

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Aubrey Williams

COLLECTION: 4700.0899

IDENTIFICATION: LSU Alumnus, former Professor of English at Yale and Univ. of Florida

INTERVIEWER: Julian Pleasants

SERIES: University History – Ole War Skule

INTERVIEW DATES: September 11, 1997

FOCUS DATES: 1922-1997

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1279

Williams born and raised in Jacksonville, Florida; education of relatives; Williams mother important influence; family lives for a time in Montgomery, Alabama; Williams works as Piggly Wiggly bag boy; the Great Depression; father's problems; Williams's school days; Williams majors in journalism at LSU and works as police reporter for the *Morning Advocate*; unable to report racist police behavior; attitude toward labor issues at paper; becomes ethically disillusioned with journalism; Williams's athletic career; originally on football scholarship at LSU, but quits team after one year; no regrets about choosing LSU over Chapel Hill; LSU freshman hazing; lives in Tiger Stadium; makes lifelong friend, Herman Armel, a Brooklyn Jew, in the dorm; freshmen taken to whorehouse; military atmosphere; strict campus rules; double standard for women; Williams joins Sigma Chi, meets future wife at a party there; Williams courts and marries Bette Sue Dougherty of Baton Rouge; marries on impulse in Magnolia, Mississippi at urging of friend Mary Carolyn Bennett; history of wife's family in Baton Rouge; honeymoon in New Orleans; couple moves off campus; Reveille staff frequents Brechtel's; Williams takes every English course he can; freshman English with Robert Heilman; writes essay about visit to Key West with high school sweetheart's family; studies with Cleanth Brooks at LSU; describes Brooks; Williams writes article protesting wartime shutdown of *Southern Review* as belt tightening measure, pointing out Mike the Tiger is more expensive; discussion of Brooks, Robert Penn Warren and the *Southern Review*; Tom Kirby chair of English Department; Eric Vogel in political science; Rudolf Heberle in sociology; T. Harry Williams; Huey Long's support of football team and band; loss of many great faculty members as a result of low pay; Warren's poetry and fiction; Brooks's new critical stance; *The Well-Wrought Urn*; Warren at Yale; Cleanth Brooks home on the outskirts of New Haven; Warren mows Brooks's pasture with a scythe; Warren as a storyteller; Warren more liberal than other southern agrarians; Katherine Anne Porter gives a reading from *Ship of Fools* in Baton Rouge, Williams sits at her feet; Porter's close friendship with Cleanth and Tinkum Brooks; Porter changes clothes at Williams's New Haven apartment, admires hunting horn, which he gives to her despite the fact it is a family heirloom; Williams experiences with *The Reveille*; John J. Tigert speaks on campus, Williams is critical of him in *The Reveille*;

later he has to be interviewed by Tigert for a Rhodes Scholarship, which he does not get; Tigert asks what he thinks of T. S. Eliot and New Criticism and asks no further questions when Williams is positive about both; Williams glad in retrospect not to have gone to England with two small children; opportunity to follow Brooks to Yale follows soon after; Williams addresses campus racism in *Reveille*; fraternities well-chaperoned and well-behaved in Williams's day; no binge drinking; fraternity paddling; ROTC at LSU; officer candidate school at Fort Knox; specific ROTC officers; Battle Training near Elizabethtown, Kentucky; bunkmate Harry Leopold; Williams regrets not donating his Faulkner collection to LSU; discusses how much he values his LSU experiences; goes to graduate school at Yale while on the G. I. Bill; Gillis Long and Walter Parlange veterans at LSU; scholar Al Kernan also at Yale on G.I. Bill; campus housing for veterans; tank corps; Williams's experience as a young officer; grueling training; requests transfer to flight school and is sent to Sheppard Field in Texas; Captain McGee;

Tape 1280

Wichita Falls, Texas; flying piper cubs; Fort Sill; Fort Jackson, North Carolina; Nuremberg, Germany; Bad Toltz; General Ernest Harmon; Kaserne; Tegern See; Aachen; Anzio; General Schact; Stenson airplane; the Siegfried line; Nuremberg trials; Hess and Van Papen; General Mark Clark; trains crossing the river Lintz during the Russian occupation; Munich; Vienna; Bamberg; chauffeuring Gen. Clark through Vienna; Williams leaves the service in June 1946; Williams describes Rudolf Hess at Nuremberg trials as having glaring eyes like Chaucer's Pardoner; Himmler and Goering; International Military Tribunal; war crimes; My Lai comparison; slaughter in Katyn Forest; V-J day; Williams asked to re-enlist in Counter-Intelligence Corps, but declines because his second child has just been born; Williams in favor of Truman's decisions to use atomic weapons in Japan; son's military career; grandson a Marine; integration of military; Williams's admission to Yale under Brooks's sponsorship; requirements at Yale; Louis Martz; Fred Pottle; Professor Prouty; Maynard Mack; Williams decision to write on Pope with Mack; dissertation on "The Dunciad" wins John Addison Porter Prize; rejected by Yale Studies in English, probably for political reasons involving a grudge against Mack, but accepted and published by both Methuen and LSU Press. Williams completes Ph.D. in 1952; process of becoming full faculty at Yale; the Williamses have four more children while at Yale; teaching loads at Yale; Mack the editor of the Twickenham Edition of Alexander Pope's works; John Butt; Emile Audra; Williams becomes a Twickenham editor; Williams applies for a Fulbright and a Guggenheim fellowship and spends a year in England; course Williams taught at Yale; Bayswater Hotel, England; cottage in Kent; commuting to London; Geoffrey Tillotson; Bonamy Dubré; Williams meets T. S. Eliot; Sir Harold Williams, editor of Jonathan Swift's work; Williams's youngest son born in England; Williams pays doctor to sit and drink Scotch while midwife delivers baby; Williams leaves Yale for the University of Florida in 1958; one reason for leaving is that his children can get a good public education in Florida and he could not afford private tuition for six children in New Haven; homesick for Florida; friend James Osborne at Silliman College, Yale, encourages him to go home if that's where he really wants to be;

fishing very important to Williams and the fishing would be better in Florida; size and structure of Florida's English Department; courses Williams taught at Florida; Johns committee seeking out communists and homosexuals; Senator Charlie Johns; twenty-six faculty members forced to resign; Williams leaves for Rice for better money and higher rank; Alan Mackillop urges him to come to Rice; Rice well-funded, but Williams did not like Houston and there was no place to fish; Williams accepts offer to return to Florida as a graduate research professor; compares students

at Yale, Rice and Florida; limitations of Florida students; refuses to grade more easily for the sake of making affirmative action work; kicks two graduate students out of program for plagiarism; dissatisfaction with Florida and its inability to attract or place quality students; Dean Grinter; Williams builds seventeenth and eighteenth century collection for library; goes to President Reitz in 1961 to ask for more for books; Williams proud to have placed all his graduate students who went on the job market; extreme dissatisfaction with the state of higher education; lack of contact between highly paid scholars and students; women in Florida's English department; minority faculty; tragedy of Council Bly, an African-American faculty member who was a personal friend; Bly hired without proper qualifications, but later fired for homosexuality; Williams forms bi-racial committee to defend Bly; Bly found murdered after he is missed at a farewell party thrown by Williams; Williams believes all students should learn standard English; opposed to affirmative action; resigns from Florida in 1986 in protest of the direction in which higher education is headed; objects to hiring stars who do only research when you could hire three teaching Ph.D.s with the same money; adamantly against faculty union and resultant political maneuvering; believes departments and faculty should be held accountable; denial of tenure to faculty, then no mention of it in letters of reference angers him; Williams takes academic dishonesty seriously; students not required to write enough; technology; against large lecture classes with graduate student graders, at least for subjects like English; universities not really businesslike enough, in the true sense of the word, not getting the job done; makes comparison to medical profession.

TAPES: 2 (T1279, T1280) **TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 3 hours, 45 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 98 pages

RESTRICTIONS: None

COMMENTS: Tapes also deposited with the University of Florida's Samuel Proctor Oral History Program.