Interview with Edran Louis Auguster

July 19, 1994
Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South
New Iberia (La.)

**Interviewer:** Michele Mitchell  
**ID:** btvct06050  
**Interview Number:** 733

---

**PREFERRED CITATION**


---

**Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South**

An oral history project to record and preserve the living memory of African American life during the age of legal segregation in the American South, from the 1890s to the 1950s.

---

**ORIGINAL PROJECT**


---

**COLLECTION LOCATION & RESEARCH ASSISTANCE**

John Hope Franklin Research Center for African and African American History and Culture  

at the Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library

---

http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/behindtheveil
Mitchell: Say your name.

Auguster: My name?

Mitchell: Un-huh.

Auguster: My name is Edran Auguster. Louis is the middle name. I'm black as far as that is concerned. (Laughter) I was born in New Iberia way back yonder in 1915 on March 17th. I went to public school and finally finished high school at the Iberia Parish Training School in 1933. During the time that I was in high school or before, even in the elementary school, I worked. I had to work. I worked for Pendelton's Drug Store. I started out as a delivery boy and by the time I finished high school, why, I was actually filling prescriptions in the drug store.

Mitchell: Really?

Auguster: Yes. I had thought that I wanted to be a druggist but I wasn't sure about that. In 1933 I left New Iberia to go to college. I enrolled at Straight College

Edran Louis Auguster
which is an AMA school in New Orleans. My intentions were to get two years of college and then go to Xavier University in New Orleans to take pharmacy. But the closer I got to the end of those two years at Straight I was thinking less and less of being a druggist because of the problems that I had seen the druggists in New Iberia encounter. For example, a privately owned Negro drug store was on the way out. The chain drug stores were coming in. The confinement that Pendelton experienced, I didn't know whether I wanted to share in that. For example, doctors would make home visits. They would usually wait until they finished their office practice and then make home visits and sometimes those home visits were made at ten and eleven o'clock at night. And they would give the prescription to the patient and the patient wanted the medicine so Pendelton would have to get up at night and come to the drug store and fill prescriptions. I wondered if I wanted to share in such experiences. And then on the other hand, Straight College was a good college and I loved it for the two years that I was there. Straight was closing and Dillard University was opening. There was a

Edran Louis Auguster
merger between the Methodist New Orleans University in New Orleans and Straight College to form Dillard University and deep things were planned for Dillard so I wanted to go to Dillard. I decided that I would go to Dillard rather than go to Xavier and take pharmacy. My field of concentration was physical science, mainly the chemical phase of it and the math phase. But anyway, I went on to Dillard and for the next two years, two years I finished from Dillard in 1937. In my last year I decided to take practice teaching because I didn't have any money and I figured that that was a good job. I mean it was necessary that I do some kind of work to get more money. So teaching seemed to be the best thing open for me. I decided to take practice teaching and as a result I came out in 1937 and I applied for jobs. The state superintendent of Negro schools at that time made recommendations and the first job I got was at Kentwood because Iberia Parish told me that they didn't have any openings. So he recommended that I go to Kentwood. Kentwood was a small town. It was down on the other side of New Orleans and I didn't know if I wanted to go that far but if I didn't get a job in Iberia Parish close to

Edran Louis Auguster
around why, I would have to go to Kentwood. But Mr. Jordan at Weeks Island got wind of it so he told the superintendent he wanted me at Weeks Island. He wanted a principal, he wanted a man principal. He didn't want any more women. And I got the job.

Mitchell: Why didn't he want anymore women?

Auguster: Well, I mean let's say conduct, you see. So I got the job at Weeks Island and ended up there nineteen years. I spent nineteen years at Weeks Island and then they opened a school right across the street from here, a block from here in 1957, 1956 rather, and I asked for that transfer and I met the requirements as far as the owners of the company insisted. That is, in order for me to get a release from out there why, I had to recommend somebody that they would accept. I made a couple of recommendations. The first one they wouldn't accept but I finally got one that they did accept and they said it was alright for me to go. But the school was on the way out, Weeks Island was on the way out. They had built a brick eight room school right after the war but then the company said that

Edran Louis Auguster
they were going to do away with the village and everybody had to leave. And I could see that coming so I was glad to get away from Weeks Island. And by 1969 they closed everything.

Mitchell: 1959 or 1969?

Auguster: 1969, un-huh, yes. In 1969 they closed everything. I worked at J.B. Livingston School which was right across the way from the house here from 1956 to 1969 and then because of a court order, desegregation of the schools, the superintendent and the board of Iberia Parish were bent on not obeying or defeating as much as possible the achievement of total integration in the schools of Iberia Parish. The superintendent and his board members were dead set on saying that or proving that Negroes were not as good as whites, that Negroes had never achieved anything and that no school where Negroes were, Negroes said they were inferior so they would prove then that they were inferior by closing all of them. So that's what they did. They closed J.B. Livingston School. They closed every, in New Iberia every school had been all black prior to

Edran Louis Auguster
1969. The only one that they kept was what was called the Jonas Henderson High School which was the high school and it was a magnificent building, air conditioned and everything, they reduced that to a freshman high school. But they demoted the principal to assistant principal of the high school, New Iberia High School. And every other principal they tried to demote them to assistant principals in the other elementary schools, you see. I happened to be on the inside to get a reading of the court order and there was one part in that court order which said that they could close the schools, they could demote the principals - no, not demote the principals, I take that back. But those principals of those schools that were closed had to be offered jobs comparable to what they had as principal. And the superintendent didn't live by that. He assigned the principals, displaced principals, to schools that were existing as assistant principals. And because I knew that, I went to the superintendent and told him that I would meet him in court because I wasn't satisfied with the job that he had offered me. I also went to the president of the school board and talked to him. He was a personal

Edran Louis Auguster
friend of mine. He was white but he was a friend. And when I told him what the court order was he was surprised because the judge had told them not to discuss his decisions, you see. But it wasn't discussed. They didn't tell anybody that. Even the NAACP which knew it didn't tell these principals that the school board was supposed to give them something equal to what they had or better.

**Mitchell:** Why didn't they tell you that? What do you think?

**Auguster:** Well, the positions, the positions they gave them. Had to give you a position either equal to a principal or a supervisor's job.

**Mitchell:** But why wouldn't the NAACP tell people that?

**Auguster:** Well, let's say there was a lot of personal animosity between the leaders of the NAACP that was pushing for that, you see, and educators because most of the educators, I mean black educators, did not see that much difference between the schools, you see. Iberia
Parish had done a magnificent job of trying to make the schools equal.

Mitchell: Really?

Auguster: Yes. For example, this building over here, the J.B. Livingston School, was a twenty-four room classroom, twenty-four room building with auditorium and cafeteria. The very same plans, architectural drawings, for J.B. Livingston School were also used to build a school on North Louis Street for whites. The school, they had built a new high school here for whites and they built a new high school here for blacks and named it Henderson High School that was top ranked. Air conditioned, very modern. Matter of fact, the auditorium at Henderson High School was larger than the auditorium at New Iberia High School. And as far as the teaching is concerned, Negroes learned. It was better in the black schools than in the white schools. In the discussions before integration where the racists were bringing out the qualifications of blacks, blacks are this or blacks are that, they're going to ruin our schools and all of
that, black teachers were not certified. The school board ordered a survey, ordered the supervisors to make a survey of the qualifications of black teachers compared to qualifications of whites. This was never published because you had no black teachers in the black schools that were not certified. But you had many, many whites who were working under two year certificates and had to go to school every two years in order to renew those certificates. Better qualifications. So the, coming back to my threat to go to court, the compromise that the president of school board made with me was that we cannot, the Iberia Parish School board does not have money, we've spent all the money we had buying portable buildings to try to house all of those students and still keep those black schools closed because the superintendent had told them that white people wouldn't go to schools that had been used by blacks. They were filthy, they were not clean. Those were lies, you see. That white teachers wouldn't work under white principals. And that was a lie because before we integrated, the summer before we had a summer program where you had a black principal on one hall and a white principal on

Edran Louis Auguster
the other hall and each one of them had a mixed faculty. When I asked the superintendent, I said you're saying that but why is it just this summer I had white teachers and they worked well with me. Oh, they'll do that for their little extra money that they make in the summer but they won't do that for a regular job. I said man, do you mean to say they would give up a regular job that's paying a whole lot more money just to make a little extra change in the summer. And then he went on to tell me about other things that had happened; a janitor locking himself up in the boiler room and died of a heart attack when he saw Negroes going to vote at the school for the first time, all that sort of stuff. But anyway, when I talked to Mr. Burns, the president of the school board, he told me said, we can't (), we're going to have to reopen those schools. And if you'll just bear with us, just mark time at New Iberia Middle School, I'll guarantee you before the semester is over we'll reopen a school and you'll be the principal of it. And sure enough, just like he said, by October they reopened what was the A.B. Simon, used to be the A.B. Simon Elementary School and I went over there as

Edran Louis Auguster
principal. I stayed there one year then they got permission from the court to reopen the Anderson Street School which was a seventh and eighth grade school, a middle school. They called it junior high but it was nothing but a middle school. And the superintendent asked me to take that school and buttered me up because I had told him I did not care to work with seventh and eighth grade children. I mean they were too much a problem. Being a disciplinarian, I was a disciplinarian, and when you get to seventh and eighth grades there you tell them to do something, they're going to do what they want to do or they're going to tell you and I couldn't take that. So I had told him before when they moved the eighth grade from J.B. Livingston School that I didn't care to ( ) the seventh and eighth grades. But he showed me the problems. He said we're going to have problems at Anderson Street School. You have two public housing projects in that area and those people are problems. I mean they are a low class of people, low income. They're in the process of building another housing project in that area. Across the street from the school you have a lumber company.

Edran Louis Auguster
Nixon. Nixon has twenty or more houses, little sharp shooter houses, to rent to folks and those children are problems. He said on top of that we're going to bring the poor Cajuns from the () area and the poor Cajuns from the () area. They'll all be going there. So you're going to have a problem of poor, underprivileged Negroes and poor, underprivileged whites mixing together and I don't have a principal that I think can handle it. So I went on and told him I'd accept it. I accepted it but I told him when I took it I said I'm not going to be there long. But I did work five years as principal of Anderson Middle School.

**Mitchell:** Was it always called Anderson Middle School because you said they reopened it?

**Auguster:** Yeah, they reopened it.

**Mitchell:** Was that always the name of it, Anderson?
Auguster: It was originally the Henderson Junior High School. But when they reopened it they reopened it under the name of Anderson Street Middle School.

Mitchell: You told me about a school that was turned into a ninth grade school.

Auguster: Yes, that was the Henderson High School.

Mitchell: Oh, so there was a Henderson High School and then there was another Henderson School?

Auguster: There was a Henderson, the first high school was built, they named it as Henderson High School. Then when they built this new school they changed the name of the old high school to junior high, Henderson Junior High. And then they named the new building or the new school Henderson High School. Now all of these schools names I've given you, they were names of Negroes that had made distinctive contributions to Negro life or Negro education. The school board had done that. But when they integrated the superintendent said that no Negroes had ever done
anything, therefore, we take the names off the schools. So they took all those names off. But in so doing they had to take some whites also because some of the schools had been named for white people that had white supervisors and white principals. So they took all the names off with the exception of the superintendent that was here for so long, Lloyd Porter. They let his name remain on the stadium, the football stadium. They let it remain as the Lloyd Porter Stadium. But everything else, they took the names off. They not only took the names off, they demoted the principals, they transferred all of the black children into formally all white schools which created a terrific adjustment problem for black students that whites didn't experience. They also said that, among themselves I guess, that nothing would be left in the school system or made a part of the school system that would serve as an inspiration for blacks. And even until today Iberia Parish, instead of the school system in Iberia Parish, instead of observing Martin Luther King's birthday, every year, every year there's a big hassle and they call it, they give them the day off, but it's Great

Edran Louis Auguster
Americans Day. Everybody else in this area and over much of the United States observe it Martin Luther King's birthday but in Iberia Parish it's Great Americans Day. That comes up every year. That has come up this year in making the calendar for next year.

Mitchell: Great Americans Day?

Auguster: Great Americans Day, yes. Because one of the disciples of (), () disciples who was his favorite and he gave him a good job when () was superintendent, he decided that he was going to run for school board when he retired and when the Negroes went up and asked for Martin Luther King's birthday he said there were a whole lot of other great Americans that we don't observe their birthdays so he named it Great Americans Day. (Laughter)

Mitchell: That's something.

Auguster: The Negroes have particularly in sports they've done well in the schools. But it's because they've had TV

Edran Louis Auguster
to look at and they were able to see Michael Jordan and all the other great athletes perform and they have attempted to imitate them and they've gotten good, you see. But as far as the school system, you don't want anything that would serve as an inspiration for blacks in this school system. I would say that there's as much or much more segregation and discrimination in the school system of Iberia Parish than before integration. The institutions that they wanted to keep white, they've come up with all sorts of regulations that exclude blacks. In one of our middle schools they had built up a reputation for a dance team, you know. But in order to join that dance team it costs you over five hundred dollars a year and blacks can't afford it. A few blacks can, teacher's children and other people they make the team because they've got the money to pay. But the dance team is not open to all students like it should be, you see. At the high school, the same thing. It's over a thousand dollars over there when you buy your uniforms and all the workshops that you have to go to and pay in order to go and if you don't go to workshops you can't dance. I don't care how much dancing you can

Edran Louis Auguster
do, you can't dance if you didn't take dancing in the dancing school because that's one of the requirements.

You have to have so many years in dancing school in order to be on the dance team. I have been working for the past I think over thirty years with the Boy's State program called the American Legion. When the schools were integrated the only high school in New Iberia was New Iberia Senior High, that's a public high school. So I went through the process of asking for a boy for Boy's State because our post is small, therefore, we have a quota of only one. When I asked for a boy they gave me a list of names. There were no black boys on there so we had to send a white boy. But since we're all black as far as American Legion is concerned in New Iberia.

Mitchell: Really?

Auguster: Yes, you see you have white posts but you have the black posts too. We felt that if we're going to put out this money then we want a black to be a part of it. We want to spend our money on blacks. You have about four, or three, you have three American Legion

Edran Louis Auguster
posts that are white that's really a part of Iberia Parish and they have quotas larger than ours because they have more membership. So they can send boys. They send four, at least four boys, every year. But they never send a black boy, it's always a white boy because the school does not give them a list of anything other than white boys. So we said we'd get around that but we weren't going to send any boy if we couldn't send a black boy, the school couldn't provide us a black boy. So we had, one of the guidance counselors at New Iberia Senior High was black so we talked to him and said listen, can't you get us a black boy. So he did that. Every year I would contact him to get a boy and he would get us a boy. I'd give him the application to fill it out, he'd fill it out. Now I don't know if the school knew anything about it or not but he'd send a boy to Boy's State. Well, he retired and then we had a former Boy's Stater that was assistant principal so I went to him and every year I would get a boy for Boy's State through him. This year, at the close of last year, he retired so that put another black as assistant principal. So this year I said well, I'm going to just see. I don't

Edran Louis Auguster
want to think that I'm being prejudiced. I called the principal of the school and I told him that I had a problem. Well, what's your problem. He's a friend of mine, you know. What's your problem. I said every year that I, come time for Boy's State, I have to go through the back door in order to get a black boy for Boy's State. What you mean. I said you know I'm supposed to go to the guidance counselors but the guidance counselors can never give me a black boy so what I've had to do through the years is go to the black guidance counselor or black assistant principal in order to get a black boy. It seems as though the guidance counselors never recommend black boys to Boy's State. And I'd been going through it, I said now () retired so the only one that's left now is your new assistant principal. I said well, what must I do. Must I go to the guidance counselor or must I go to the assistant principal, go through the back door to the assistant principal. You know what he told me? You better do like you've been doing. I'll talk to the assistant principal. And that's what I had to do. (Laughter)
Mitchell: Well, when you started you said that you've been doing it for thirty years?

Auguster: Probably longer than that. Yes, it is much longer than that because we've been integrated twenty-five years and I was district chairman I guess about fifteen years because when we had the all black high school we were sent and the program was segregated, the Boy's State. We had two Boy's States. Had one for whites and then we had bayou Boy's State for the black boys. The whites would meet at LSU and the blacks would go to Southern.

Mitchell: Southern in Baton Rouge?

Auguster: Southern University, yes, in Baton Rouge. And we had the two programs. They were identical as far as what was done but it was just that they were segregated. And at that time I would carry as many as eight boys from Henderson High School alone. There it was a matter of money, you see. If we could get sponsors to sponsor a boy, why we could send as many as we could get sponsors for and that's what happened back in

Edran Louis Auguster
those times, you see. But now, it's not like that now because they allow a post to sponsor only boys based on membership quota. And as a result, we can send only one now regardless of how many sponsors. And then the other thing is the cost has gone up so. We used to sponsor a boy for forty or fifty dollars. Why now it's, this year it's a hundred and sixty-one dollars to sponsor a boy.

**Mitchell:** Did you go to black businesses to get sponsors?

**Auguster:** Huh?

**Mitchell:** Did black businesses sponsor them? Who did you go to to get sponsors?

**Auguster:** Oh, we had, back in those days you had the Knights of Peter Claver which is a Catholic organization sponsored boys. The Masonic Lodge, everywhere you had a Masonic Lodge they were required by there minister to sponsor a boy. So we had a Masonic Lodge here. We didn't have to worry about it. The Masonic Lodge would come up with that money, you see. We had,
I've even gone to the sheriff and talked to the sheriff. The sheriff sponsored a boy. We had this building here, it was a veteran's building and when they had money I'd ask for forty dollars to sponsor a boy. And the American Legion would sponsor as many as they could afford with the money that they had, you see. Sometimes one, sometimes two, sometimes three if necessary trying to meet the quota that we had for this area. So it was no big problem of getting sponsors. We could get the sponsors. But now no need to get a sponsor because you can't send but one boy because of the quota of the American Legion post, you see.

Mitchell: Has there been a Girl's State program too?

Auguster: Yes, un-huh. The Girl's State program is...

(End of Tape 1 - Side A)

Tape 1 - Side B

Mitchell: Before the schools were integrated, were there any organizations that black teachers and principals had amongst themselves?
Auguster: Yes. The blacks had the Louisiana Education Association, the LEA. That was state wide. And we had IEA, Iberia Education Association locally. They played a big part in getting, well probably the biggest I'd say was getting a law which called for equalization of salaries because there was a big differentiation between what a white teacher with a master's degree got and what a black teacher with a master's degree got, or one with a bachelor's degree or one with no degree, you see. I remember when Negro teachers, when I started to teaching the Negroes were receiving around forty dollars a month but the whites were receiving sixty dollars a month.

Mitchell: When was that, sir? When did you start teaching in the forties?

Auguster: 1937.

Mitchell: So you did, I mean when you came back, you told me about how you left Dillard and how Mr. Jordan wanted you for Weeks Island. So you started that in 1937?
Auguster: 1937. I'm just thinking about this, when I was
telling you about Mr. Jordan and so forth, there was
one thing I didn't tell you. In 19--, well I went in
the service in 1943 and I didn't come back out of
service until 1946. I got out in 1946. But school ()
was in April so school closed. In the Fall of 1946, I
didn't know whether I wanted to go back to teaching or
not. And I certainly wasn't going back for what I was
getting when I went into the service. I decided to
open up a little business, putting into effect a hobby
that I had, that of making pictures, photography. So
I opened a little shop and then when it came time for
contract negotiations I went back to the
superintendent and talked about my job because he had
to give me my job back if I wanted it. You see that
was a part of the draft program, that whatever job you
had if you were drafted into service you got your job
back when you came back out of service. So I went to
him to talk about the job. I had been making eighty
dollars a month so I told him I couldn't work for less
than a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month for
twelve months in the year. They had gone to twelve

Edran Louis Auguster
months then. Oh, I don't see how I can give you that. I said well, that's it. But I also told Mr. Jordan that I wasn't coming back unless I got a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. A few days after that the superintendent called me. He had the contract all drawn out for a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. Gave it to me to sign. I said I'm not going to sign this until I see what kind of contract you've got for my wife. Well, he had her down there still getting eighty dollars. That's what she was getting when I was in the service. So I said well, since you're paying her eighty dollars and going to pay me a hundred and twenty-five, you've got a deal and I went on and I signed the contract. In 1947, the next year, the very next year, the superintendent was having trouble with getting white teachers at the white school in Weeks Island. They wouldn't mind going out there to teach but they didn't want to live out there because I'll tell you, mosquitoes were hell out there and he couldn't get white teachers to go. So what he did, he went and ordered a 1947 Ford station wagon at the school board. The school board superintendent ordered this 1947 Ford station wagon and cars were

Edran Louis Auguster
hard to get at that time. Coming after the war you
couldn't buy them. So it brought up the question and
went to the attorney general and the attorney general
said that the school board could not buy a station
wagon to transport white teachers, or teachers period.
So he was in a predicament. He had a station wagon
on order that he couldn't buy and he still didn't have
any way to get his teachers to Weeks Island. So he
called me and asked me he said, don't you drive to
Weeks Island every day. I said yes, I drive to Weeks
Island every day. I had an old Chevrolet and I'd have
to stop and rebuild it sometimes on the road. He said
this is what I've got, I've got a problem. He said
I've ordered a station wagon and the school board
can't buy that station wagon but I bought it to
transport the teachers to Weeks Island. He said would
you buy that station wagon and transport my teachers
to Weeks Island. I said sure, I'd be happy to. He
said I'll pay you twenty-five dollars a month for each
teacher riding with you and I've got five going out to
Weeks Island. So that's a hundred and twenty-five
dollars a month I'll pay you extra, you know, that's
over salary. He went on to show me that gas, how much

Edran Louis Auguster
gas I would use, you know, and I could make money on it. And I needed a station wagon. God knows I was happy to get a station wagon, brand new too. I told him I said well, Mr. Porter, that was the superintendent named Porter, I said Mr. Porter, I'd be happy to do that but you have seven teachers that are going to Weeks Island. Naw, there's just five! I said no, you've got those five whites but I'm a teacher and my wife's a teacher. Now if you pay me for seven teachers to ride, why, we got a deal. Okay. (Laughter) Now it was against the law for him to pay for any teachers to ride to go to work. But they got around the law and he was willing to get around it, wanted to get around it just for the white teachers, you see. But I did that until oh I guess, let's see, I wore that 1947 station wagon out, I bought a 1953 station wagon and then in 1955 I said I wanted to buy a car and by that time they had opened a road where from here to Weeks Island was eighteen miles compared to the forty miles, you see. And naturally when they cut the distance down, why, he cut the amount of money that he was paying down, you see. I agreed with him that was right because it wasn't costing me that much.

Edran Louis Auguster
So I told him since the road was good and those white teachers wanted to ride to work, let them drive, buy a car and drive it. That's when I stopped. I told him I was getting rid of the station wagon and I was going to buy an automobile. See I couldn't get away because any time I'd make a demand on Mr. Jordan that demand was granted by the school board and I couldn't let him down by just leaving anyway.

**Mitchell:** But the station wagon, that 1947 station wagon, they paid for it or you paid for it?

**Auguster:** No, I had to pay for it but I made enough money to, I paid for the station wagon in just about a year's time.

**Mitchell:** That's not a bad deal at all.

**Auguster:** No, you see. And I was making I think seven times twenty-five. That's a hundred and seventy-five dollars a month, the station wagon. I wasn't paying anymore than about a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month for the station wagon and the other fifty

Edran Louis Auguster
Edran Louis Auguster

dollars would take care of my gas and tires and everything else, you see. And then I got a chance to go to school free because before that the old car was costing me like everything. (Laughter)

Mitchell: Was it the same car, you told me earlier how the roads used to wash out going to Weeks Island? The old Chevrolet that you had was the car that you were driving then?

Auguster: Yes, un-huh.

Mitchell: What year was it, the Chevrolet?

Auguster: The first, let's see, the first car I bought, I believe the Chevrolet was a 1935 I think. No, yeah, 1935, that's what it was. And I wore it out. When I got the station wagon I thought I could do something with the Chevrolet, you know, and a junk dealer came and looked at it and I had to pay him twenty-five dollars to haul it off (Laughter) instead of giving me that money. Instead of giving me something for it I had to pay him to take it off my hands.

Edran Louis Auguster
Mitchell: When you had to drive forty miles to go out there, how would you have to do it? Because if they cut it down to eighteen, what was the old way that you would have to go?

Auguster: The old way that I would have to go the forty miles, I had to go from here to Jeanerette and then from Jeanerette to Glenco. That's on rural going on out. And go on out to Louisa which is quite a distance and the roads were bad, and then come back to Weeks Island. But with the new road, the new road went through the swamp and went directly to Weeks Island. That was just eighteen miles.

Mitchell: When you first started at Weeks Island in 1937, I'm curious about a couple of things. What made you decide not to stay in New Orleans and what did you think of the school out in Weeks Island when you first got there?

Auguster: Well, I had no reason to stay in New Orleans because I didn't like New Orleans for a place to live. My ties

Edran Louis Auguster
were in New Iberia. My mother was here and everything I knew was here so I wanted to come back. If I was going to teach then I wanted to come back here and teach. Another thing why I wanted to come back to New Iberia is because when I finished high school I had taken, we had was a teacher training course and those of us that graduated got a teacher's certificate and with that teacher's certificate all my other classmates went on into teaching right after high school, you see. I chose to go to college, I didn't want to teach. And at the graduation the superintendent offered me a job teaching. So I said well, I've got it made, I'll come back here and I'll get a job. But he first told me he didn't have anything for me. That's my real reasons for coming back to New Iberia. And Weeks Island, when I got there it was a disappointment in that there was no school. I had never been out there before. It was in a church. I knew several of the people that lived out there but they were all strangers to me. But there was a need for education out there and there was seemingly a desire on the part of the people that they have somebody that would really be interested in

Edran Louis Auguster
education of their children. I don't know how long the school had been there before I went to work there but it had been there for a long time because I know I knew some of the teachers that had worked out there. And at the time that went to Weeks Island only one student had finished the elementary school at Weeks Island, gone on to high school and then went to college and got a college degree. Most of them worked, most of the children, the aspiration of the young men, the boys, was not to get old enough to work in the mine but to get big enough to work in the mine.

Mitchell: When would they go work in the mine? How old would they be?

Auguster: It didn't matter how old you were it was just big enough, you see. And the girls to work in some of those white people's kitchens or the bosses. And yet some of those people out there loved those bosses and would even name their children after them to gain favor with the boss. (Laughter) A whole family named after the bosses' folks, you see. And one of the reasons was that it was isolated. The high school in

Edran Louis Auguster
New Iberia was forty miles away. The high school in Saint Marais Parish in Franklin was thirty-some miles away, you see. And there was no such thing as bus transportation. You either had to get somebody to bring you to school every day and pick you up in the evening or go and live with somebody where there was a high school. And the families nor the students were interested enough in education to pay for their children to stay in New Iberia so they could attend the high school. In the first place, there wasn't an interest and in the second place there wasn't the money. Because even though that was a salt mining community those people were not making any money.

Would you believe that I stayed at Weeks Island for three years, I couldn't afford to come home but every two weeks. I'd come home on Saturday and go back on Sunday or come a Friday night if you could get somebody to bring us and go back Sunday afternoon. If I couldn't get anybody to bring me from here I'd have to catch the bus and I'd have to leave here at three o'clock in the evening in order to catch the bus to go to Weeks Island to get there at nine or ten o'clock at night. They were just not making the money. But I

Edran Louis Auguster
stayed out there for two years and I was guaranteed two meals and a place to stay, ten dollars a month.

**Mitchell:** And you started out at forty dollars a month?

**Auguster:** No, I started out at fifty-five.

**Mitchell:** Fifty-five?

**Auguster:** Yeah, you see, as principal.

**Mitchell:** Principal, teacher?

**Auguster:** Yeah. But ten dollars a month and I had my own private room. (Laughter) The things were, I mean the people weren't making any money but they didn't have to spend that much money because the houses were provided by the company. They were the company's houses, you see. They didn't have electricity in them. They had water but no electricity. And then through the years they added electricity to the community. The church had electricity but nothing else. No street lights, no lights in the homes. They
went a number of years without it but when they did get it they abused it.

**Mitchell:** How so? What do you mean?

**Auguster:** When they got electricity, first they put them electricity and no meters, you see.

**Mitchell:** Oh, okay. (Laughter)

**Auguster:** Alright. They raised hogs out there and those Negroes would put a light so the hogs could eat at night. A two hundred watt bulb so the hogs could eat at night and grow and get fat faster. (Laughter)

**Mitchell:** When did they get electricity, what year was it about?

**Auguster:** Let me see, they got electricity just before the war, around 1941 or 1942. They ran up such a bill the company had to come there and get meters and put on the lights. And too, they used to buy the bulbs. You'd buy the bulbs at the company, you see. You had a store out there but the company sold a lot of things.
cheaper than you could buy it in the store. So the company decided they would no longer sell two hundred watt bulbs. They cut out the two hundred watt bulbs and finally cut out the one hundred watt bulbs. So if you would go to the company and buy you couldn't buy but a seventy-five watt. (Laughter) Keep down that electric light bill.

Mitchell: Do you think that the Depression in any way affected that community?

Auguster: The Depression? Yes, you see when I went out there in 1937 they were just coming out of the Depression. Yes, the Depression had hurt them severely because the economy of the island depended on the salt company. And the demand for salt wasn't as great, you see. You had three salt mines in this area competing. You had Avery Island, Jefferson Island and Weeks Island. And those salt mines, just looking on a map you might say that they were far apart but we could stand on a hill at Weeks Island and look across the west and see the smoke coming from Avery Island and Jefferson Island.
Mitchell: Really?

Auguster: Yes, on a clear day. That's how close they were.

Mitchell: Did Jefferson Island and Avery Island, did they have schools before Weeks Island did?

Auguster: Schools? Yes, they had little shacks. But the schools never, because of the isolation of Weeks Island, the number of students was larger. The numbers were larger, yearly enrollment was larger at Weeks Island because everybody lived out there. At Avery Island, Avery Island is just about seven miles from New Iberia and many of the men go to work, they live in New Iberia. They go to work at Jefferson Island, it's the same thing. A few people lived at Jefferson Island but most of the men working at Jefferson Island came from New Iberia. Avery Island had a community. They still have, to a small extent, you know, housing for people. But you had two big industries out there. You had salt mines and () Tabasco Pepper Plant to employ people. But most of the men working out there would commute every day.

Edran Louis Auguster
But at Weeks Island it wasn't like that. After they got this new road then the company said well, it's too expensive for us to keep up all of these houses so they closed they village because with the new roads men could go backwards and forward to work. Most of the workers that were at Weeks Island that were displaced, I mean when they closed the village, they went to Jeanerette to live. Most of them ended up at Lydia and eventually they moved the church from Weeks Island to Lydia and it's out there now. They have a nice church out there now. They improved it and those two classrooms that were built on the side, they're still there. Put brick around them but they're still there. The company gave, and many of those people, they gave them the house and then paid to move it off.

So that's why I went to Weeks Island, what I found at Weeks Island. It was a dismal place but through the years the interest that the parents showed in education made me stay. We had students, every year we'd send students, I mean they provided after they got the short road, they put bus transportation out there and all graduates would come here to Henderson High School and you could count on eight of the best

Edran Louis Auguster
top ten in the class, you could count on ten of them coming from Weeks Island. We had some good students out there. Yes, indeed. Right now I have in the Iberia Parish we have one school board member, the supervisor of transportation, the principal of the Anderson Street Middle School, the principal of the Loreauville Elementary School, guidance counselor in Jeanerette High School, the guidance counselor in Jeanerette Middle School, all of those are my students that I had at Weeks Island. And when I went out there only one student had ever gone to college. We also have one student that, well we have some that are retired principals but we have another one, Frank (), I think he's at, I don't know I'm a little confused on those schools, but Wiley College. I don't know if Wiley is still in operation but I know it was in that Wiley district. He's a librarian over there. He's been a librarian at Texas, he was librarian at Texas Southern for awhile. He was librarian at Prairie View for awhile and the last time I talked to him he told me he was over at Wiley or, Wiley College I believe. But anyway, I know Wiley and Bishop merged and they were still over there. But we've had some terrific
students that were turned out there and that talent had just been lost before I went out there. I don't claim credit for it as being responsible for it but by just insisting that they not go to work as soon as they're big enough we were able to get them to go to school, educate them.

**Mitchell:** I'd like to ask you a question. Would it be possible, I don't know how much time you have, would it be possible for me to schedule another interview with you?

**Auguster:** Sure.

**Mitchell:** I would really like to spend some more time.

**Auguster:** Okay, I mean that's alright. I've got plenty of time. My time is usually my time and most of my time is well, volunteer for example.

Tape 2 – Side A

**Mitchell:** It's July 21, 1994 and this is a continuation of another interview with Mr. Edran Auguster. I'm just

Edran Louis Auguster
curious sir, you told me last time when you went out to Weeks Island that they wanted a man principal. Were a lot of principals in schools women or how many principals were men?

Auguster: On a whole, the parish seemed to have been shifting from women principals to men principals. However, in the black schools since most of them were one room schools, two room schools, they were principal-teachers and they were women. You see? Only in the larger schools like the city schools were men. But they were shifting to men principals. But that wasn't the reason that I was selected at Weeks Island. It was because of, well, other things other than teaching that had put the company against women. Breaking up homes and things like that.

Mitchell: Okay. I'm wondering a little bit about your role as a principal and what sort of leadership role you played in the community because it sounds like you weren't afraid to speak your mind.
Auguster: Well, community wise, I guess you would say that my activities in communities when I came to, or rather before I came to New Iberia as a principal. But I was living in New Iberia at that time while I was working at Weeks Island. We were involved with a number of issues in the community that affected black people. For example, you had a city park but it was strictly white. You had no park for blacks, no playgrounds for blacks. Everything was for the whites and the blacks were not allowed to go there. Well, we organized community civic, what we called civic leagues and we went on and approached the city council for these things, that we were entitled to them. That was before the civil rights movement actually started. And by going to them and making demands, why, they began to provide some of those things. We found that a lot of these stores where Negroes purchased things, Negroes patronized, they would have such things like water fountains and a big sign over them, white. If you were black you couldn't drink out of that water fountain. They didn't want you to drink there and they didn't provide any for blacks. That's another movement that we took on and were successful in that
the owners put these water fountains for blacks. We also demanded if you had a restroom for whites then if you didn't want us in there, provide one for us. And probably one of our biggest achievements as a civic group, one of them, was the city of New Iberia passed, well we started agitating for a swimming pool for blacks because you had one here for whites. The city had purchased land for a park right out there and we wanted a swimming pool because children from here would have to go to Abbeyville where there was a swimming pool blacks could use or Lafayette or somewhere else and a couple of them got drowned swimming in canals. So we demanded a swimming pool. So the city went to the people and asked a bond election first to repair the swimming pool in City Park which was for whites and to build a swimming pool in the West End Park for blacks since we were segregated. After the bond issue passed they started fixing up the white swimming pool, City Park, and every time you'd read about it in the paper they found something else wrong with City Park that had to be fixed. They hadn't anticipated that expense. So what they were actually doing was taking away from the

Edran Louis Auguster
money that had been appropriated for West End Park to fix up City Park. And our civic group went to the city and demanded that they start work on West End swimming pool. And when we raised enough sand they, okay, they went on and got a contract to build the pool at West End. But they had spent some of the money so the plans had to be altered on the West End swimming pool. We wanted members on the park commission so that blacks would be able to share in those plans and have a voice in how the money was spent. Of course, that was just before the civil rights, well, during the time of the civil rights movement. I was the spokesman and when the Daily Iberian came out with it because I had asked for black representation on the park board the Daily Iberian carried it that Edran Auguster, principal of J.B. Livingston School, demand integration of City Park. Well, I did ask to integrate City Park, I asked for integration for it. Alright, Louisiana had passed a law that any teacher could be fired if they advocated integration. This happened on a Thursday I think and the superintendent was out of town. When he got to town he called me on a Saturday. School board office

Edran Louis Auguster
doesn’t open on Saturday, to meet him up at the school board office. I went and he told me that he had read the article in the paper and you know what the law is about advocating segregation. I told him I said well, now first you know that that law is being contested as unconstitutional. That's the first place. And second place, I'm a private citizen and I went there as a private citizen and I can talk as a private citizen. Yes, but they used the name of the school. I said well, I don't have any control over the Daily Iberian.

The Daily Iberian put the name of the school in there because they didn't want anybody to misunderstand or not know who was doing the talking. (Laughter) Well, he agreed with me that the lawsuit was being contested and that most likely it would be declared unconstitutional which eventually happened, you see. So I did that. We also took part in defense of people that were accused of doing things that we knew they hadn't done, you see. It's really nothing but prejudice or racism and we spent our money defending those people. The first time that I ever sat on the first floor of the parish courtroom was in one of those defenses where we had hired a black

Edran Louis Auguster
lawyer out of New Orleans to come here and defend a doctor and we just took our seats in the courthouse on the first floor. Otherwise, Negroes had to go in the balcony, you see. The only ones that would be down there are the ones that are being tried, you see. All the rest, that was reserved for whites. Negroes went in the Jim Crow balcony. But in New Iberia the city officials, parish officials and any other white that was in authority, they tried to keep any civil rights movement out of the city. And they intended to do that or they did that through intimidation, you see, violent intimidation. We had an incident here where the school board to help the war effort, they...

**Mitchell:** Which war?

**Auguster:** World War II. To help the manpower commission, they opened a welding school but that welding school was open to whites only because you had shipyards down here that were hiring welders and paying big wages if you could weld. We had one Negro who was not educated but he had worked all of his life with the Conrads. The Conrads owned a big rice mill here in New Iberia.
and one of the Conrads is a historian at USL and he wrote books on the history of New Iberia. So when this Lawrence () talked to those people evidently they wrote a letter to the war production board and the war production board sent a representative down here to investigate the superintendent because Lawrence had applied for admission to the school of welding and they had refused to let him attend because he was black. Well, this man, the representative from the war production board came down here and the superintendent called the principal of the black school and told him of this meeting and he wanted the principal to get around and get some black leaders to meet at his office at ten o'clock on that particular morning. When we got there, Professor Simon came by and asked me to attend and when we got there we didn't know what we were going there for but it turned out that this representative from the war production board was there and the superintendent wanted us to come there and say what all he had done for blacks other than the welding school. And in the process he brought up about he had established a blacksmith shop in the Negro high school to teach Negroes to be

Edran Louis Auguster
blacksmiths. And I was a fool, I mean I was young but I was a fool, you see, and I told him, I said it's true everything that you say. Hiring a band director, a man to teach music and they had hired Bob Johnson who was at one time a great trumpet player. He claimed that Louis Armstrong taught him to play the trumpet and he was good but he had passed his time. I said you said about the blacksmith shop, I said that was good but with a blacksmith, a blacksmith works on the farm, he shoes horses and mules when it rains but when the sun shines he gets out there and plows just like the rest of them. I said we don't want that, we want welding where you can go into the () projects and make some money while money is being made. I was rewarded for that. I was rewarded by just three months before that happened I had been reclassified and that was a part of the deal that brought my wife to Weeks Island, I had been reclassified from 3-A to 3-B which put me further back down the line of being drafted. But automatically I jumped from 3-B to 1-A. (Laughter) And how I know he did it, I went to him and told him I said listen, I've been ordered to report for a physical. As the superintendent of the

Edran Louis Auguster
schools, you see, I told him I had been ordered to. Well, we don't, the school board will not ask for a deferment. I told him I said I didn't ask for a deferment. I said I'm simply telling you that I've been ordered to report for a physical examination for the draft. Well, I went into the service. But there were some other group, really the NAACP continued to fight to get this welding school in New Iberia for blacks. And the superintendent had been ordered by the war production board to provide welding for blacks but he didn't want to bring them into the white school. So he decided that he would establish a welding school here for blacks.

**Mitchell:** This was Porter?

**Auguster:** Porter, yes, un-huh. But he was dragging his feet. So the NAACP had a meeting and they wrote a letter to the superintendent about his delay in getting this welding school started. But in the letter the writer of the letter didn't begin it Honorable Lawrence G. Porter, Superintendent of Schools. He just put Lawrence Porter. (Laughter) Porter was infuriated

Edran Louis Auguster
and the next thing we know this man, Leo Hardy, was ordered out of New Iberia by sundown. That Negro that will address the superintendent of schools just by his first name, Lawrence G. Porter and didn't put Mr. on it, he had to go. Okay, so Larry Porter, I mean Leo Hardy...

**Mitchell:** Leo Hardy, now what did he do?

**Auguster:** He was the secretary that wrote the letter.

**Mitchell:** Of the NAACP?

**Auguster:** Huh?

**Mitchell:** He was the secretary of the NAACP?

**Auguster:** NAACP, yes.

**Mitchell:** Did he have a job in town?

**Auguster:** He was an insurance collector. But he wasn't originally from here. He had come here and he was an

-- Edran Louis Auguster
activist so the group wanted somebody that probably was able to stand up to them so they elected him secretary. Probably if he had been from here he would have known better. But Leo had some money in a credit union and he had to get his money out of the credit union before he left town, before he got out of town at sundown. So he went to the secretary of the credit union and the president because the secretary and the president had to sign the check. So they gave him a check. That night they watched Leo and they caught Leo and beat him up because he hadn't gotten out of town before sundown. They searched him and they found the check signed by Herman Falk. Herman Falk was an ag teacher in Iberia Parish and he was secretary of the credit union. Dr. R.A. Pearson, a local dentist, was the president so his name was on the check. When they saw that they said yeah, two others that's in cahoots with Leo Hardy.

**Mitchell:** So these were both black men?

**Auguster:** Huh?
Mitchell: Herman Falk and R.A. Pearson were black?

Auguster: Oh yes, they were black. I mean these are all black organizations. So they went and got Herman, they beat Herman and drove him out of town. They beat Pearson and made him leave town because they were in cahoots with Leo Hardy.

Mitchell: Because they had signed the check?

Auguster: Yes, un-huh, because they found their names on that check. I was in service at the time and probably if I had been home, been here, I would have been in the gang too. There was a Negro doctor here by the name of Lewins Williams. I had gone to school with Lewins. Lewins was a very good friend of mine.

Mitchell: How do you spell that, sir?

Auguster: L-E-W-I-N-S. Dr. Lewins came out here after finishing medical school, came out here to practice medicine. When he came he told us at the drugstore that he wanted to practice medicine but he wanted to give one
day each week to community service and he would do that through the health unit, Iberia Parish health unit. Along about the same time the director of the Iberia Parish health unit went into service. He was white, went into service. Lewins took over the duties of the director. They reported to the sheriff and officials that Lewins was up there with those white nurses ordering them around. They reported even that they found one white nurse sitting on Lewins' desk talking to him. So while they were getting rid of Negroes they went and they got Dr. Lewins Williams and beat him and drove him out of town. We had another doctor here, Dr. Scoggins. They went to get him and they would go at night, they went to get him. He put the lights out and opened the door and told them to come on in. They didn't want to go in, they wanted him to come out. So he said I'm not coming out there but you come in. So they left him. But Scoggins for his own safety moved away from here. There was another black doctor here, Dr. Eddie L. Dorsey. Eddie Dorsey had built up a terrific practice here. He had built a clinic and was doing well here. This was in 1943 or 1944. Dorsey had come here in 1930 and set up

Edran Louis Auguster
a practice. He wanted a show so he would buy the biggest cars he could find. Sometimes they barely could turn the corner they were so long. (Laughter) So he asked the sheriff for protection. The sheriff told him he couldn't give him any protection, he couldn't assign, the law wouldn't allow him to assign a deputy to Mr. Dorsey. So Dorsey left. In other words, they ran all the doctors out of New Iberia at one time. While they were getting rid of the what they called agitators they got rid of the doctors too.

I was in the service when I heard about it. I had just left from here on a furlough. My company commander wanted me to come back. I told him no, my family, I talked to my family on the phone and they are alright so I don't want to go back because I wouldn't go back unless I had one of these Army pistols. I said now if you give me one of those I'll go. (Laughter) I can't do that he said. Very understanding commander. He really did like me although I didn't like him for a long time. It would be years before we could get another doctor to come to New Iberia to practice.

Edran Louis Auguster
Mitchell: Were most of these doctors from out of town?

Auguster: Yes, all of them were from out of town. There were none of them local.

Mitchell: So you went to school with Dr. Williams?

Auguster: Lewins Williams, that was in college.

Mitchell: That was in college at Straight or Dillard?

Auguster: Yeah, but he was originally - Straight and Dillard - but he lived in New Orleans. He was a native of New Orleans. Dorsey was a native of Dallas, Texas. And I don't know where Scoggins was from. Scoggins married a woman from here but that was his second marriage. It would be years before we could get another doctor to come here. We were interested in getting doctors or some doctor here because as I told you, I worked at Pendleton's Drugstore and Pendleton's Drugstore depended on a doctor. If there was no doctor then Pendleton's Drugstore was nothing but a delivery service for the white drugstores because every time
you'd go there for something if you didn't have it
you'd have to run down, I would have to run down to
the wholesale and get something or go to one of the
other drugstores and buy one or two because that was
all he could pay for, you see. But when he had a
doctor here he did a lot of prescription work because
he had the doctor's office right there in the
drugstore. And when the people go in there and get a
prescription they come out, they just have it done
there. But if you didn't have a doctor, then the
white doctors got all the practice and they went to a
white drugstore then. We've always been a people of a
white man's sugar is sweeter than the black man's
sugar. A white man's medicine is better than the
black man's medicine. White man's ice is colder than
the black man's, you see. And right now we have two
swimming pools here and you will find that when this
swimming pool is open for swimming you have few
swimmers come over here. Many times not enough to pay
for the cost of our opening the pool, you see, and if
you don't have a certain amount, why, they close. It
closes that day. If it takes ten or twenty swimmers
to pay for the lifeguards and so forth, if only ten

Edran Louis Auguster
come out there they let them swim a little while then
give them a rain check to come back later. But over
at the white pool across the bayou those Negroes flock
over there because that water over there is cooler
than the water here at West End Park. (Laughter)
Cooler air and weather.

Mitchell: Was there any, did anybody sort of agitate to bring
any black doctors back in the 1950's?

Auguster: Say what?

Mitchell: During the 1950's did anybody try to get any black
doctors back into town or they were just afraid to?

Auguster: We tried to get doctors to come back but they wouldn't
come. We had one, Dr. Braden came here but he was a
New Orleans boy and he was from a popular family in
New Orleans so that every weekend he was going back to
New Orleans where the good times were.

Mitchell: But he came down from New Orleans?
Auguster: He came down and practiced here for a little while, you see. He'd come on Monday and practice through Friday but on Friday evenings he would leave and go on back to New Orleans. But we finally did get a woman, Dr. Chatters. She was from New Orleans. But she was one of these what they call cocky women. She came out here and sat up a practice and was doing well. She had a wreck. She was wrong. But when the police came there she balled them out. That went against her record. Then she went up to the courthouse. The driver's license, where you go and apply for your driver's license was in the courthouse at that time so she went up there to get her driver's license and she stood around while the person that's supposed to issue the driver's license was standing up talking to another white woman. So after waiting for a length of time she went over to him and told him that she was there to get a license and she didn't have time to stand around while he gossiped with this other woman.

So he hauled off and slaps her and arrested her for creating a disturbance in the courthouse. They set the trial and since it happened in the courthouse that was supposed to go to district court. Well, she

Edran Louis Auguster
claimed that he slapped her, he said he didn't. They set her date for trial. Just before the trial the city judge called Dr. Pendelton and told Dr. Pendelton to come up to his office at nine o'clock that night. Well, Pendelton had been here through all the other turmoil, you see. So he called me and said as president of the Negro Civic Association I wish you would go with me to see the judge. I said are you sure that it was Judge Tilley that called you. Oh yes, I know Judge Tilley, I know his voice, that was Judge Tilley called. I said he wants you to come up there at nine o'clock at night. Yes, that's the time he told me to come. I said well, if he told you to come and you're sure it was Judge Tilley I said I'll go with you. So we went up there. And I'm telling you, when we got there the police station was downstairs and the judge's office was upstairs and when we got there it was dark, very poorly lighted, and he told the police what we were there for, to see Judge Tilley. He told us he said Judge Tilley is not here now but I'll go upstairs and put the light on and you can go and sit up there and wait for him. I said okay. We went on and we sat. Just about nine o'clock

Edran Louis Auguster
here comes Judge Tilley. Judge Tilley told us he asked us to come because they had decided that they would transfer the charges against Dr. Chatters from district court to city court and if there was a penalty, if she was found guilty, why, it wouldn't be anything, you see. But if it went to district court, why, it could be a big fine or something like that, you see. So he wanted Dr. Pendelton to talk to Dr. Chatters and get her to agree and come up to city court and I guess plead guilty and nothing would be other than that the record would show that she admitted that she had disturbed the peace but nothing about the man slapping her. So Dr. Pendelton told him he said well, I'm sorry Judge but did you read the paper today. He said what. He said Dr. Chatters has filed a suit against the sheriff and his deputy that slapped her and I can't make her take her mind back on that. So that ended that discussion. When Dr. Chatters' trial came up in district court that was the time we hired a lawyer from New Orleans and came here to plead her case. Of course, everything was set. They found her guilty and they found the white man innocent of slapping her because he had a white
witness there and Dr. Chatters didn't have any witness. So we lost the case. She wanted to appeal but she didn't have the money or didn't want to spend the money and the Negro Civic Association wouldn't put out the money that the lawyer wanted to appeal the case, you see, appeal the verdict. That was one thing. And then we also found out that Dr. Chatters had married a man, a doctor, who was still in school from the Bahamas or some place like that and he had told her that as soon as he finished his internship that he was going back home and she was going with him. So why put out all that money for a doctor that would be here maybe six months and then be gone somewhere else. So we didn't spend the money. That was why it was never appealed.

Mitchell: What year was this?

Auguster: Dates and years, I'm kind of hazy on but that was in the 1950's, you see. Because those doctors were driven out in 1943 or 1944 and we stayed about six or seven years before another doctor would take a chance coming here. We had one to come here and stay and

Edran Louis Auguster
that's Dr. Diggs. He lives right over there. But he
does not take part in any civic activities. His wife
will take part but not him. He won't even go to
church most of the time. (Laughter) For fear that he
might get involved.

Mitchell: So Dr. Diggs came in the 1950's, late 1950's?

Auguster: Yes, in the middle 1950's.

Tape 2 - Side B

Mitchell: That's just, this whole thing about the doctors, it's
amazing how it started. The way that you told me how
it started is amazing.

Auguster: Well, that's actually what happened. But that was a
typical pattern, you see, to intimidate and eliminate
anything that showed that the Negroes were trying to
be white or trying to be equal to the whites, you see.
We had another incident and this was later on, this
was around 1955 I think. After the war, you see, the
government set up trade schools for veterans and

Edran Louis Auguster
veterans could go to these trade schools and learn a trade. So the government didn't set the up, they'd authorize the money, they gave the money but individuals set those trade schools up. And there was one here on Hopkins Street that taught carpentry work and veterans could go there, the government would pay them for going to school to learn to be carpenters. You had another one, cabinet making. The Kings, Thomas King opened that. The veterans took advantage of it because they didn't have any work, wasn't any work for them, so if they could go there and get that little money that the government would give them every month, when they would graduate they would give them all the tools that a carpenter needed and most of them went right to Compton and pawned them as soon as they got them and they went to school just to be going to get the check, you see. Some of them did learn and become good carpenters. You had a young man, Joseph Hardy, was teaching at that school. He was from Lafayette. So the men, they wanted to vote. They wanted to vote before they went into the service. They weren't allowed to vote even if they were in the service, you see. Iberia Parish, you were supposed to
be able if you were in the service, all that you had to do was write the registrar of voters and they would have to register you and you’d be able to vote in national elections even though you were in the service, you were a registered voter and you could vote. Well I wrote, they never would answer me. So these men, a group of them decided to go up to the courthouse to register. They let them get to the front door but they turned them around and sent them back. Then in 1955 five prominent citizens of New Iberia decided to go and try to register to vote. Those five were Whitney Boldsmans who lived at Avery Island, that's a private island; Reverend I. Cane who was a pastor of the () Chapel Christian Methodist Church. Another was Reverend F.M. Boley. Reverend Boley was pastor of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church and also president of the sixth district Baptist association. Another was Gus Barone. Gus Barone owned a funeral home and had been in insurance business, particularly the insurance connected with his burial funeral home. And of course, I went, I was one of the five. We went up to the registrar of voters and told them we had come to register. Well,

Edran Louis Auguster
he assigned each one of us to a different table so that we wouldn't be able to help each other and we filled the forms out, he gave us the forms, and we filled the forms out. He went and whispered something to one of the women working in the registrar's office and a few minutes after that five deputies came up and lined up against the wall swinging their billies, you know. After we didn't run we completed the registration form. They took the registration forms and looked at them. Reverend Boley did not know the precinct he was in but he had asked me. I knew what precinct I was in and Reverend Boley lived on one side of Persure Street and I lived on the north side. He lived on the south side. But Persure Street was the dividing line. So, told him he couldn't register him because he didn't know the precinct that he was living in. And then after awhile talking, he told him what precinct he was in, you see. So when they finished checking all of us he said everything is alright but before I can register you, you have to bring two registered voters here to identify you. Reverend Boley told him he said that deputy there, he knows me.

Deputy Poe looked at Reverend Boley he said yeah boy,
I know you but I can't voucher for you. So Gus Barone got into an argument with him. I'm going to go and see if I can get two whites to come up here and vouch for me. The registrar of voters told him they don't have to be white, they can be black. Now if you don't have any blacks registered, how am I going to get blacks to come up here and vouch for me. I'm going to see. But we're going to see about this. And we left.

Before Gus Barone got to his house they had called his house telling him to get out of town before sundown. Gus Barone had been for a long time the only person that would volunteer to be president of the NAACP. After they drove those doctors out, the NAACP had to go underground. All communications would come with no return address. Most of our communications, we'd get them through the state president who was Mrs. Combray who owned a funeral home in Lake Charles and she would write, no return address and when we would write to her we had to write everything as a personal letter to her because she felt that these people might be watching the mail and see if anything was coming from the NAACP or going to the NAACP. So we had to do that. I was secretary and that's the way we

Edran Louis Auguster
communicated with Mrs. Combray and the NAACP. So Gus Barone, they called him five times and told him about getting out of town. He immediately got on the phone and called Thurgood Marshall. Alright, Thurgood Marshall told him if they told you to get out of town for your personal safety, do that and give me a little time to get this thing straight. So Gus Barone had another black leader in New Iberia, Octive Lilley, Jr., to take him to Lafayette and put him on a train in Lafayette and he went to Lake Charles to wait because Thurgood Marshall had told him to wherever he would go to get back in touch with him and let him know where he was so that he could communicate with him, you see. In the meantime, Gus Barone was a Mason so Reverend Herd who was pastor of the Methodist church, St. James Methodist Church, heard about it so he went to the president of the police jury who was also a Mason and told him what it was all about. That was on a Friday afternoon that this happened. Saturday Reverend Boley, it was in the summer, hot you see, so Reverend Boley sat on his porch until late at night because it was hot in the house and he sat out there in the cool. Reverend Boley told me he saw a
man walking backwards and forwards in the shadows across the street from his house. There was a high fence there of a lumber yard. He said he saw this man and he wondered about it. When we got the news, when Gus Barone told us the news, I personally went to all of those five that were with us except Whitney Boldsman because Whitney Boldsman lived on Avery Island and they weren't going to go out there and bother Whitney, you see. So we all said that we weren't going anywhere. We were going to stay here. They hadn't told us anything so we weren't going, we weren't leaving. I found out later or Reverend Boley found out later that Thurgood Marshall had notified the FBI and that was an FBI agent patrolling that area in case they should come there and try to, you know, run Reverend Boley out or run me because we were right close together. But they refused to let us register to vote. A few months after refusing to let us vote, running Gus Barone out of town, the superintendent of public works in the city of New Iberia told men working for him, you can go up and vote now, go up and register to vote. Want you to go up and register to vote. He went downtown and told Frank Moore who was a

Edran Louis Auguster
retired teacher, Frank, why don't you all get some of these people down here to go up and register to vote.

Well, Frank wasn't an activist. Frank just forgot about it, you see. Finally, we had one man that worked under John Rochelle, John Rochelle was the superintendent, Abraham Roy, he was a little plumber and he worked with the city in the maintenance department or public works department making sewage repairs. So he had the courage to go up and try to register. That Friday evening the Daily Iberian headline was "Abraham Roy Becomes the First Negro to Register to Vote." Saturday morning couldn't come fast enough because they were getting ready before an election and the registrar of voter's office stayed open until twelve o'clock on Saturday. Fifty-five of us were able to be registered that morning. And to show you just how they changed, while I was up there registering a white woman came in to register and she wanted to cut the line, get in front, you know. The registrar of voters asked her what she wanted and she told him that she wanted to register to vote. I heard him tell her listen lady, you have had all your life to register to vote and these people have never had a

Edran Louis Auguster
chance to register so you come back next week and register. I heard him say that.

Mitchell: This was in 1955?

Auguster: 1955 or early 1956.

Mitchell: Oh, really?

Auguster: Yes. I wondered why because people that registered that day, they didn't have to know anything. They didn't have to fill out the registration form. The forms were being filled out for them, you see. The only thing about it I found out afterwards by working at the polls, some of those people after their name, they had "I". So I inquired from the registrar of voters. I said what's this "I" here for. Illiterate. (Laughter) I was laughing because those people, I had one woman working at the polls as a commissioner and yet they had her down there as illiterate. I told one woman that that I had gone to school with and they had her down there as illiterate so she went up there to find out why they had put her down there as

Edran Louis Auguster
illiterate. They told her well, when you registered you didn't sign the application form. She said they didn't ask me to sign it. And those people that didn't sign the application form they just said they couldn't read and write and so they put them illiterate. (Laughter)

Mitchell: Oh my God! (Laughter)

Auguster: But anyway, they went on and they registered them. I found out afterwards why. Why less than six months earlier you were barring the blacks and six months later they didn't even have to fill out the application form. They didn't have to have anything. All they had to do was go up there and say they wanted to register. I found out why. There was an election in the fall of 1956, national election. In Louisiana the Republicans were making headway in getting people to join the Republican party. A lot of whites were switching from the Democratic party to the Republican party. So the state central committee decided that we got to do something to get some Democrats in here so they opened the polls up to

Edran Louis Auguster
Negroes and you didn't say what party you belonged to, you automatically were put in the Democratic party.

Mitchell: So they filled out these forms thinking people were illiterate to register them in the Democratic party?

Auguster: They filled out the forms. Yes, you were a Democrat, see. (Laughter) If you registered, you were a Democrat. You didn't have any choice of parties. So that's how Negroes got to vote in Iberia Parish.

Mitchell: Was Gus Barone ever able to come back to town?

Auguster: Yes, Barone came back by Sunday.

Mitchell: So he did come back, okay.

Auguster: By Sunday he came back, yes, I didn't tell you that. Yeah, they got busy with the president of the parish council, it was the police jury at that time. Howard Levy was the president. They got back there and they called the sheriff and told him to lay off and called Thurgood Marshall and told Thurgood Marshall to tell

Edran Louis Auguster
Gus Barone to come on back home, there wasn't anything going to happen to him. And Gus came back that Sunday, Sunday afternoon. But it was just the intimidation and that is how they lessened any civil rights activity in Iberia Parish, through intimidation. If you were an activist and tried to start something they'd run you out of town, get you out of the way. That started way back there during the war. An incident that I didn't tell you, that I didn't say, that this sheriff that was in office when all of this happened, he was taking a bath in his bathtub but he forgot to take his pistol off. Taking a bath with his pistol on him. He slipped in the bathtub, the pistol went off and killed him. The Daily Iberian said he was killed by an accident by accident. They wouldn't say he committed suicide. Said he was taking a bath and his pistol went off. (Laughter) Man's going to take a bath with his pistol on him. His name was Gilbert (), committed suicide.

Mitchell: When did that happen? Did that happen later?
Auguster: That happened while he was in office, the four years when he was in office when those doctors were driven out of town, after he drove those doctors out. He lived a few months after that or maybe a year. But he accidentally killed himself. The sad thing about it, all of this that we went through in order to get the vote, we have too many blacks that are still not registered to vote and so many of them that are registered to vote that won't even take the time to vote. They will come and vote when there's a big election like the sheriff and most of them when they come they've been bought. They come because the sheriff or this candidate or that candidate has given a barbecue for them or he's a good man because he gave a barbecue for us or he bought us a lot of beer and they'll go and vote. But generally, I work at the polls at every election and the young people, the older people will vote but the younger people won't come. Probably they don't know what we had to go through in order to get to vote and they've never been able to realize the importance of that vote. We had an incident here not too long ago. Our present governor, Edwin Edwards, and you had a David Duke

Edran Louis Auguster
candidate. Well, everybody knew David Duke had been an ex Klansman. He was a racist and his platform whereas it might have been say legitimate, it was aimed to a great extent against black. He was opposed to welfare. He was opposed to aid to dependent children. And a few (brief break in tape) the Negroes stayed home because they felt that David Duke didn't have a chance. But in Iberia Parish David Duke got the majority. A big majority of people voted for David Duke but they were white. When the second primary came they got the Negro vote out and David Duke got a sound beating because Negroes went to the polls. But unless it's something like that, why, they don't go. And David Duke didn't stand a chance against Edwin Edwards in the second primary or the general election. They repudiated David Duke all over the state and it was largely due to the number of blacks, not only in Iberia Parish but the state that were opposed to David Duke. They voted for Edwards, swept him into office. Now anything, any other phase that you're interested in? The occupations or people around here or would there be something else that you might want to talk about?

Edran Louis Auguster
Mitchell: There's actually, Mr. Auguster, what sort of benevolent societies were here?

Auguster: Well, there were a number of them in this area. They were prompted by a need for medical attention. Many of these people worked on these plantations and they were usually sick enough to see a doctor when the overseer felt they were sick enough. And then many of them were sharecroppers and they didn't have the money to go to the doctor even though the doctor's visits were just a dollar. The doctors would make office calls for two dollars. They didn't have it so they banned together and formed these benevolent societies.

And as I tell you, there were many of them. And those benevolent societies gave them doctors, they paid their doctors and they bought the medicine for them which was, compared to now, nothing. And each month those members were required to pay some of them seventy-five cents, some of them a dollar. Very few of them were more than a dollar. And they got doctor and medicine when they were sick. They got a burial, funeral, when they died. And above all, they had a

Edran Louis Auguster
big funeral and that's what they loved, a big funeral. Because all the society members would have to go to the funeral, you see, so you were assured of a big funeral. (Laughter) These benevolent societies prospered and they did help the people, the members, plus they were a sole support of those black drugstores in New Iberia because each month they would have a big bill with the drugstores. There was a little racket along with it in that the druggist usually gave a little rebate to the marshall, you see. He got his ten percent and then the presidents usually came by to get their little rebate, you see. But they were doing it for just practically nothing to start off with. I mean that marshall, he was doing it for nothing, they didn't pay him that much. They paid him a little something but it wasn't nothing to brag about. But those societies built, each one of them built them a hall to have their meetings in. You had a number of them here, St. Matthew, St. Matthew Hall is still up there although there is practically nothing left to St. Matthew because with the inflation, the cost of medicine, the cost of doctor visits, they could no longer provide those services,
you see, so there are very few services now that benevolent societies can offer and as a result people don't join them anymore. They can afford to buy insurance that will cost them a whole lot more but give them more so they join insurances now. Back in those days the biggest insurance was the little weekly sick and accident insurance which paid you five dollars a week when you were sick and you had to pay maybe twenty-five cents a week premium. Each one of these societies had their own hall and they would have a turn out every year. They'd give a big collection to the churches where they turned out. St. Matthew did buy up a lot of land and they have a cemetery, converted that land into a cemetery and right now St. Matthew is the only cemetery where blacks are buried. I mean blacks can be buried in Memorial Park or the other cemeteries. But cemeteries and funerals, ninety-nine percent of them they're still segregated, you see. We have two funeral homes here and they get ninety-nine and nine-tenths percents of the blacks that die. So they're still segregated. They don't get any whites. The white funeral homes get all the whites. St. Matthew is the only cemetery that we have.

Edran Louis Auguster
here other than church cemeteries and most of these
church cemeteries are not open to the general public
for burial, you see. For example, my church has a
cemetery but we'll sell grave sites only to members of
our church or members of St. James Church or if you
belong to another church or if you don't belong to any
church but you have somebody in your family buried in
St. Paul cemetery, we'll sell you a grave site. But
just to come in and get a grave site, un-uh, you don't
get it.

Mitchell: So then there's a real benefit to belonging to a
church too?

Auguster: Yeah, un-huh, yes. Mt. Calvary has a cemetery. They
have one up here that's filled up and then they bought
eight or ten acres of land out in the country and
opened a cemetery. The Catholic church, St. Edwards,
has it's own cemetery but it has reached a point where
they're going to have to go somewhere else because
they don't have any space left. Within fifty grave
sites, St. Edwards will be filled. I doubt if it's
fifty. They have mausoleums but most of those

Edran Louis Auguster
mausoleums, I mean in the mausoleums most of the
crypts in the mausoleum are paid for before they build
the mausoleum. Families buy the vault in order to
build the mausoleum. If you have enough money and
want to spend it you can still go into these big white
cemeteries. They don't bar you if you have the money
for burial. Now in the rural, the rural churches
usually have their own cemeteries. As I say, most of
the benevolent societies had their own halls. When
the Iberia Parish school board was building schools
and consolidating schools, that's before integration,
and overcrowded, why, they would always go into these
benevolent society halls, set up classes in there to
teach the children, you see, until they get
classrooms. They didn't plan ahead as far as blacks
were concerned. The only time they only planning a
building was when the crowd was so big they couldn't
get them in the schools, why, they put them in a
society hall until they were able to build classrooms.

Mitchell: That's fascinating, that's really interesting.
Besides St. Matthew, what were some other ones?
Auguster: Oh, you had the True Friend. You had the Lincoln. True Friend was one, Lincoln another. The Young Union. The Morning Star. Solid Rock. You had a True Friend in Loreauville. That's a community right off here. It's still quite active. You had a Morning Glory. ( ) that was very active. And I believe they're still operating. You had also in New Iberia at one time the Morning Star. They were so solid that they were able to build a two story building, not just a little frame building to have a meeting. They had a two story building that was in good shape. Of course, you had in the fraternal orders, you had the Masonics that had been here and they'd build a big building, gym and everything in it downtown, a place we call Annville. We call it that but it's the east end of town. They have a nice building there now but it's strictly Masonic. They do rent it but for the organization. That's about it.

Mitchell: Since the tape's almost out maybe we'll just stop here.

Auguster: Okay.
Mitchell: Okay, Mr. Auguster, if you could just say your name.

Auguster: I'm Edran Auguster. Now in talking about the economic conditions, we just finished talking about the benevolent societies. Those benevolent societies did contribute much to economic conditions among blacks in New Iberia. First, I'd say they had their officers who usually paid. They were of tremendous help to the drug industry and the doctors and those people in turn spent money in the community which did help out. Before the benevolent societies people, since most of these people were farmers or sharecroppers or just living on a plantation, working on plantations, there were very few professional jobs other than teaching profession, when they wanted to go to the doctor if they were sick they got to the doctor only if the plantation owner felt they were sick enough to go to the doctor and give them the money to go to the doctor. But if he didn't think they were sick enough, why, they didn't go to the doctor, you see. With the

Edran Louis Auguster
benevolent societies, why, they were able to go to the doctor or able to get the doctor to come to them if they were sick enough and not have to depend on the plantation owners. But for the worker who had to do jobs in order to make a living it was tough. Women usually did house work, washing and ironing, washing the white people's clothes and ironing them for little or nothing. Those people who were not residents of the plantation but would do farming work like harvesting, those people worked for less, in some instances fifty cents a day from can't to can't.

Mitchell: Fifty cents a day?

Auguster: Fifty cents a day from can't to can't. I've had friends of mine that were in that type of work say they would work a whole day for a dollar digging Irish potatoes or digging sweet potatoes. I did not experience that. I went to work at twelve, at age twelve, as a delivery boy for Pendelton's Drugstore. I had to buy my own bicycle and I started out at two dollars and fifty cents a week. And to give you an idea how bad it was at times, when Pendelton didn't
have a doctor, in 1927 we had a high water, a flood in this whole area and we closed the drugstore and my mother took me to Lake Charles. But at that time Pendelton owed me almost five hundred dollars in back wages. That's right. At two dollars and fifty cents a week. Of course things, I mean right after the high water came the crash of 1929 and it was even worse from an economic viewpoint. The jobs closed down that they did have. Very little other than cane farming and at that time cane harvesting was a big thing and many people wouldn't work all the year, they would just wait for that harvest season because the cane was cut by hand and either they got so much a day for cutting the cane or so much a ton for cutting the cane and they waited for that. Many would come from different places to work during the cane harvesting season. The mills would operate and there were Negroes that had jobs with these mills and they would earn enough money to last them the year, they wouldn't work after harvest. But after 1929 we really had a hard time. The good Lord looked out for us in a way because after 1929 or after the high water in 1927 we had something to happen here that had never happened

Edran Louis Auguster
before and it has never happened since. You had
looked like an infiltration of salt water crabs in the
bayou and people were there catching those crabs and
that's what they ate on. I mean large salt water
crabs.

**Mitchell:** After 1927?

**Auguster:** Yeah, after the flood, you see. Some people would go
there and catch them and sell them just like we did
when we were kids. We sold everything in order to
make some money. And when we talk about money we're
not talking about a whole lot of money, we're talking
about ten or fifteen cents to go to the show once a
week and little things like that. Food was cheap.
You could buy bread for a nickel. That was after the
Depression. Later on things began to get better. By
1933 the schools of Iberia Parish closed seven weeks
ahead of time because they had run out of money and
could no longer pay the teachers in script.

**Mitchell:** The paid teachers in script?
**Auguster:** Yes, teachers were paid in script.

**Mitchell:** How long before that?

**Auguster:** That was in 1932.

**Mitchell:** They were paying teachers in script?

**Auguster:** That's right. 1932 and 1933 they paid teachers in script and some of the teachers who had saved money were able to live and hold that script but others each month had to find a store that would accept that script at a reduced value. My class in 1933, school closed seven weeks ahead of time and the state required that we have nine months of schooling. So for those seven weeks we had to pay the teachers, those teachers that would stay on and teach, we had to pay them out of our pockets in order to graduate from high school.

**Mitchell:** That's amazing.

**Auguster:** Yes and we did that.
Mitchell: How much did you have to pay, do you remember?

Auguster: No, I don't remember, it wasn't that much. I don't remember exactly how much it was. It was two or three dollars a week, you know, that you had to pay. It wasn't that much because people couldn't afford it. I guess it came to around twenty, twenty-one, twenty-eight dollars, something like that, for the seven weeks. Each student paid that. We had some that were in the lower grades, that is, we graduated in eleventh grade at that time. The state was on a seven-four plan, seven years of elementary school and four years of high school. So we graduated at eleventh grade. The twelfth grade was added afterwards, after 1933. Well, as I say, things began to get better after 1933. We came out of the Depression with Roosevelt's recovery program, the NYA, the NRA and they opened up jobs.

Mitchell: For blacks too?
Auguster: For blacks, yeah, blacks as well as whites. I mean the WPA was the main one that blacks profited from because it was manual labor and they were hired for those things. Of course, they developed some bad habits but it was a livelihood. Had habits, they were working by the hour and when that bossman would say the time is up if they had a shovel of dirt in their hand they'd just drop it. (Laughter) They'd just drop it and walk out from under that shovel and pick it up the next morning. But it was a life saver. For the younger people they had the CCC's, Civilian Core, I've forgotten now what it is but anyway it was the CCC. They were camps where young boys could go and it was like an Army camp. They did work, landscaping and clearing away brush and just something to keep them busy, you see. And I wanted to go to CCC camp but my mother wouldn't allow me to go. She wasn't for it. But quite a few of my friends went and it was like an Army life. When I finally got in the Army I didn't like it. (Laughter) Now that was before the civil rights, you see. Of course, when it came up to the civil rights movement, why, Negroes were demanding consideration and they demanded it here. They didn't
always get it and we had a lot to go through in order to get respectable jobs for Negroes. But that was after civil rights. I don't know if you would be interested in that. We did have two or three instances where we broke down along with breaking down segregation, we were able to break it down in the economic field, you know. We had a lot of trouble in integrating our schools even after court order but we didn't have the problems that we had in other parts of the country with integrating public businesses like lunch counters. We didn't have that trouble. We had here, the mayor of the city had an interracial committee and here in New Iberia we had an exceptionally good interracial committee. It consisted of whites leaders in business, leaders of the major religious denominations; the Catholic, the Baptist, the Methodist, the Episcopal church. On the black side we had ministers from the Methodist church, from the United Church of Christ, from the Baptist. We had representatives, we didn't have any of the priests of the black Catholics with us. And then there were others, teachers and principals, most of them were principals of schools. And that group was

Edran Louis Auguster
able to accomplish a lot, not through demonstrations but through negotiations. With the integrating of the eating places, one group tried it and behind it was a white citizen who had been named as one of the leading ones that beat up those doctors and Leo Hardy. He was reported, I mean he was a deputy sheriff and he was reported as being the leader of the beaters. But he was on this bi-racial committee and he did more than anybody else toward integrating the lunch counters and he did it by simply taking black members of this community relations council into those eating places and demanding that they be served. They did set up one and the word leaked out and they were there to, I mean the seating establishment, they had someone there, had a woman that supposed to come in and say that she was attacked by the Negroes or insulted by the Negroes and there were others there to beat them up, you see. But he got wind of it because a secretary in the mayor's office had leaked the information out, you see, and he got there in time to get those people that were supposed to be there and they were there to eat but they were standing on the outside, you see, and sent them on off. But the next

Edran Louis Auguster
attempt was successful and we didn't have any trouble after that. Once one accepted the blacks and served them, the other places, particularly the chain store lunch counters, but before that oh, you always had to go to the back door in order to eat. Or if they would serve you they would serve you on the end of the counter, you'd stand on the end of the counter and they'd say...

**Mitchell:** You could stand?

**Auguster:** Yeah, you could stand there but you couldn't sit down.

The integration of the working force or the banking institutions was another objective of this Community Relations Council that we had.

**Mitchell:** Community Relations Council?

**Auguster:** Yes, it was the () Community Relations Council or Community Relations Council of New Iberia. I might say we had an equal number of whites and an equal number of blacks on that committee. The integration of the banking institutions was really a brain child

Edran Louis Auguster
or a brain storm of () who was at St. Peter Catholic Church here. And he tried all he could by talking to the members, the presidents of the banking institutions on his own, you see, about hiring Negro tellers in the bank. And they always give him the excuse, I can't do it. One of them told him that the day that he put a black behind the teller cage in his bank, his bank would lose a million dollars or two million dollars worth of business. White people with money would pull their money out. That went on for I'd say for a year, () trying on his own to convert these financial institutions to hiring of blacks. They were doing it in Lafayette. Lafayette had started hiring them but Iberia Parish wouldn't. The Community Relations Council decided to call a meeting of all the banking institutions and try to talk to them. Well, in some cases the president of the board of trustees of the banks also had big businesses in New Iberia, particularly in the oil field business. We got them all together at the United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall and when we finished with them each one of them agreed to hire a black as a teller in the bank. The Red Fox or the Red Fox Industries,
Beldon Fox rather of the Red Fox Industries here, he told them that he had hired some Negroes and had offered them promotions.

**Mitchell:** What is the Red Fox, that's oil?

**Auguster:** Red Fox was a company and the owner of it was a Beldon Fox. He's one of the owners. But it was a machine shop that worked primarily on oil field equipment, you see. They agreed to hire them but their contentions were that Negroes didn't have the qualifications to be tellers in the bank. So they put the responsibility on the Community Relations Council to go out and find them some blacks that were qualified. And we did that. I was talking to a group, to a Negro history program, and I mentioned and at this program was a young man, Raymond Spencer, and after the talk telling them about the work of the Community Relations Council he told me he says you know, I often wondered what had happened because he had been a teacher at Catholic High which was the white high school, Catholic high school, he was a teacher over there and he said that when he decided he didn't want to continue teaching he...

Edran Louis Auguster
went to City Bank & Trust and applied for a job and they told him they didn't have any janitor's job open. He told him he wasn't applying for no janitor's job, he was applying for a teller's job. And they told him no, they didn't have any job for him. And then after about two months he said they called him and offered him a job and he didn't know what had happened. But it was after we had gotten an agreement, the Community Relations Council had gotten an agreement from them that they would hire blacks. They hired a few and they worked out fine and one of the conditions that we had asked in the Community Relations Council is that you not only hire them but that you give them every opportunity for advancement. Sure enough, the banking institutions did that. And before you know it, why, you have plenty of blacks working in the banks now.

Raymond is vice president of City Bank & Trust.

**Mitchell:** Really?

**Auguster:** Yes. And we have a number of other blacks that are vice presidents in those banks. They were made branch managers, they became branch managers so everything
worked fine in spite of what the bankers said, the banks would lose money. The banks actually made money because Negroes were able to, by having better jobs, they were able to put money in the banks. We are proud of that achievement that the Community Relations Council was able to achieve.

Mitchell: When did that happen, what year?

Auguster: Oh, that was, let me see now, that was in the late, well in 1969 after the integration of schools, along with the integration of schools, 1969 and 1970. I know I was at in 1970, that was in 1970 because I went to Anderson in 1970 and I had a young lady, first I had the president of the People's Bank, I had his daughter on the faculty of Anderson Street and her daddy must have talked to her about, well, she knew about the promise of the banking institutions to hire blacks. And I had a young lady that did not have a job as teaching but I did use her for quite a bit as substitute and this daughter of this bank president came to me and said I know you're looking for somebody for a job in banking and don't you think so-and-so

Edran Louis Auguster
would do well in the bank. I said well, I don't know but I don't see any reason why she couldn't. So we talked to that girl, she didn't have a regular job, she was just doing substitute work and her name was recommended and they hire her. Well, the reason why, I think the reason why that they hired her was because it was kind of hard to tell the difference between, I mean that she was black or white, you see. And a lot of those banking institutions or a lot of those business places, they hired them because you couldn't tell whether they were black or white. I mean you had to look very close, look for certain features, lips and their nose in order to tell that they weren't white. But they got jobs and in most instances that has disappeared now. They hire them all different colors now, yeah. But we still have some stores here that you've got to be a certain color and have a certain grade of hair, you must have both. You can't have one and not the other, you see. And that's to keep the whites, they feel that the whites don't know that they're black and usually from out in the country. They're not from right in town, you see.
Mitchell: You mean from Grand Marais or somewhere else?

Auguster: You'll know them if they're in town, generally you know them. But that is disappearing. It hasn't completely but it's disappearing.

Mitchell: Back earlier before that like in the 1940's and 1950's and 1930's, was there a lot of passing going on?

Auguster: A lot of what?

Mitchell: Passing, people passing for white? Does that happen a lot?

Auguster: No, they weren't passing. The only thing that you had, you had a certain group, we call them Mulattoes, they stuck together. If you were black you couldn't attend their social affairs. One of my sons is dark, brown skin and Darryl, the one that lives here, is light complexion. He took hair after his mother so he has a good grade of hair and he could go to any of those Mulattoes' affairs but not my oldest son. My oldest son was darker. His hair isn't quite as good
as Darryl's but he couldn't go. I had a hobby that turned out to be, well a vocation or advocation of taking pictures. I started taking pictures when I was a freshman in college and learned how to develop and enlarge and print. So when I came out of the service, while in the service I bought some equipment, cameras and so forth, and I taught photography in the Army to special service. Those people that wanted to learn that in their spare time, why, I taught them and I also developed and made a good bit of money taking pictures in the Army. So after coming out of the Army I was undecided about what I wanted to do so I opened a picture studio and I made pictures around here for years. Just yesterday a fellah met me in the store and he said you're Mr. Auguster. I said yes. He said you took my wedding pictures. I said yes. Yeah, you took my wedding pictures. And I think that he told me forty-one years ago that I took his wedding pictures. I didn't know him. I wouldn't know him now. If he'd tell me his name maybe I would remember but I didn't go into details. But I've seen the time that these Mulattoes would call me to take pictures and when I'd go, they'd usually have it in the country in a home.

Edran Louis Auguster
when I'd go there those Mulattoes would be standing on the steps and on the porch and so forth but when I'd walk up they'd get out of the way. They didn't want me to be close to them because my hair was bad. (Laughter) See, I wasn't a Mulatto, my hair was bad. They'd swear I had a dreaded disease. I'd go in and take their pictures and go on to my house. Those people were something. There's one area which we call the Grand Marais and those were Mulattoes out there. My wife was from a Mulatto group. Not my wife, my wife was from a group that were white and blacks mixed up. They were only, she was a Boutte and the only Bouttes here were that family and they were originally from Loreauville and white Bouttes and they claim a relationship there, that they all came from one source. And my wife's father was from that Grand Marais bunch. Now he was not light complexion, he was sort of like an olive complexion but he had good hair and he was known from out that way. Well, I'm just saying this to show you how things were with those people. Had an uncle that got sick and we went out to see him. I took my wife, my oldest boy and my baby boy and her sister and her sister had a daughter that

Edran Louis Auguster
was very bright. When we got out there and met those people they came in, even the little children came running out to greet her. My wife was saying and this is my son, my oldest son which is dark, you know. He reached out like that, shook his hand, and this is my baby boy, they run there and hug him and grab him and kiss him. (Laughter) They hug and kiss her but wouldn't hug and kiss her sister because her sister, even though her hair is good, she's dark, you see. Oh, my. You had schools here and particularly in that Grand Marais school that you couldn't teach there if you didn't have good hair and be bright. But there was not that many passing for white, you see. They had their own society. They didn't mix with the blacks and they didn't necessarily, I mean they may have catered to the whites, but they didn't try to pass for white. And I mean a lot of that is still today. I'll tell you what you did have as a result of that, you had a higher percentage of children born with birth defects or mentally retarded because of their inter-marriage, you see.

Mitchell: You said that your wife came from Loreauville?
Auguster: Originally the family came from Loreauville.

Mitchell: Originally the family came from Loreauville?

Auguster: Yes, un-huh.

Mitchell: You said something awhile ago and I want to ask you before I forget, you said that you made ten or fifteen cents and you'd go to a show. Where would you go?

Auguster: The picture show, we had picture shows here.

Mitchell: Which theater?

Auguster: They had at that time the Elks Theater, later the Palace Theater, the Evangeline Theater. They were Jim Crow. We could go up in the balcony, go upstairs. They ran those, at that time, you had those serials, maybe fifteen weeks and it would be on Friday and every Friday we wanted to see the next chapter. (Laughter) So we'd do everything to get that money. I know I have even stolen milk bottles. At that time

Edran Louis Auguster
they'd deliver milk, you know, and you'd steal a milk bottle and you could sell it for a nickel. People put the milk bottles out, we'd go get the milk bottle and go sell it. A lot of that went on. I had a friend that went to a owner of a grocery store, went to his house and stole a bunch of turkeys and then went right back to his store and sold them to him. (Laughter) But we did everything for money because our parents couldn't give us money. We'd sell wood, pick up scrap wood and sell it. We'd walk the tracks down and pick up stone coal where it would fall off of the, at that time locomotives burnt coal, you see, () coal, and pieces would drop off. (Telephone interruption.)

Tape 3 - Side B

**Mitchell:** You were telling me about picking up coal off the locomotives.

**Auguster:** Yes, we'd pick up coal and you could always sell that coal. People would buy that for heating in the winter, you see. Wood, we'd sell wood. Small pieces, kindling, bigger pieces, whatever would burn in the

Edran Louis Auguster
stove or the fireplace. We had a paper mill here. We'd collect paper and go down and sell paper. That was way downtown, a long, long walk but we had little wagons, we'd go sell them, sell paper. In that pulp that came from the paper mills, you know, the manufactured paper, you had a lot of pulp that they would pile up and one year somebody went there and planted, just threw turnip seeds in there and they had groves of turnips and anybody that wanted turnips could go down there and pick turnips. So we'd take a load of paper down and then get a load of turnips and bring back and sell them for a nickel or dime.

(Laughter)

**Mitchell:** Oh, that's wonderful. Did any black people work at the paper mill?

**Auguster:** Yes, you had laborers working there.

**Mitchell:** How long did the paper mill last?

**Auguster:** Oh, I don't know, it lasted I'd say ten or fifteen years but it finally went out, Bold Paper Mill. The

Edran Louis Auguster

104
only thing that's left to it now, I think the chimney is still there but they have the trucking companies using what buildings are left there. But that didn't last long. The only thing that really lasted were the salt mines, you see. I don't know, it seems as though the city officials through the years have been dictated to by the farmers; that this was a farming community and any other industries that would come here would take away farm labor. For that reason it is believed that many of the businesses, you know, that would have hired people, any number of people, stayed away from New Iberia. I remember in my time there was a move or an opportunity for the city of New Iberia to get the terminal of the Southern Pacific. Southern Pacific chose Lafayette. (Blurb in tape.)

Mitchell: So, you were saying that they...

Auguster: Yeah, the Southern Pacific terminal, you see what was happening the trains would make up, passenger trains and so forth would make up in New Orleans on the way to California, the () you see. And they normally changed crews at a certain point. That point,
Lafayette was given that point. As a result, you had a lot of jobs created in Lafayette and the Southern Pacific used that for a long time, you see. Engineers, conductors, porters, dining car workers and so forth, they'd get on in New Orleans, they'd come to Lafayette, they'd lay over in Lafayette and then the next train they'd go back to New Orleans. Those that got on in Lafayette went maybe to Houston and in Houston they'd come back here. New Iberia didn't get that but I understand, I mean that was before, you know, my time, that New Iberia was in the running for it. That had been the case of a lot of industries. For example, I was telling you about the salt domes. The government came in and wanted to use salt domes for storing petroleum for an emergency. And one of the places that, they considered a number of salt domes along the Gulf of Mexico along the course and Weeks Island was one salt dome that they wanted. Well, by being privately owned if the company wanted it then they got it so the government chose Weeks Island and they had this big storage facility over there and it hired quite a few people. I mean I know, have a personal friend that has a job out there.
She's doing well as a result of that. On the other hand, at Jefferson Island Texaco was drilling for oil in the bayou or lake that surrounds Jefferson Island and accidentally bored into the mine and that killed the mine because it flooded it out and the water rushing into this opening, why, destroyed some land around the place, you see. Now another company has come there and want to use the salt dome that's not being used now, they want to use the salt dome to store natural gas because they'll be close to a pumping station or a distribution center at Henry, Louisiana. And they want to come in there and store natural gas in the Jefferson Island salt dome and they're having all sorts of opposition from the people around there even though the United States Core of Engineers have said it's safe, that nothing's going to happen. Everybody else involved has given the okay. And I was reading in the paper where the company has started drudging canals to start operations, you see. And the group of owners around there, land owners around there, they are talking about filing a suit and ah, they've been raising all kinds of cain to keep that company from coming in there, you see. Where if a company comes in

Edran Louis Auguster
there it's going to create some jobs but they're not interested in that. They want to say that something's going to happen. Well, science has been able to show them that nothing is going to happen. All the agencies regulating such activities have said okay, it's alright. Those people, they do a lot of things that I just can't see the logic myself. For example, in waste, garbage, in the city of New Iberia and the parish garbage disposal is a problem. One of the companies bought or took options on some land up here at Cade on Captain Cade Road, to build a landfill. This wasted land not being used, can't use if for anything, they want to build a landfill there. They guaranteed, I mean they sent their proposal to the Environmental Protection Agency and showed them how they would align the landfill so that no toxic waste would get into the water streams. It so happens that it's right over or supposedly very close to the main water stream for water for this entire area. And those people have fought the garbage company. It's been about three or four years that this thing has been, the hassle has been going on. The state, they had to get a permit from the state. The state finally

Edran Louis Auguster
granted them a permit then the people went to court. The court has put some other stipulations and this thing has gone on. In the meantime, garbage from here is being transferred to Lafayette and from Lafayette to some landfill in Evangeline Parish and that landfill will be filled in a certain length of time and then the garbage company acquired some land at Elton, Louisiana I think it is and that's over fifty miles from here. And do you know our folk in New Iberia are objecting to that landfill in Elton. They don't want the landfill in Iberia Parish, they don't want it built in Elton, so what do you expect to do with all this garbage that you're collecting? It's alright to put it on somebody else but not on us. That's one of the big problems. Every day you pick up the paper it's something about a landfill. The parish has been negotiating for the longest trying to get a dump for, not garbage, but trees and stuff like that, buildings where they're tearing down buildings and so forth. You've got to do something with it. They don't want you to burn it. The Environmental Protection Agency says you can't burn it. They've got to do something with it. The people are complaining

Edran Louis Auguster
about the city's not picking up their debris and stuff like that. The city doesn't have anywhere to put it and when they find a place, somebody willing to accept it, we object to it. It's a mess.

**Mitchell:** That just reminded me of what you told me the last time when I was getting ready to leave about the trash collectors being kidnapped. When did that happen?

**Auguster:** Oh, that was way back there when the city first started hiring blacks. That was, let me see, that was in the 1950's. That was in the 1950's. They kidnapped garbage men because that was a white man's job. (Laughter) And a short time after that when they hired the Negroes and put them in the ditch to digging ditches and the garbage men passed there on one of these hot summer days sweating, picking up that garbage and there were Negroes standing around leaning on their shovels, that's a white man's job, leaning on a shovel. (Laughter) So they wanted to put the Negroes back on the garbage truck and give them the job working in ditches. That was a white man's job. But those days are behind us. Now most of the garbage
men are black now. You have some whites but we've gone to private companies, you see, and because of lack of other opportunities blacks get those jobs.

Mitchell: Oh, and one other thing I want to ask before I forget, back in 1927 when the high waters came, did a lot of people from New Iberia go to Lake Charles like you and your mother did?

Auguster: Well, a lot of people left from here and they went to various points to get out of the area where the flood waters were. The water came in about three o'clock in the morning - well, let's say this, it came into New Iberia a part of what we call the hill, that is the northwest section, the water came in one day and the railroads were always elevated, you know, the tracks, so that water stopped where the tracks because it was high and had to build up. But in the city proper the water didn't start coming in until about three o'clock the next morning and it came in pretty fast. By daybreak I guess you had three or four feet of water in the streets of New Iberia on the other side of the track, this track.

Edran Louis Auguster
Mitchell: On the other side by the bayou?

Auguster: Yes. Oh, the bayou had been flooded over long before that, you see. The bayou had flooded in before the water came into St. Martin area and the St. Martinville highway because I remember going down to the bayou, as close as I could get to the bayou, and seeing the dead cattle floating by and different things floating by from the upper part of Bayou Tesh. But coming into New Iberia proper, particularly the other side of the track, and by sunup the water was about two or three feet high. But the people were for getting out. So everybody that wanted to get out went to the station which is elevated and they would gather there and the Southern Pacific, first they sent a train with flat cars and a lot of those people got on those flat cars and they took them to a refugee camp up around Cade, you see. But there were others that didn't want to go there and finally the train did, I mean the Southern Pacific did sent a passenger train out of Lafayette to pick people up that wanted to go further. My mother chose to go to Lake Charles and

Edran Louis Auguster
take us to Lake Charles because we had relatives there. She had a sister there. But others went to Texas. And if you didn't have any money Southern Pacific took you there free and if you wanted to pay a little something and had some money and wanted to pay you paid what you could. They were very nice in helping out there. Many of the people went where they wanted to go for nothing. They had to pay when they got ready to come back.

**Mitchell:** So they had to pay if they wanted to come back?

**Auguster:** No. If they wanted to come back, I mean, you know, after the flood waters you had to buy a ticket.

**Mitchell:** I guess I asked you, a lot of people had told me about ( ) from Beaumont and it just seems like there has a lot of traffic between Beaumont and New Iberia.

**Auguster:** Yes, well you had a lot of people from here that lived in Beaumont.

**Mitchell:** Why is that so?
Auguster: Well, people went to Beaumont, Port Arthur, because of the oil industry jobs, you see. And naturally you left somebody home, some people stayed home but there was that relationship between Beaumont because of the relatives. For example, my wife's people had people that settled in Port Arthur so most of our visits were to Port Arthur. We'd go to Port Arthur three or four times a year and they would come here, you see. But it was because the jobs over there that they had gone and gotten and built houses and were doing well so they were able to entertain their relatives. That was not so with Orange.

Mitchell: With where?

Auguster: Orange. Orange, Texas is just this side of Beaumont. Orange had a reputation of being hard on Negroes and they didn't have the industries that Beaumont and Port Arthur had.

Mitchell: So Orange is closer to New Iberia but it had that reputation?
Auguster: Orange is closer, yes. Orange is right after you get into Texas, you see. Orange is the first city you reach after you cross the state line. I remember in years going to Port Arthur and you'd pass through Orange, why, you were warned to be careful. (Laughter) I think you had, I'm not sure but I think you had a riot there at one time, a race riot and that put the people afraid to even stop in Orange. But that wasn't so of Beaumont. Beaumont had a problem one time but that was settled.

Mitchell: Is this the riot that was during the war you're talking about?

Auguster: No, the Beaumont deal was during the war time, yes, Beaumont. But Orange was before.

Mitchell: Another thing, I think you've mentioned this before about Avery Island. Is Avery Island, has that been really cut off from New Iberia because people lived out there a lot?
Auguster: Avery Island was not really cut off from New Iberia. Avery Island is just seven miles from New Iberia. It's a private island and at one time, I think you still, they have a gate where you have to stop and if you're on official business, why, they let you through and if you're not on official business, why, you have to pay to get on the island. You also have Jungle Gardens out there which is privately owned and in order to visit Jungle Gardens you have to pay, you see. Jefferson Island wasn't like that. Jefferson Island, you had two roads that you could go onto Jefferson Island and you could go onto Jefferson Island without any problem. No admissions, no checking or anything, you just go on out there. At Weeks Island it was privately owned also. It was isolated. It was just one road going in. But they had no restrictions on your going out there because you had people living out there and it was open. But they did reserve the right to bar anybody. I remember an incident while I was out there where a young man from out there had come to town in a car one night and out on the road to Jefferson Island, the Hopkins Street Road to Jefferson Island, he had a wreck with

Edran Louis Auguster
some whites and it knocked his car in a ditch and he
drowned because the whites wouldn't get out and help
him get out of the ditch, it was a ditch full of
water, so he drowned. After that the whites got
together, I mean those people involved in the wreck
wanted to say that he was wrong, that he ran into them
and they got the police along with them or a lawyer
and they went out to Weeks Island to try to frighten
the boy's parents into paying some damages, you know,
get money out of them. They went out there and talked
to the parents and then they left and they said they
would be back with the police. Well, the parents went
to the officials of the salt mine and those officials
told them said when they come back just let us know.
And sure enough they came back and when they came back
the company was there and informed them that this was
a private island and we give you so many minutes to
get off of this island and we don't want you back
here. And that ended that.

**Mitchell:** Was this Myers? Which company was this?
Auguster: That was the Myers Salt Company. Now since the, in the early 1960's they sold out to Morton Salt and Morton Salt decided that keeping the village was too expensive, you see, so they decided to close the village. They either gave or sold at a give-away price the house that any of those employees were living in. If you wanted the house you could buy it.

The church, they moved it out. Got a moving company and moved the whole church and set it up on land that had been donated at Lydia for the church. Those people that wanted to build their own house, why, they went on and did it. But a lot of the homes were houses that they had lived in on Weeks Island then they closed the village and right now you can go just so far and that's all. You can go to the main gate or where the mine is or where the storage facility is, you've got an oil storage out there, you can go to that. You can go to the chemical plant which was out there, part of Morton's. But that's as far as you can go. At one time you had good fishing places out there and in order to fish there now you've got to get a special permit, you know, to fish. It's privately owned and they've closed it.
Mitchell: Wasn't there a long strike on Jefferson Island like labor union strike?

Auguster: Strike on Jefferson Island?

Mitchell: Were there any of these strikes in the area?

Auguster: I don't know. I don't remember any long strike. There might have been because when the unions came in, why, they had a lot of friction between union demands and company demands, you see. I know at Weeks Island the union came in after negotiations and votes and intimidation and so forth but it never resulted in any strike for any length of time. I don't remember Jefferson Island being involved but it might have been.

Mitchell: But you don't remember any real nasty stuff with the unions?

Auguster: No, the only incidents that I know of is that when the union was trying to organize at Avery Island one of
the union officials that came down here to negotiate or to observe the election where the fellahs would vote whether they wanted to be or so forth, the union sent a representative down here that was a friend of mine, F.A. Piper, and he got a reservation at what was then the Frederick Hotel. Now Negroes had never been at Frederick Hotel but he had a reservation at Frederick Hotel. And he had another friend here by the name of J.B. Henderson, was a principal here. He called Henderson to come up to his room. (Laughter) He was afraid to go up there. I believe Henderson went but he was very, very uncomfortable and he stayed just so long. The next morning, F.A. told him to call him the next morning or he would call J.B. to see how his night had been, you see. But they didn't bother Piper. That was integration (). (Laughter)

**Mitchell:** This was in the 1950's too?

**Auguster:** Huh?

**Mitchell:** Was this in the 1950's or 1960's?
Auguster: That was in the 1950's. That was in the 1950's, yes.

Mitchell: Well, the last thing I have if you have the time, I just need to run through this and get a little bit of information about your mother, just about her name and things like that.

Auguster: About what?

Mitchell: Your mother and just, you know, your family member's names if you have time to do that.

Auguster: My mother was Clara. She was originally Clara Auguster. She was married twice before I was born and she couldn't stay with either one of her husbands. One was a drunkard and the other was a gambler. Had one daughter, Bridgette, by her first husband and Bridgette died. I had another brother, Elliott, and we chose her, or rather, she gave us her maiden name because she was not married to my father or his, you see. Then in later years she married a Reverend Noah Jackson. He was from the Christian Methodist Church. He was pastoring the Christian Methodist Church here
in New Iberia, () Chapel Christian Methodist Church.
And she stayed with him until she died.

Mitchell: When did she die?

Auguster: She died in 1947.

Mitchell: And do you remember when she was born?

Auguster: No, that was never established. At that time, shortly
after she was born her mother died and she was raised
by a sister and the sister had one child. That was
around Franklin, Louisiana. And as a result, my
mother being the older and not her sister's child, her
sister's child went to school and my mother had to
take, it was about five miles to school, would have to
take that girl to school and go back and pick her up.
She told a tale about and she said it was true that
they would walk the track from Franklin to Baldwin to
go to school and one day they found a sack of money on
the railroad track, paper money and silver money. And
they didn't know anything about paper money because
all that they had dealt with was silver. So they took

Edran Louis Auguster
the silver and tore up the dollar bills, the paper money.  (Laughter) But my mother was a worker. She took ironing, washing and ironing, in order to take care of us, send us to school. She worked as a janitor at Iberia Savings & Loan or Building Association at that time for years and also did janitorial work at a big lumber company, Burtran Lumber Company here in New Iberia. Worked at the lumber company in the afternoon or late in the evening she'd go and clean up and early in the morning she'd go and clean up Iberia Savings or Iberia Building Association. And during the day she had washings. She became very proficient in laundering white shirts and white suits. At that time men wore linen suits, white linen suits particularly, the big, big people, you know, of the community like the Weeks' of Building & Loan. W.G. Weeks was the president and he wore nothing but white linen suits and white shirts. And that was the way she was able to get money to take care of us and send us to school. (End of Tape 3 - Side B.)
Auguster: ...ironing, taking sheets out of the ringers and you'd pass those sheets, hold those sheets open and pass them through a mangle which would press them and dry them at the same time. And then when they found out that I could iron I was put on ironing boy's shirts and the women teachers at Straight, a lot of them were missionaries, white missionaries, and they wore just plain old gingham dresses.

Mitchell: Gingham dresses?

Auguster: Oh, yes. And they would have to be ironed and those of us that were working there did the ironing. And I got fifteen cents an hour for ironing missionary dresses. That was my job.

Mitchell: So all this came about because you had been helping your mother doing her laundry?

Auguster: Yes, learning to iron, yes. Not only that, after we were married, I got married in 1940, my wife and I, sometimes I would go when my mother wasn't able to go
to Iberia Building Association and clean up, why, I would get up in the morning and go there and clean the building up before I'd go to school, before I'd leave for Weeks Island. That went on until her health got so that she couldn't work so we just had to stop her. But there was no social security then, you know, or anything like that so when your parents send you to school they weren't ashamed to say that I'm sending you to school so that you can help me when I get old. And that is what happened in our case. When I got out and got a job, why, the first thing that I did was to buy the house that my mother had built, take over the notes, because the house that we had before this one, she built it just before I finished college. She sold the other place that we lived on Coreen Street, she sold that and built on Persure Street and there was a mortgage on it so when I got a job the first thing that I had to do was to buy that mortgage out and include a clause in it that my mother would have her room, use of the kitchen or any part of the house that she wanted to live in as long as she lived that she wanted to use. That was included in that sale, you see. Now she was motivated by the fact that she

Edran Louis Auguster
had sold this house and she had used the money to build another house. But when she sold that house which she had worked and bought she was married. So when she borrowed the money to build this new house then Reverend Jackson was included in it. So he wasn't helping her to pay for it so she didn't want him to inherit what she had worked for so I bought her out. I gave him a place to stay and I gave her a place to stay but the house belonged to me so that when she died there was no question, you see. There was no question. The two properties that she had, one she had bought in my name and my brother's name and the other she had bought in her name and naturally Reverend Jackson had to included in it. But the only way she could get around that was to sell while she lived and so she sold and I bought.

**Mitchell:** You mentioned your wife, what was her name?

**Auguster:** My wife was named Irene. She was originally Irene Boutte.

**Mitchell:** Did she have a middle name?
Auguster: Bernadette.

Mitchell: So she born in, you said that her people were originally from Loreauville, but she was born in Iberia?

Auguster: She was born in New Iberia but the family originally came from Loreauville. But she was born in New Iberia.

Mitchell: And she taught, she was a teacher?

Auguster: Yes, she was a school teacher.

Mitchell: What was her birthdate? When was she born?

Auguster: She was born on January 17th. I was born on the 17th of March, she was born on the 17th of January but I was born in 1915, she was born in 1914. She was a year older than I.

Mitchell: And your mother was born in Iberia Parish too?
**Auguster:** No, my mother was born in St. Marais Parish.

**Mitchell:** Was she born in a town or just in the parish?

**Auguster:** Born in Franklin. But her people were from Virginia. Yes.

**Mitchell:** How did they get out here?

**Auguster:** Well, they came down this way. She didn't talk too much to me about her father. I didn't get too much out of that but her mother was of Indian extraction and that determined her complexion to a great extent. She had an olive complexion, very smooth. But for no education she had a lot of intelligence. A lot of intelligence but no education. I had to teach her how to write her name. She just didn't get a chance to go to school.

**Mitchell:** And your brother's named Elliott and your children's names, you told me Darryl, Darryl is the oldest?
Auguster: Darryl is the youngest. Carol is the older. We wanted a girl but we couldn't have any so we gave him Carol.

Mitchell: Born in New Iberia?

Auguster: Un-huh, both of them born in New Iberia.

Mitchell: And Daryl is D-A-R-Y-L?

Auguster: D-A-R-R-Y-L.

Mitchell: And Carol was born in what year?

Auguster: Carol was born in 1945 and Darryl, I can't remember when Darryl was born. Darryl was born in 1952 I think or 1953, 1952.

Mitchell: And you do have grandchildren?

Auguster: I have two. I mean, no, I have two by Darryl; Dana, that's his picture right there. He's a junior at Southern. And Nakesha.

Edran Louis Auguster
Mitchell: And that's the young lady I met?

Auguster: Un-huh.

Mitchell: And that's her picture?

Auguster: Yes. And that's my wife picture. I can't see who the other one is.

Mitchell: A woman with glasses on.

Auguster: Bring the picture over here. That's my mother.

Mitchell: That's your mother?

Auguster: Yes, and that's my wife.

Mitchell: Oh, I see what you mean. These are nice pictures. Did you take these pictures?

Auguster: Yeah.
Mitchell: You did?

Auguster: Un-huh.

Mitchell: So you got two by Darryl and those are your grandchildren?

Auguster: My oldest son had one that you can say is his.

(Laughter) Right now he married a woman with three so I got three grandchildren there. But he has one son by his first marriage.

Mitchell: I'm pretty sure I've got the dates straight on your jobs but I just want to make sure one more time. I know that you went to school, you went to Iberia Parish Training School?

Auguster: Un-huh.

Mitchell: And that was from the beginning on through?

Auguster: Yes, I went to the public school that was named Iberia Parish Training School in the late years when it
became a teaching institution. But before that it was Douglas Institute.

**Mitchell:** So it was known as Douglas Institute and then?

**Auguster:** See, it was a public school and they named the school when it was built Douglas Institute which was really after Frederick Douglas, you see. And then when it was condemned and we no longer had a school the Iberia Parish school board had just spent in 1922 all the money that they had building what they called New Iberia High School for whites. So when the fire marshall condemned Douglas Institute we had no school and the superintendent told them that there wouldn't be any school for Negroes, the school board couldn't build any. And then he came back and said that there was some land that the school board could buy and if the school board provided the land the, aw shucks now what, I can't think of the name of the group - Rosenwald, the Rosenwald fund would build a building. So the principal, Professor A.B. Simon, presented that to the people, the blacks of New Iberia, and they
went on and raised the twenty-five hundred dollars needed to buy the land.

**Mitchell:** With the Rosenwalds or without?

**Auguster:** No, the school board, they would give the money to the school board and the school board would buy the land and once the school board had the land then the Rosenwalds would build the school.

**Mitchell:** Okay.

**Auguster:** So that's how it was achieved and I told you about the benevolent societies, those benevolent societies did much, gave much money, towards this twenty-five hundred dollars because twenty-five hundred dollars at that time was twenty-five hundred dollars, you see. They got together and in a little over a month's time they had the twenty-five hundred dollars. And while the process was, while they were in the process of building the Rosenwald school classes were held in these benevolent society halls. They gave the use of their halls in order to have school. And we had

Edran Louis Auguster

133
schools all over town where you had a benevolent society giving use of it's building. With the coming of the Rosenwald school it was large enough to add grades so a grade was added every year until it became a high school. And along with that money from the Gene's fund provided training of teachers. So in this Iberia Parish Training School it was Iberia Parish Training School because of the Gene's program in there that trained teachers. And after you finished the eleventh grade because the high school then went to eleventh grade, after you finished the eleventh grade you took this teacher training program and you were certified to teach in the elementary schools of the state of Louisiana and that is why it was called training school.

Mitchell: So the certification would be another year or so?

Auguster: It all depends on the amount or the score that the students made on the state examination. The state would give you an examination on this teacher training, you see, and if you made a good score and passed - they would take the average score; for
example, if you had twenty in the class and the average was say a hundred sixty or a hundred seventy, then the state said if your average came to a certain point you got a certificate that allowed you to teach two years. If you fell below that point but above another point, why, you got a certificate for one year and then you had to go back to school to take some sort of extension course or summer session in order to renew your certificate, you see. If you fell below a certain average then you didn't graduate or if the class fell below that point then you dropped off the state approved list and none of your graduates would get certificates. When I finished we actually had twenty-two in our class but when they started to figuring averages only seven of us passed the cut-off point and the school had already dropped to the point where you either take a one year certificate, you cut the class so that you can average to entitle you to a one year certificate or you let the whole class graduate and nobody get a certificate because you fall off the state approved list. So in my class we had only seven to graduate because only the top seven graduated. The others that were in the class had to

Edran Louis Auguster
go back to school another year and try to make a better grade on that teacher's examination. That didn't last but one or two years after 1933. It dropped off the state approved list and it no longer classified as a teacher training. But at one time it had gone up. After I started teaching at Weeks Island in 1937, 1938, 1939 IPTS, Iberia Parish Training School, was offering two years above high school. Yes, because I had some students from Lafayette particularly were coming here to school lived with my mother, roomed with my mother to take that extra two years of schooling that was being offered by the parish above the eleventh grade. Grambling had been offering it, Grambling College, Grambling State University. Many of our teachers when they finished high school they just went on to Grambling, got two years of teacher training up there and then came out and got jobs teaching. Matter of fact, we have one that teaches still, been teaching fifty-some years. (Laughter) Still she is, you know, in a supervisory capacity and she just won't go. She retired and then she went back and she's still fooling around with that stuff.

Edran Louis Auguster

136
**Mitchell:** So then you went directly to Straight College?

**Auguster:** Straight College to Dillard University. That's all considered Dillard now.

**Mitchell:** And your first job was at Weeks Island?

**Auguster:** Well, I mean I had additional studies that, I got a master's from USL.

**Mitchell:** What year was that? You told me about that and I forgot.

**Auguster:** At USL?

**Mitchell:** Un-huh.

**Auguster:** I got my master's in 1960.

**Mitchell:** That's University of Southwestern?

**Auguster:** Yeah, Louisiana.
Mitchell: And that's in Lafayette?

Auguster: Un-huh.

Mitchell: I know you told me about that. Did I forget anything else?

Auguster: That's all, I mean I may have told you about other studies but that doesn't matter, I didn't graduate from those schools. I went to the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan.

Mitchell: That's what you told me about, un-huh.

Auguster: But I didn't go back after I went in service.

Mitchell: So that was 1940?

Auguster: At Michigan?

Mitchell: Un-huh.
**Auguster:** That was in 1942 because I went in the service in 1943. That was summer of 1942.

**Mitchell:** And Weeks Island, you were there from 1937 to? How long were you at Weeks Island?

**Auguster:** I was at Weeks Island for nineteen years.

**Mitchell:** J.B. Livingston was 1956 to 1969?

**Auguster:** 1956 to 1969 was J.B. Livingstone. 1969 to 1970 Johnson Street Elementary.

**Mitchell:** And then you ended up at Anderson Street?

**Auguster:** Anderson Street from 1970 to 1975, five years.

**Mitchell:** Okay.

**Auguster:** And I spent thirty-one months in the Army.

**Mitchell:** Thirty-one months?
Auguster: Teaching Private Pete. That was the Army, you had so many illiterate people in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina until the Army set up schools, special schools, and they drafted those illiterates and we were brought there as teachers and we had to teach them to read and write. What we were required to do was that in twelve weeks we were required to teach them to read and write so that they could at least write home and sign their name in twelve weeks. If we couldn't do it in twelve weeks, why, we had to do one thing or the other; either prove that they were faking or discharge them, you see. And many of them did come there faking. They knew that if they didn't reach that fourth grade level in twelve weeks, why, they would discharge them and they were able to read and write but wouldn't do it.

Mitchell: Well, I'm done.

Auguster: Okay.