

**T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

**ABSTRACT**

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Nathaniel F. Harrison, Jr.

**COLLECTION:** 4700.0866

**IDENTIFICATION:** Longtime member of Mount Zion First Baptist Church in Baton Rouge

**INTERVIEWER:** Tonetta Morrison

**SERIES:** McKinley High School Oral History Project – African American Churches

**INTERVIEW DATE:** July 17, 1997

**FOCUS DATES:** 1960s - 1990s

**ABSTRACT:**

**Tape 1242, Side A**

Born in Houma, Louisiana, February 14, 1950; Mother was African Methodist Episcopal, paternal grandfather was a Baptist preacher; moved to Baton Rouge in 1965 to live with his uncle Nicholas, a deacon at Mount Zion Baptist Church; history of Mount Zion, is over 130 years old; size of congregation has dwindled from 1500 to around 800; holidays celebrated at the church; role of various outreach ministries at church; importance of church meeting needs of its community; Rev. Theodore J. Jemison, civil rights leader, has pastored church for forty-nine years so far; Jemison's role in Baton Rouge Bus Boycott; a typical service is well-rounded; opening of J.K. Haynes Foundation School; important persons in church history like Rev. Gardner C. Taylor; increasing leadership role of women in the church; role of (birthday) Month Clubs in the church; weekly church activities like choir meetings, Bible study, etc.; historic and current involvement with National Baptist Convention; Harrison's role as officer of church for last twelve years; congregation is getting older; Mount Zion members are supportive of other local churches; Mount Zion Men, a group in the church who assist troubled young men, works closely with Baton Rouge Juvenile Court; formation of Christian Education Ministry; one woman in ministry helps with shut-in members but declines to sit in pulpit; women's involvement may have ruffled feathers in past years but now the church is changing; participation in political arena includes church radio show on WXOK; evolution of Mount Zion's name; retention of ministers at Mount Zion, only six pastors in 130 years; connection between the church and Southern University in Baton Rouge; different churches have different styles; tithing allows the church to fund itself; Mount Zion has always attracted the socioeconomic upper crust; Harrison has learned and grown as a member and officer at Mount Zion; more details of National Baptist Congress and Convention meetings; young ministers have more training these days; training sessions for preachers at Baptist convention are vital; importance of relating to contemporary youth; difference between role of preacher and pastor: "You preach on Sunday morning, but you pastor the other days"; parents no longer force children to attend church, pastor must make young people want to attend; difficulty of finding the right individuals to work with

youth, they must be able to relate to them; philosophy of working with youth; hopes for a mentoring program like Big Brother; he loves his church, discourages people from church-hopping; average age of congregation is seventy; high ratio of active versus inactive members; benefits of experienced congregation; people from all occupations attend Mount Zion, story about members working at Home Depot; many families have attended Mount Zion for three or four generations; older congregation is likely due to church's location; increased affluence of members allows church to continually make improvements; funds raised for renovation of church; not right for outsiders to criticize a church;

**Tape 1242, Side B**

Mount Zion sees the surrounding neighborhood as a brotherhood; importance of music in church service, music ties in with each service's theme; recent service he attended in Washington, DC; congregants must bring something to service in order to take something away; the black church is a significant part of the African American experience; conclusion.

**TAPES:** 1 (T1242)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 48 minutes

**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 24 pages

**OTHER MATERIALS:** Correspondence (2 pgs); Index (5 pgs); Interview data sheet; Interviewer's comments

**RESTRICTIONS:** None