

Interview with George Watson

George Watson, is a community leader who has been active on many civic and County boards and State commissions. He is foremost in asserting that the current ethnic relations in the Pass are exceptionally favorable. George was one of the returning veterans following World War II who experienced the patriotic fervor of serving his country and had become indoctrinated with the American dream. In returning to the Pass, he looked forward to pursuing his educational benefits and performing the basic rights such as promoted by the Military Command as "something worth fighting for in achieving world peace in the performance of democracy for all".

Watson related that, "Pass Christian, during the 30's, was a laid back community with no pressure or concern in race relations. Some contributing factors were:

The Beach property residents were ultra rich whites from New Orleans who didn't concern themselves with provincial problems. They only needed their service requirements satisfied by local citizens, black or white.

All the other Whites were in the same economic level as the Blacks who had to forage for subsistence by fishing or providing services, resulting in their working side by side with each other.

The few natives or long time Whites, who were well-off financially, simply took life as a matter of fact and went their own way.

"For the most part, Blacks stayed in their 'place', not needing to rock the boat, but on returning home from serving their country, the Black veterans, including myself, were denied basic voter registration, election rights and representation", he stated. He found that he was being denied the very precepts and principles his country had told him he was fighting for. Awareness of such imbalanced justices and upon realizing a need for change, he became one of the leaders in forming the *Progressive Civic League*, a local support organization. When he went to vote, he was confronted by several Whites who asserted, "No Niggers are going to vote in this election!" In pursuit of these same basic rights the organization appealed for help from one of the local clergy who called in the FBI. It was through these endeavors that shattered the obfuscation practices of Governor Bilboe.

Another turning point in reaching some semblance of equality was an appeal to, and the assurance that the City officials would appoint a Black member to the School Board. Most of the citizens of the "Pass" realized the fairness in this proposal and were in favor of such an unprejudiced rationale. However, political imprudence resulted in the appointment of another white person. This severely offended the Black citizenry which eventually resulted in a boycott of local businesses and a fresh demonstration of unbridled frustrations.

The Pass community became altogether cognizant that the political authorities had made false commitments to the Blacks and had betrayed their trust. Even the newly appointed member of the Board in question offered to resign his position providing a Black person was appointed. Result, Bidwell Barnes became the first elected Black member of the Pass Christian School Board."

In 1981, Governor Winter made a talk at Pass Hi specifically to demonstrate his friendship with George Watson. It was kept secret until he was introduced

* * *

Note by Dan Ellis: George Watson has demonstrated courage and leadership in overcoming the throes of bias and discrimination by prevailing in spite of early adversities. He is a compliment to the city, the county, the state, the nation and to his people.