**Morris:** So there were things you could do to continue the work right around here in Oakland.

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. We conducted dental health clinics at night for a period of years. They started the project in the schools where the people of lower financial standing—

**Morris:** Poorer people.

**Jackson:** Poorer people, that's what I'm trying to say. They had regular teeth examinations. And through the efforts of Mrs. Logan, we got certain dentists to agree to take whatever children we sent there. So many days a week they would give these children free dental care.

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That was an outgrowth of this whole project. Mrs. Logan was responsible for that.

**Morris:** And she had heard you speak somewhere?

**Jackson:** She was a member of my sorority.

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## **XI Experiences at Columbia and Tuskegee, but no Principalsip at Home**

**Morris:** Somewhere in here you took a year out and went to Columbia?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** How did you manage that? Did you take a leave of absence from the school?

**Jackson:** I took a sabbatical and went to Columbia and studied there. And while I was there, Dr. Patterson, who was president of Tuskegee, wrote Dean Kemp out here—I believe that's how it came about—and asked him if he knew of any black woman who was prepared to come down and serve as dean of women. So my name was recommended. He contacted me while I was in New York and sold me on the idea of going to Tuskegee.

**Morris:** He wanted somebody who had been educated in the North?

**Jackson:** Yes. Someone who was prepared to serve as dean of women.

**Morris:** Was this a tough job? It sounds to me like dean of women would be an honor.

**Jackson:** Well, I guess it is an honor. But you've got a lot of work to do. You've got to search for the honor. It was a very challenging job because although Tuskegee is a great institution, it was geared toward men until comparatively recent years. Booker T. Washington started it, as you know. When I went to Tuskegee, the dean of men was chairman of the social committee.

**Morris:** But you were telling earlier that you thought that black men should have more courage to get up and fight for what was right for them. And here you are in a situation where it was a men's institution and you didn't think that was right.

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**Jackson:** No, I'm not saying that. When I'm talking about fighting for their rights, I'm speaking of an earlier period. During the period that I was at Tuskegee, the social situation was such that a black woman could do more, in my opinion, socially, than a black man.

**Morris:** Out in the rest of the community, in the wider community.

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Why was that, do you think?

**Jackson:** The pattern, the American pattern, has always been to subdue the black man, the black male.

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**Jackson:** The history of the black man in America would tell you the status of the male.

**Morris:** But not the black women? They would not be subdued as much?

**Jackson:** They were tolerated more gracefully. If any graciousness was shown, it was more to the black woman.

**Morris:** You mentioned that Dr. Carver was still at Tuskegee and still active when you were there?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Was he retired, or still doing his research?

**Jackson:** Well, he was still doing research. He wasn't researching exclusively. There were one or two young men that helped him. And they were going along with him.

**Morris:** You were saying something about the social committee at Tuskegee, the chairman was a man.

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Did he have different ideas than you did about the kinds of things that students should be doing?

**Jackson:** Of course, when I went there, I took over the women's department and tried to build that up, and also organized the women students. As I said, I believe I was the first trained dean of women they had. They had matrons who served as dean, but they had not been especially trained in areas that would prepare them to serve there.

**Morris:** What kinds of ideas did you want to try out?

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**Jackson:** I wanted the women students to develop themselves to the highest ability, so consequently I organized activities among the women students.

**Morris:** Were you doing kind of a counseling role too?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Helping them think in terms of what kind of work they might prepare for?

**Jackson:** Yes, I think that that is why Dr. Patterson wanted me, because I had a pretty general education.

**Morris:** Did they want you to stay longer than one year?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. My family was here. They came to California when I was seventeen. We established roots here.

**Morris:** So you wanted to come back to the Bay Area, you didn't want to stay at Tuskegee?

**Jackson:** No. I took the job for the experience. I had applied for an administrative job here in Oakland, because I had credentials from Cal and Columbia that prepared me for administrative work. But the principal here said they weren't ready for a black principal, and said that I needed experience. So I took the job at Tuskegee to get experience in administrative work.

**Morris:** That would seem like a good experience.

**Jackson:** So when the time came, the superintendent sent a blank for resignation saying that since I had succeeded so well in this one year I had been at Tuskegee, that he felt that I would want to stay there and work among my own people. He sent me a resignation blank so I could stay there. I replied by asking him what my assignment would be the next year when I returned to Oakland. They sent me to McClymonds.

**Morris:** McClymonds was a high school at that time. It has since come to be known as kind of a "troubled" school.

**Jackson:** It always has been. I believe that it just practically has always been a school not with the same rating as University High and Tech had, and Fremont. You see, McClymonds in the early days, like Prescott, was in an area where you had a great many of the foreign-born and the few blacks that were in Oakland. Most of them lived in that vicinity.

**Morris:** Around Prescott?

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**Jackson:** Around Prescott and McClymonds.

**Morris:** Prescott is the junior high school?

**Jackson:** Yes, it became a junior high school. It used to be an elementary.

**Morris:** Does that mean it didn't get the resources in the way of teachers and special support from the administration that some other schools might have had?

**Jackson:** For a while it seemed as though Prescott Junior High School was set apart as the sort of place where if some principal wanted to get a teacher out, he would transfer her to a West Oakland school.

**Morris:** If that's the opinion that people have of the school, that doesn't encourage very good teaching and devotion to education.

**Jackson:** It never has. But there were some dedicated teachers there. There were some teachers who realized they were teaching children, molding children. And some very fine teachers were at Prescott, some of the finest in the system. And some chose to teach there. But by and large, the new teachers that came there were sent from some high school, demoted down to—they got the same salary—to Prescott and Cole, and other West Oakland schools. The general opinion among teachers was that they were being demoted when they were sent to one of the West Oakland schools.

**Morris:** Was there any kind of teacher organization at that point to which teachers could take a grievance like that?

**Jackson:** I don't think so. The teachers were organized as OTA at that time. There was a protest group formed when I was assigned to Prescott. A group of teachers called on the superintendent to question him about having sent a black teacher.

**Morris:** Did they make your life difficult while you were there?

**Jackson:** Well, the only way I can say that is, I was interested primarily in teaching and children. So whatever efforts were made to make my life uncomfortable, it didn't register. I was determined. It was a challenge. I was determined to make good in the job. And I like children. I just thought teachers were supposed to be this or that or the other. But there were some splendid teachers who did not openly revolt when they had more blacks to teach.

**Morris:** Were there some teachers who did become friends, whom it wasn't uncomfortable to work with?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. There were a few who were friendly with me. But it was an unpopular thing, so consequently I tried not to cause them any more embarrassment.

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**Morris:** At some point, did it begin to become easier?

**Jackson:** I suppose so. Maybe this will answer your question—I wasn't able to keep the class I was assigned. I was hired to go there and teach a sixth grade class but in a short while that class was taken from me.

**Morris:** This was in your first year?

**Jackson:** The first few months. And then they gathered the retarded and the problem cases and gave me a group, made up of some of them. Among the things I remember, they gave me a class of seventh- and eighth-grade boys for music, you know, teenagers with their voices changing.

One of the teachers, she's still living and we communicate, said to me, "Would you like to teach my English class, and I'll take your music class?" She volunteered that. She was well respected, highly respected, a beautiful character, with a lovely voice. She told the principal she was going to take the class, and took it over. That was Albertine Dubois Smith. She's still living, in a retirement home in Menlo Park. We became very good friends.

**Morris:** Did World War II make any difference as lots and lots more people began to move into the Bay Area to work in the defense plants, including a lot more black families?

**Jackson:** Yes, a great many people came in from the South, both white and black. It created problems.

**Morris:** Did it create any more opportunity?

**Jackson:** Well, we got more black teachers then. The problem was that many of the people came from rural communities, and those children had only gone to school three or four months during the year. So that's why they were unprepared. They weren't retarded mentally, but they hadn't been exposed to much of an education. So that caused problems in the school naturally.

**Morris:** There were twelve or thirteen-year-old children, whose schooling had only been at a third-grade level?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Morris:** Did you continue to take teacher-education classes at Cal or San Francisco State?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. I continued studying. And I earned most of the required units for the doctorate at Cal.

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**Morris:** And at Columbia too?

**Jackson:** I got to the point of dissertation at both the institutions. I got the unit credit, other than the two points given for the dissertation. That was at Columbia during the Depression. My brother nearly had a fit when he found that I had really needed money badly and hadn't called on him. He had helped me. One brother especially.

**Morris:** Was that Emmett?

**Jackson:** Yes, had fostered my progress in whatever I wanted to do. I felt that having done so much, after I had been out teaching, I shouldn't let him continue to contribute to my education.

**Morris:** Even though it was just the last piece of the Ph. D. that you needed some help on?

**Jackson:** I would have had to do research and take time out for that. As I advanced, the professors that were interested in me would say, "Of course, when you write your dissertation, you're going to write something about colored people, you're going to write something about your own people." There was another friend who had the same experience. He was in law school. And we didn't realize the value of what research we would do. And we didn't realize that we might be helping blacks by doing a profound study on some phase. So we felt that the white man felt we weren't prepared to do research, in-depth research. So that was the attitude here with some of the professors I had at Cal, and also at Columbia.

**Morris:** Did you have some aspects of education that you did want to pursue and do research on?

**Jackson:** No. I don't think I had any specific thing in mind. We just felt that the whites didn't feel that we were capable of doing scientific research.

**Morris:** I do see what you would feel as a young person. You couldn't talk with the professors long enough to work that out? Or they didn't give you the time to?

**Jackson:** We either develop more courage as we grow older, or lose it. I don't think I ever expressed that opinion to any professor that I had.

**Morris:** Sometimes it's very hard to really explain something that you feel very strongly.



**Jackson:** Yes. I was interested in vocational education and vocational guidance. I was particularly interested from the angle of guidance for blacks, but away from the trend. I was thinking in terms of

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getting out of the routine and going into other fields that weren't open to us. The theory when I was coming along was: "Blacks don't do this, you don't have any blacks in that field."

**Morris:** There was for quite a while an NAACP committee that was working on that same kind of thing, keeping some pressure on the people in charge to open up new kinds of jobs for blacks. Did you work with that committee at all?

**Jackson:** I worked with them for many years. In a less obvious way.

**Morris:** Did there continue to be an NAACP education committee that could help you?

**Jackson:** It has been very much subdued. I doubt if they have that department. We're so integrated. We worked on integration. Certain things you set up would be calling attention to the separateness. We've gone through this period of wanting to be integrated. Now I think we are trying to emphasize the coordination of blacks. That isn't a good word, but you know what I mean.

**Morris:** Promoting of black identity?

**Jackson:** Yes, that's what I'm trying to say.

**Morris:** Did you stay in the Oakland schools long enough for the beginnings of some concern about racial integration and response to things like the *Brown versus Board of Education* decision?

**Jackson:** No, I resigned in '55, I think. Fifty-five or fifty-six. I think I had three years to go to do the thirty years of teaching, for retirement on full salary.

**Morris:** What were your brothers doing all the time that you were working with such success in the classroom and in the South?

**Jackson:** I don't know about success. I was working. I've never tried to tally how successful anything I've done has been. But my brothers supported the entire family until my mother died. She was the hub of the whole, and the family was sort of centered around her. As long as my mother lived, I don't think there was hardly a day that she didn't see all of her family. My brothers Emmett and William stayed. And the two that married, they would see to it that they got by the house to see Mama each day.

**Morris:** They stayed here in Oakland too, then.

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. They all came out here when she did.

**Morris:** Did they go into the military service during World War II?

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**Jackson:** Two went in. Two were eligible. My brother Emmett was excused from military service because Mama and I were dependent on him.

**Morris:** Why don't we stop there for today and maybe I could come back one more time, if you have the patience to listen to my questions and tell me about running a sheep farm in Mendocino.

**Jackson:** [laughs] Oh, you still have more to do?

**Morris:** Yes, indeed.

**Jackson:** You are enabling me to recall things that are dormant, that I have absolutely forgotten about.

I haven't forgotten, however, how much my students have meant to me. One of my star pupils was Andrew Viscovich, who recently retired [1990] as superintendent of the Berkeley public schools. Another was Milan Depolo, who built up his own food distribution business; and there was David Austin, who organizes travel groups and takes them around the world; and others I think of often.

About four years ago, Andy and David and some of the others organized an event I shall always treasure. They gathered together as many students as they could find that I had taught at McClymonds High and Prescott Junior High for a reception honoring me. There must have been several hundred people there. It was quite a lovely affair, and very moving to hear all those people saying that I had taught them to think well of themselves and that they could amount to something in the world even if they were from West Oakland.

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## XII National Education Association Convention, 1953

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**Morris:** There was a note that in 1953 the Oakland teachers chose you to go to the National Education Association convention in Miami Beach. How did they happen to choose you? Was this something that you were lobbying for?

**Jackson:** Well, they elect a representative each year. Frank Adams was the principal at McClymonds at the time. We were in the lunchroom discussing whom we should elect to go. Somebody said, I think it was Joe Payson, "Ida why don't you run?"

I said, "I wouldn't have a chance. I've never thought of going."

The group that was there encouraged me to run. So I got the unanimous vote for first place from the faculty there.

**Morris:** From your school?

**Jackson:** From my school. So then when we went to the Oakland Teachers' Association meeting I had some friends in other schools (these were white, of course) who were thrilled to hear that I had been named by the McClymonds faculty. So they campaigned for me. I'm just telling this as it comes to me. This isn't significant enough to write. One of the teachers called me at eight o'clock that night. They were counting the votes. And she said, "We just started, but you are so far ahead of everybody else, that I'm safe in telling you I think you're going to Miami as the top delegate." And so I was elected.

The interesting thing— We had been sending Homer Cleary, a man, each year. And he just automatically, he just knew he would be chosen. So he campaigned against me and he said it wouldn't do to send me because decisions weren't made as people thought they were. They were made in smoke-filled rooms where the men got together and planned what was to be done, and there was no point in sending somebody that couldn't represent them. Dear Homer got the surprise of his life when I was elected citywide.

When we went to Miami, the woman who took care of the hotel arrangements didn't consult me at all, but she put me in one of the cheapest hotels on the beach. And the other people from Oakland that were elected were at the other end of the beach in the beautiful hotels. The second meal I had there, the manager of the hotel came to me and he said, "I understand you are a part of the NEA delegation."

I said, "Yes, I am."

He said, "Well, why are you here?"

I said, "I was placed here by—" This woman was from southern California. I've forgotten her name now, glad I have.

And he said, "Why the hell did they put you here? This crummy place. I'll have you moved right away." I felt that if the group which I was with had not said anything about my not being with them, I wasn't going to change to go where they were. So I told him I was happy there.

Anyway, there were two men elected in our delegation. So one of them told me what was the usual procedure. And I had heard something about it before I left, that the group got together at night and had parties in different suites. I said to him, "Well, I'll take such-and-such a night. And if you don't mind, I'll have it in your quarters." He had let me know. I don't know whether I suggested it. I don't imagine I did. I imagine he may have suggested it. I said, "I'll provide all of the refreshments because I'm giving it." So I purchased the liquor and whatever else. So it was quite a surprise to the rest of the delegation, of whom this man— I've forgotten the fellow's name. I'm sorry, too. He was so lovely. Anyway, they had a marvelous time. Some people, after they get the second drink, some on the first, they start having a good time.

**Morris:** Did Homer Cleary go to the convention as one of the delegates?

**Jackson:** I don't believe he did.

**Morris:** He was just completely aced out.

**Jackson:** Because there were two other men from Oakland. Oh, yes. I saw the woman who placed me there. I asked her. She said, "Well, it didn't cost much and I knew—" You see, they only gave a hundred dollars towards your expenses. So she said, "I didn't think you could afford any other accommodations, they only give a hundred dollars."

I said, "I wouldn't have come on the one hundred dollars. I hope you don't think I would have done that."

There were about five blacks. I remember a state group from Pennsylvania elected a black woman to represent them. She was an official in the state teachers' association, very popular, a very goodlooking and very well-trained person. And then one was head of the schools in the South somewhere. So there were about five or six of us there. I wasn't going to the dance. You possibly have been to an NEA delegation?

**Morris:** I haven't. But I'm familiar with conventions. They usually have one big party or dance.

**Jackson:** There were so many there they had two places. I went to both. And one of these women knew me. So she rounded up the men that she knew so I was able to dance. My delegation had their

eyes on us when we were dancing around having a ball.

Where did you find these data? I had forgotten I had ever been to an NEA meeting.

One other thing that happened there. Oh, what's that man's name. He used to be superintendent of schools here in Oakland. And he was president of the NEA that year. In the assembly he wanted to see the California delegation. They were checking the numbers from each state. There were two life members from California, and I was one. They came to me after the delegation. "Oh, you saved our face today. When did you become a life member?" Nobody knew it. I sent it direct to the national, because I don't like monthly bills or anything of the sort. If I like anything and I think I'm going to stay with, I'll take out a life membership. That has been my habit.

**Morris:** It's good business practice. It's cheaper.

**Jackson:** I think it was only a hundred dollars at the time.

**Morris:** The next year, 1954, was when the Supreme Court passed the *Brown versus Board of Education* decision about separate was not equal education. Were some of those questions about race issues discussed at that NEA convention?

**Jackson:** If they were I was not a part of it.

**Morris:** Had you been active in supporting the Supreme Court case? Were there any kind of committees that were trying to help get that case to the Supreme Court?

**Jackson:** None of which I knew. There certainly weren't any in the school.

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### XIII On a Sheep Ranch in Mendocino

**Morris:** How did you and your brother decide to buy a ranch in Mendocino?

**Jackson:** As I may have told you before, Emmett and I planned many things together. Of course, I had no money. On my salary, it was all I could do to live. And I didn't entirely live off that salary. Are you interested in this background?

**Morris:** I am indeed.

**Jackson:** For months I had noticed my brother would have in his pocket the Want Ads section of the *Examiner* and the *Tribune*. He worked in San Francisco, among the many jobs he had. He would read these ads on the trains. I couldn't understand how he could be just interested in Want Ads. But I just passed it off as one of his hobbies. And lo and behold, he was looking for a ranch site. We usually did things on the weekends, such as visiting. For years we knew every antique dealer in San Francisco, just about. They knew him. So we would go there. Most of them were open on Sundays. After church we would go there. At that time, he was a member of the Christian Science church and so was I.

Anyway, this particular weekend he went off alone and said, "Kiddo, I won't be back tonight, and maybe I'll go on to work. I'll call you, though, and let you know where I am."

**Morris:** Were the two of you living in this house by then?

**Jackson:** I was living here. He didn't ever live here, although he bought this house. He had to live at his apartment house. It's a long story. I'll make it short. During the rent control days—

**Morris:** During World War II?

**Jackson:** Yes. His rents were frozen. He had let people who didn't have money just pay a nominal sum for four- and five-room apartments. And the rents were frozen on him. So he found the only way he could make it was to rent rooms to men. He knew men working at the

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shipyards and the like. He had a wide acquaintance. So in that way he was able to keep up the payments on his places. How did I get off into that?

**Morris:** He went off on the weekend and didn't tell you where he was going.

**Jackson:** Yes. Finally the time came, and he said, "Kid, I'll call you." Then the next week he went. So I said, "Well, now this is funny." So I thought he just had a new girlfriend he was going to see. Usually he would tell me about his different friends. He said, "I like her very much, but she's getting serious." I mean the different ones. Most people liked him. He was a very unusual person. Not because he was my brother, but he was. I wondered what he was doing. So then when he came back during the week he said, "Are you going to be busy this next weekend?"

I said, "No, if you're not going out of town."

He said, "Save it for me."

As the week went on, I said, "What are we going to do?"

He said, "I want you to go to Point Arena with me."

I said, "Point Arena? Where's that?"

He said, "You're a school teacher; you're supposed to know."

We went up to Ukiah. He said, "I want to go to Ukiah."

I said, "All of this mystery! But I won't push it so long as I'm going along."

So we went to the county recorder's office. And he had been meeting the owner of this ranch. This man had advertised in the *Examiner*. And he answered the ad. These weekends that he wasn't seeing me, he was meeting this fellow. The first time, the man met him in San Francisco. The next time he went to Point Arena. And they had a bus line that stopped in Point Arena then.

**Morris:** From Ukiah?

**Jackson:** No, from San Francisco, the bus used to go to Point Arena up the coastline. As I said, the first weekend he was meeting the man who owned the ranch. The next weekend they went farther to look over the land. Then the third weekend was when he invited me to go. And we went to the recorder's office. He asked my brother James if he wouldn't come along too. On our way up I was driving and he said, "Now, James, I know you can keep a secret, so I don't want anyone to know anything of the business we transact today."

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So James said, "Okay, you know it doesn't concern me."

So we went to the recorder's office. And he was having the deed recorded. And the former owner was there, Gus Hoffman. I was introduced to Gus Hoffman. So we went up to the

recorder's office and Mr. Anderson, who was recorder then, asked him how he wanted it made out. He said, "Emmett Lee Jackson, a single man, and Ida Louise Jackson, a single woman."

And I said, "Emmett, I don't have—" And he put his foot on mine. I can see Mr. Anderson now with his pen poised, and he said, "How do you want it?"

He said, "I told you, Emmett Lee Jackson, a single man, and Ida Jackson."

When we came out I said, "Emmett, you know I don't have any money."

He said, "You're not supposed to have any. But you do keep a car. You don't manage to have any money, but you do keep a good car. And all I require of you as joint owner is to provide the transportation so that we can go back and forth."

So that's how I became half-owner of a 1280-acre ranch.

**Morris:** Is this something he had wanted to do for a long time?

**Jackson:** All his life. You see, when we came out here, my mother left a nine-room house and its furnishings and came to California and never went back. We came out here in February of '18, and she went back in '29, and just left the place with the woman in charge. And the woman took care of it in exchange for living there. That was her payment, caring for the place. As far back as I can remember, there was always a problem of paying taxes on some land. Mama and Papa would be talking, "We can't get the children a bicycle this year because we've got to pay the taxes." I told Emmett, "When I grow up, I'm never going to own any property, because all you do is pay taxes." Of course, I was young then.

**Morris:** Did he go up there and run it as a working ranch? Or did he have somebody run it for him?

**Jackson:** For a year we left the former owner on it. He did not announce it to the people there, that he had sold it. In the middle of the second year, we arranged to take over. It took Emmett some time to find someone who could manage it for him. It was a sheep ranch. At the time we bought it, we bought 273 sheep with it. The owner stayed on it and we hired a man to do the chores, that is to take care of the sheep and such cares.

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**Morris:** I would think sheep ranching would have been quite different from your memories and Emmett's memories of cotton and other kinds of crops in Mississippi. Yes?

**Jackson:** Well, what we knew about the cotton crops in Mississippi was what we read until I went back there.

**Morris:** In the summers?

**Jackson:** In the summers. Because we lived in Vicksburg. It was and is still the largest city in Mississippi, which isn't saying much. My father died when I was ten. He had a plantation. When he didn't have any carpentry work, he went down there. There were seven families that lived on this place.

**Morris:** By and large somebody else did the actual farming for your father?

**Jackson:** Yes. Because the money came from his carpentry.

**Morris:** What did you think of the sheep ranch in Mendocino?

**Jackson:** I liked it. First of all, this was Lookout Ranch. And it was at the summit of Lookout Range, eleven miles from the coast and sixteen miles from Boonville. So we were almost midway between—It was fifteen miles from Point Arena and sixteen miles from Boonville. But the coast was at Manchester, and that was five miles out of Point Arena. So that was the nearest place to the ocean.

**Morris:** Boonville is a beautiful place.

**Jackson:** Oh, it was beautiful. You see, we were at the summit and we had a view of the surrounding country. There were areas of the ranch where we could see the ocean. There was a grove of fir trees and redwoods that started at the gate and went all the way back almost to the house that was on it. A beautiful place. The game warden told me that our place was a landmark because he could see it from the county seat in Fort Bragg. That's the largest place up there. They said that was a landmark. They used it. You could see five counties from our place.

**Morris:** Did you decide you were going to retire from teaching and go up there to manage the ranch?

**Jackson:** Yes, after a while. I was ambitious and had gone in for administration. I had hoped to some day become a principal or administrator of some sort. Emmett said, "Sister, you will never be anything but a teacher in Oakland. So why waste your time there? You can make more money by going up and managing the ranch. So why don't you leave?"

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But I didn't. And it wasn't until much later on that I realized I wouldn't be getting anywhere. It was sort of a routine thing. They continued to give me the problem students and that sort of thing.

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## XIV Thoughts on Racial Discrimination

**Morris:** You didn't see any movement in what was happening for black students and black teachers after the federal government began to be interested in improving things?

**Jackson:** They didn't make any changes here.

**Morris:** Even though the Supreme Court had said that education should improve?

**Jackson:** How can I put it without making a sweeping general statement? That didn't affect the white majority. That didn't affect them and their idea of the Negro's education, very much like when freedom was declared, so many of the slave owners didn't feel that it applied to them. And they didn't release their slaves. Throughout the South, there were very few places where it made any difference.

But this latest decision, I found that the South, when they did find that they had to admit black students, they did a complete turnaround. That was later than the '50s, wasn't it?

**Morris:** The *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision was 1954. Coming into the '60s you had more government programs. You begin to have Head Start and some of those civil rights related programs. You're thinking that more change happened in the South than did maybe in Oakland and the Bay Area?

**Jackson:** Oh, yes. Because, you see, on paper we were not supposed to be segregated here. We were supposed to get any job for which we were qualified.

**Morris:** In your work with the children at McClymonds, were you finding some that you thought ought to go to the University and encouraging them to go to Cal as you had?

**Jackson:** I did that. I got very few average and above average students in my classes. My classes continued to be sort of handicapped—

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**Jackson:** —retarded, and mentally retarded, children who just had not been exposed to normal educational procedures. If I know what normal is. Also, many who had come from the South had only been able to go to school three or four months during the year. Consequently, they were not promoted, and when they came into cities, they were large for the class, and over age for the class. And a lot of people took that as being lacking in intelligence and ability. But they hadn't been exposed to anything because most of the blacks had come from rural areas. The rural teacher in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana— Louisiana wasn't quite as bad as Alabama and Mississippi. Georgia wasn't quite as bad, but bad enough. Those young people had gone to rural schools. And the rural black teacher had little opportunity for an education. Toward the end, I mean in comparatively recent years, they found that by going to summer school, many got their degrees that way, by going to summer school. It took years and years for them to do it. But they did it.

**Morris:** Now, this is in Oakland?

**Jackson:** No, that's in the Southern states.

**Morris:** For black people to get a teaching credential.

**Jackson:** But most of the people who were qualified to teach here, up to and including the period that I came in, those who did go to teacher's college in San Francisco, and the University of California, went South to get teaching positions because they couldn't get them here.

**Morris:** That continued on into the 1960s?

**Jackson:** Well, I'm afraid so. I'm not quite sure on the years now, because I haven't been thinking in that direction. I asked a native daughter why were they going South to teach, why didn't they teach here. One said, "I couldn't endure what you endured as a teacher in Oakland." So they were going south, to the Carolinas and places like that.

**Morris:** Were there any people at the university that you stayed in touch with to say, "I have some students that I think would be good at the University?"

**Jackson:** I kept in touch with Dean Stebbins until she passed. We became pretty good friends. When I went to Columbia, I was taking guidance and personnel, I met Dr. Lee there. He had transferred to Columbia and I studied vocational education with him here and I took guidance and personnel with him there. Who else did I know? I got to know Dr. Ruh and Dean Kemp very well. And Dean Kemp told me about the job at Tuskegee, and was responsible for my going there.



**Morris:** Did they have anything at Cal like the Student Affairs Office that they have now, working with people in the high schools to help encourage young minority students to come to the University?

**Jackson:** No, nothing of which I knew.

**Morris:** Did you stay a member of the alumni association and do any of those kinds of social things that the alumni association does?

**Jackson:** I've been a life member of the alumni association for years. I don't remember when I joined. I was a member of the association a long time before I took out life membership. It had no program into which a Negro, a black person would fit. You see, California hasn't proved to be the Mecca that most of us thought it was. To put it roughly, the black could go to the shows and sit anywhere they wanted to. He was paying his money for that. But when it came to equality of opportunity in employment, jobs above the average, the racial factor entered. It has never disappeared.

**Morris:** That's very uncomfortable and very sad to hear, because there was fair-employment legislation passed in 1959. Was that a help, do you think?

**Jackson:** Obviously it's been a help in many places. But it's limited in itself. Even though the law was passed about hiring minorities, you see very few blacks now in positions that are predominantly white. What they do, they hire a Chinese or a Mexican. The Mexican is just a little bit above the Negro when it comes to employment, where preparation is concerned. They are given preference to hiring a black. You see, the law is hire a minority, a member of a minority group. And the Chinese have become minorities when it comes to American classification and job problems. So we still are the last hired and the first fired.

**Morris:** While you were teaching were there beginning to be larger numbers of Mexican American children in the Oakland schools and more Chinese and Japanese children?

**Jackson:** Yes. They didn't have a great many, but it was on the increase. The numbers were increasing.

**Morris:** Did that make things more complicated for you in teaching?

**Jackson:** No. In fact, I never had problems from a standpoint of race with my students, ever. The first children that welcomed me were whites. I remember two little Italian girls with an armful of geranium blossoms coming to my door and saying, "Teacher, we brought these flowers. We like you." It just did something for me.

**Morris:** So when you decided to go up to Mendocino, it sounds like you were ready to leave teaching.

**Jackson:** I had been ready to leave a long time. If I had listened to my brother I would have left long ago. But I'm glad I did.

**Morris:** Nowadays they say sometimes it's a good thing to change careers, it's good for your outlook on life.

**Jackson:** It broadens one. I don't think one should stay in one category.

**Morris:** How was life on the north coast, up there in Mendocino County? Did you find that the people there were more open to a black woman from the city?

**Jackson:** Not necessarily. I think Mendocino had fewer blacks than almost any county. I think we were the first black landowners up there. Let's see, how can I put it? I never did build my social life around race. I had all the social life I could handle with black people.

During my early years in Vicksburg the neighborhood came to us, and it was a white neighborhood. My father bought out there because it was in the country. But when we were growing up, whites began to buy the land all around us. It became suburbia for them. So consequently, I was accustomed to white people. And white kids played in our yard. The neighbors didn't mind it, because they knew that Jackson, or Mrs. Jackson, would keep them straight. They would have to behave over there. It was no new thing for me to be in a predominantly white situation. And then we were brought up to feel that we were anybody's equals. We had the intelligence, and behaved ourselves. And we had to live with Mama.

**Morris:** How about in Oakland as more black families have moved into Oakland? That has meant that some neighborhoods are mixed, black and white, hasn't it?

**Jackson:** Yes. When we first came here, most of the blacks lived in West Oakland and North Oakland, about where we lived. There weren't many when we came here. There was one black family that we knew on Thirty-fifth Avenue and one on Thirty-fourth; San Leandro Avenue, I think it's called now. Those were the two. And there were two or three other families that we didn't know living out there. And then the last of them lived between Fortieth and Sixty-second Street in North Oakland when we came. But they were scattered. In recent years, the trend has been to East Oakland. And there was one family living on Eighty-fifth Avenue when we moved here. I don't remember their names. We never did know them very well.

**Morris:** This neighborhood looks like it's been here awhile. These are nice big solid places.

**Jackson:** This house was built in 1915. We are the third owners.

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**Morris:** You moved into this house when?

**Jackson:** In '33.

**Morris:** In those days, Fruitvale was still gardens and orchards, wasn't it? Not too far from here?

**Jackson:** Yes. The few blacks that were here that had cars, we would make a tour going to San Jose, through the cherry-blossom time. We would have a picnic. That was in the spring when we made these tours of the cherry blossoms, beautiful on each side of the highway.

**Morris:** I wished I had lived here then. It sounds like it was lovely. Somewhere along the line, the university did begin to seek you out, because you wrote that marvelous article for the Centennial yearbook, *There Was Light*. That was nineteen-sixty something. Who came and asked you for some help then?

**Jackson:** How did that come about? I'm trying to think now how Mr. [Irving] Stone reached me. I was chosen to become a Berkeley Fellow, voted into it. I can't remember.

**Morris:** Was that while Dr. [Robert Gordon] Sproul was still president?

**Jackson:** No, I met Mrs. [Ida] Sproul. I never did know Dr. Sproul. I'm trying to think who was responsible for calling attention to me. I wish I had known about these.

**Morris:** My job is to ask questions that nobody has thought of asking you before.

**Jackson:** [laughs] But, I remember Irving Stone asking me to write my story for *There Was Light*. The other contributors had done theirs. I remember I had a very short time in which to get it ready. And I had written most of it but hadn't quite finished it, and I had to go to Los Angeles. So I took the manuscript with me and worked on it down there. Then it occurred to me to get in touch with Mr. Stone and tell him I couldn't make that deadline. I was talking with him on the phone, and somehow in the conversation I said, "Well, I'm here in Los Angeles."

He said, "You mean you're here?"

I said, "Yes."

He and his wife are a wonderful team. He said, "Just a minute." I've forgotten what name. He said, "I'll put her on the phone."

So we chatted, and I said, "I will need every minute up to the very last to get this ready." I was asking for an extension of time. So then I took it out to him on the deadline. I did get it

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ready by the deadline. I had driven down to Los Angeles. I found where he lived and drove out there. So he read it and then he took it into Jean to read. And he said, "Did you write this?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Did you have any help on it?"

I said, "No."

He said, "Your niece didn't help you?"

I said, "No." My niece had done some writing and was better known to the current people up there than I was. I said, "No, I asked my niece if she would help and she said no."

He said, "I have to tell you, it's good. It's darn good. It's longer than any of the articles. But I would like to use the whole thing, and if I possibly can do so, I will use the entire story. There's just one criticism. It isn't a criticism, because you are justified in what are saying, and what you are saying is a fact. But some of the relatives of the former president are still on the campus and they're active on the campus. And I think it would hurt their feelings if we use this expression."

You see, I was telling it as it was, that when the picture a group of us black women posed for did not appear in the *Blue and Gold* (I think I may have told you about it), we went to Dean Stebbins and she empathized with us. Then we went to see the president.

We had been to the student body officer to find out. And nobody was ever in the office when we went there. So consequently, we went on to President Barrows then. So he said, "Well, you're not representative of the student body, that's why."

So that's what I had in the story. I quoted him in the story. And Mr. Stone said, "There's just one thing. If you insist, I'll leave it in. But I would rather you wouldn't." And he agreed with me on certain factors. He said some of his family are still on the campus and active.

**Morris:** That's true. But I think they might be unhappy that that's the way their father had felt. I think most people would realize that their parents had different ideas. We would like to leave it in this transcript of the story.

**Jackson:** Well, I'm giving you facts as I recall them.

**Morris:** Then in later years you decided to support the university very handsomely with a scholarship fund. So you think there's hope for the campus yet?

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**Jackson:** That didn't destroy my love for the university. You see, I was thinking the other day. I was thinking about your doing this and what happened when I first went up there. I remember I visited. You see, my brother William was responsible for our moving to California. Mama sent him out here first. And he wrote back and told her that I could get a better education out here, et cetera. I remember, I visited the campus and I looked around at all of the marvelous buildings and the size of the campus. The schools that I had attended, the black colleges that I had seen, however beautiful, they didn't come up to anything like the University of California.

So I said, "Well, I wonder if I can handle this." I had a conversation with myself. I wasn't sure what I could do. As I think back on it now, I wonder about myself and some of the ideas I had because I've always been a challenge to myself, if you know what I mean. I said, "I dare you to try this," that sort of thing. I guess I wouldn't have been disappointed too much if I hadn't made it. I challenged myself to see if I could do this or that. I came up with that sort of thing. See what you can do with this.

**Morris:** That's a great way to look at it. And then when you got involved and into the classes, you discovered it wasn't as hard as you thought it was going to be?

**Jackson:** Yes, it was as hard.

**Morris:** But you could do it.

**Jackson:** Well, I did it. It didn't make any difference to me. I mean the attitude of the students didn't deter me because, as I may have told you, I came up with, I guess, foolish courage or something that made me— My mother was a courageous woman. As I said, it was a challenge.

**Morris:** That's really very good advice for young people today who are wondering whether or not they can try for a college education. Is there any other advice from your own experience that you would give a young person who's maybe struggling with high school now?

**Jackson:** I wouldn't try to advise anybody. I've learned better. I used to offer free advice, think that I should tell people about this and that. But I no longer feel that way. But I do feel that it's a good philosophy to have a certain amount of confidence in yourself; to be willing to tackle whatever interests you, because you get something out of it whether you win all the way or not. It's a valuable experience to go into unknown territory to sort of prepare yourself for anything that follows.

**Morris:** Regardless of what other people may say or think about what you're doing.

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## **XV Senior Week at Cal, 1922**

**Jackson:** Of course, I did some foolish things. I remember when it came to senior week on the campus. There was another young woman who graduated at the time that I did, Oreathial Richardson. There were two or three black men that graduated the same day.

##

**Jackson:** When it came to Senior Week activities, we were talking. There were four or five of us on the campus then. But if I remember correctly, Oreathial and I were the only senior women. We had the Senior Week activities list. I remember the seniors were supposed to wear white and carry a white umbrella.

**Morris:** A white umbrella?

**Jackson:** [laughs]. Yes. I think I'm correct. They visited—I don't know whether they still have that tradition or not. They visited certain sites on the campus. I think it was called Senior Pilgrimage, wasn't it?

**Morris:** It sounds very familiar.

**Jackson:** I told Oreathial we should go. She said, "I wouldn't go. Oh, I'm not going. They'll snub you." I said, "Well, we'll be together."

She didn't go. But I went. The group of black students laughed at me for going alone in the line of marching senior women. I said, "I'm not concerned about what the other people think. I want to know what they know. I want to see these places. This is graduation time, and I want to participate in it and see what it's like."

So I marched in the procession. Some of the black students that were watching the procession yelled and laughed at me for participating in the march. They tried to make a picture of me walking along. I turned my back as they made the picture. Somewhere I have that picture. I recognized myself, but I doubt if others recognized me.

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**Morris:** You turned away from the camera?

**Jackson:** Yes. Because I didn't want them to make my picture.

**Morris:** And how about Howard Ellis and Howard Ingram? Did they take part in Senior Week activities?

**Jackson:** None that I know about. Our house on Fifty-eighth Street was a place where the black students could come. My brother Emmett helped some of the boys, the men students, by getting work for them.

**Morris:** And putting them to work in his business?

**Jackson:** Yes. That was when he worked with a contractor to clean all the windows when they finished a building. That was one of the many jobs that he did. I remember Alvin Nourse and some of the other black men on the campus.

As I said, the women students discouraged me from participating because they said I would be alone. There were some things we did. I don't remember what they were now. I've always been pretty much alone, so I don't mind that.

**Morris:** Walter Gordon played on the football team. Did you go out and watch him play, and cheer on the Golden Bears?

**Jackson:** I went to the games occasionally. It was some time before I could afford a student-body card. It was all I could do to get the tuition and carfare to go back and forth. Brother was providing all that. And there was no work for me that I could do. So I was dependent on my brother and mother. They were very supportive of me.

**Morris:** Everybody kind of helped everybody else.

**Jackson:** I remember on my first trip, my brothers chipped in and bought my wardrobe. William was a waiter on the train, and he told me what to wear. He looked over my wardrobe and he said, "Now, don't forget, you dress for dinner. Take this coat, so that when the train stops you will have a light coat to throw on you and go out on the platform." That sort of thing.

**Morris:** It's not many brothers that take that much of an interest in their sisters.

**Jackson:** We were a close-knit family.

**Morris:** Other people I have talked to said that the black families that were in the Bay Area, by and large, were very close and were very proud of their children and hoping that they would make a good place for themselves in life.

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[phone call interruption]

**Jackson:** One thing brought on another.

**Morris:** Mr. Gordon appears to have stayed in touch a lot with the university and helped other young fellows.

**Jackson:** Well, he was a football player, and he was very popular. He was a good man on the team, and got good write-ups, so he was well received. Athletes are very important, you know. That's the one barrier that the blacks have been able to break earlier than others. Their skill in athletics has made a place for them there. He was very much idolized by the university. But by that same token, they didn't see other blacks. In the classroom it was a different story. That's pretty much the way it is. Even in our high schools, in my teaching experience, some of the most skilled athletes were not scholars and didn't seem to have to be anything but athletes. Most of the teachers didn't require them to come up to par with their work. I got in trouble there.

**Morris:** Expecting some of the young athletes to also get their classwork done?

**Jackson:** I would tell them, "You are going on in athletics, you will have to have a contract. And you should at least know how to read your contract. Although the lawyer will draw it up for you, you've got to watch him."

**Morris:** I think maybe we have covered pretty much my questions. I really appreciate your sharing so many very moving and important things with us.

##

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