

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Bernestine B. McGee

COLLECTION: 4700.1592

IDENTIFICATION: President of Mu Zeta chapter of Zeta Phi Beta sorority, Professor at Southern University

INTERVIEWER: Chrystal Perkins

SERIES: McKinley High School Oral History Project – Social Organizations

INTERVIEW DATES: June 12, 2002

FOCUS DATES: 1990s – early 2000s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3173, Side A

Introduction; McGee born in Gilbert, Louisiana; president of Mu Zeta chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Incorporated; administrator and professor of nutrition at Southern University; education included high school at Franklin Parish Training School in Winnsboro, Louisiana; BS from Southern University, master's and doctorate degrees from the University of Iowa; major turning points in her life include completing her education, getting married, having her son; familiarity with South Baton Rouge started with high school experience in 4-H Club; familiar with people involved with advancement of African Americans in Baton Rouge; initial involvement with Zeta Phi Beta sorority; Zeta's seven point plan of action: education, community volunteerism, drug and substance abuse prevention, health and wellness, awareness, governmental affairs, chapter management; sorority's sponsorship of youth group in Baton Rouge; community volunteer programs with Dufrocq Elementary, Baton Rouge Food Bank, senior citizens, March of Dimes, Walk America, and Stork's Nest; McGee initially drawn to Zeta because of founding principles of scholarships, sisterly love, service and finer womanhood; Zeta founded in 1920 on the campus of Howard University by five women known as the five pearls; sister organization to Phi Beta Sigma fraternity; Mu Zeta sponsors annual Blue Review in Baton Rouge; description of organizational hierarchy; sorority's positive impact on the community; recruitment of members into organization: BS required, service minded, family ties to sorority favored; other Greek and social organizations in Baton Rouge; Mu Zeta chapter founded 1920; Mu Zeta had first sorority house in Baton Rouge; sorority's recent Regional Youth Retreat in San Antonio, Texas; Civil Rights Movement gave sorority access to more community facilities; description of Blue Review, a pageant to present the young ladies; definition of "finer womanhood"; girls in junior sororities called Archonettes, Amicettes, Pearlettes; decisions about which sorority to join when members of junior groups go to college; sorority's work with youth begins at age four, exposing them to cultural activities and community service projects; sorority's work with boys age four to thirteen, called Gems and Gents; sorority's essay contest for fifth graders; clarification that any bachelor's

degree qualifies women to join; greatest challenge of sorority is for members to find enough time to volunteer with community service projects; church and youth activities link people from north and south Baton Rouge neighborhoods; sorority's dues and fundraising activities; cost for children to join youth groups; youth fundraisers, such as carwashes; the Amicea, a group of female Zeta supporters who do not have baccalaureate degree; pursuit of grants to fund Zeta activities;

Tape 3173, Side B

Involvement in teenage pregnancy prevention program with Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity; collaboration between other fraternities and sororities facilitated by Greater Baton Rouge Pan Hellenic Council; Greek Show fundraiser; interview conclusion.

TAPES: 1 (T3173)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 46 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 22 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Correspondence; Copy of PowerPoint presentations (6 pgs); Interview notes; Interviewer's handwritten notes (7 pgs); Brochure on Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Youth Affiliates

RESTRICTIONS: None