

JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

700 PELHAM ROAD N.

JACKSONVILLE, ALABAMA 36265-9982

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

TELEPHONE: (205) 782-5632

**Gift and Release Agreement:**

We W.F. Duncan and Chad Hudson  
(Interviewee) (Interviewer)

Do hereby grant permission to Jacksonville State University to copy the tape of the interview conducted at W.F. Duncan's house on the date(s) of November 14, 1995 for the oral history collection being compiled at Jacksonville State University.

This collection will be maintained by Jacksonville State University for research into the history of Northeast Alabama and the South. We further grant researchers permission to quote from the interview on this tape.

Waldo F. Duncan  
(Interviewee's signature)

Date 11-14-95

3410 Gilmore Ave  
(Address)

Hokes Bluff, AL 35903

492-1276  
(Telephone)

Chad Hudson  
(Interviewer's signature)

Date 11-14-95

5010 Oakwood Dr.  
(Address)

HOKES BLUFF, AL 35903

492-7253  
(Telephone)

**Interviewee Background Information**

Name: W. F. Duncan

Address: 3410 Wilmore Ave. Hokes Bluff, FL 35903

Phone Number(s): 491-1276

Approximate age or date of birth: 78

Mother's name: Buna Mae Duncan

Father's name: Joseph Duncan

Places lived and when: Born and lived in Etowah County all his life, mostly in the Hokes Bluff area.

Education: graduated from Hokes Bluff High School in 1938

Religion: Baptist

Business, political and social memberships (past and present): Rod and Gun Club

Present occupation: retired

Former occupation(s): Goodyear - 41 years

Special skills: \_\_\_\_\_

Major Accomplishments: raising Christian family

Local events in which you have participated: heavily involved with Hokes Bluff athletic programs

State and/or regional events in which you have participated: \_\_\_\_\_

National events in which you have participated: \_\_\_\_\_

International events in which you have participated: \_\_\_\_\_

Natural born U.S. citizen? (Yes) No

Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Country from which you emigrated: \_\_\_\_\_

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in your possession: \_\_\_\_\_

Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral history interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Table of Contents

- I. Aspects of Mr. Duncan's life
  - A. Birth
  - B. Family
  - C. Education
  - D. Occupation
- II. Race Relations
  - A. Education
  - B. Discrimination in public
  - C. Blacks contentment
  - D. Ku Klux Klan
  - E. Martin Luther King Jr.
  - F. Civil Rights Movement
- III. Politics
  - A. George Wallace
  - B. Political Parties

#### IV. Changing Alabama

#### V. National Events

A. Landing on the moon

B. The Depression

C. World War II

D. Vietnam

ALABAMA HISTORY THROUGH THE EYES OF  
W.F. DUNCAN  
by  
Chad Hudson

Alabama History  
Dr. Jackson  
November 20, 1995

W.F. Duncan is a man who has lived a long time, and seen a lot of things. He is seventy-eight years old and has lived every one of those years in Alabama. He has resided in Etowah County for his entire life. He lived through some of the most crucial and important times in Alabama's history. He has strong feelings towards many issues. He is a very wise man who has learned to change with the times and adjust to a new and different environment.

Mr. Duncan was born on a farm in rural Etowah County in 1917. His father was a farmer, so Mr. Duncan and his three siblings worked on the farm as soon as they were old enough. Mr. Duncan graduated from Hokes Bluff High School in 1938. He finished later than he should have because he often missed school to work on the farm. Shortly after his graduation from high school, he was hired in at the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. He would go on to work there for forty years before his retirement in 1979. He married Lois Taylor in 1945 and they recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Mr. and Mrs. Duncan have two children, six grandchildren, and three great grandchildren, all of whom live in Alabama.

Mr. Duncan has seen the impact major, national events have had on Alabama. The Depression had very little effect on Mr. Duncan and his family. As farmers, they grew what they needed. Mr. Duncan adds, "Back then, if you lived on the farm you had it

made."\*The farmers in Alabama were the least affected people in the state.

Mr. Duncan has vivid memories of World War II. He was turned down and unable to serve due to bleeding ulcers. He blames Japan for all of the United States casualties. He describes a very shocked and angry Alabama after Pearl Harbor. Mr. Duncan lost several friends during the war. He admits, " There were a lot of people I knew that never came back."\*

His feelings about the Vietnam War are bitter. He calls the war "a no win situation."\* It was a war, he feels, we should never have gotten involved in. While he was not in favor of the war, he was against protests and demonstrations against it.

When the United States landed on the moon, according to Mr. Duncan, there were mixed emotions. While most people believed what happened, many poor people and older people couldn't believe it. They said it was tricky camera work. They thought it was simply impossible to reach the moon. Mr. Duncan said many people thought we were getting into something that should be left alone.

Politics in Alabama were dominated by the Democrats throughout Mr. Duncan's life.<sup>1</sup> Republicans were thought of as radicals and had no chance to win. The Democrats were thought of as the working man's party, while the Republicans were thought of as the more wealthy people. Mr. Duncan spoke of a general distrust of the government that could be attributed to the Depression. If you wanted to be elected to office in Alabama, you better be a Democrat.

The central figure in politics in Alabama was George Wallace. He was governor of Alabama four different times. His platform was based on segregation.<sup>2</sup> He wanted Alabama to remain a white man's state. The white voters repeatedly put Wallace in office, even though he was an obvious racist. Mr. Duncan says, "George Wallace was a racist, no bones about it."\* Mr. Duncan says many people did not like Wallace, but they were in the minority in a still racist state. There were few alternatives to Wallace, and most Alabamians had no problem with this. Wallace angered many Alabamians when he promised not to run for the presidential nomination if re-elected, then went ahead and did it anyway. Alabamians were shocked and angered when there was an assassination attempt on Wallace in Maryland. According to Mr. Duncan, many people were disappointed with George Wallace.

The main focus of the interview with Mr. Duncan focused on the racial tensions in Alabama during his lifetime. Alabama had a reputation as a racist state, and it is probably well-deserved. From Martin Luther King Jr. to the Ku Klux Klan, Mr. Duncan lived through it all. Blacks have been discriminated against in this state for a long time and that reputation is hard to change.

When Mr. Duncan was going to school, the blacks were not allowed to attend the same schools as the white kids. The whites were allowed to ride the bus to school, while the blacks had to walk eight to ten miles to their school. Because of the poor income of most blacks, most had to quit school to work.



Education was not the only place segregation took place. In public places such as drug stores or department stores, there would be separate water fountains and bathrooms. There would be signs above each saying either colored or white. Mr. Duncan said that blacks would not knock on a white man's front door, instead he would go around to the back door. Whites who were friendly with blacks were often ridiculed and harassed. The whites felt they were a superior race, that should separate itself from the lower class blacks.

Before the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 1960's blacks in Alabama seemed content with their place in Alabama. They seemed to know their place and very few caused much of a stir about it. They knew they were being treated unfairly, but they did not take any action. This contentment can be attributed to lack of education and no real leaders, because the educated and most intelligent blacks had gone to the north. The blacks were used to sitting in the backs of churches and having the lowest-paying jobs. A lot of this started to change with Rosa Parks.

Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of a public bus in Montgomery like the blacks had always done.<sup>3</sup> Her actions sparked a movement to end the discrimination against blacks all across the south. Blacks began to rally and decided to do something about the unfair treatment they had been getting. The white people in Alabama blamed the north for, as Mr. Duncan said, "agitating the blacks."\* The whites said northerners were interfering with southern differences. Mr. Duncan said that the media, especially national media, also encouraged blacks to

respond and do something. It seemed as if the demonstrations were constantly on television.

Martin Luther King Jr. was seen as the leader of the civil rights movement. He was hated by the white people of Alabama. Mr. Duncan called him "a trouble-maker and agitator."\* He was blamed for many of the changes that began to take place. He led a march from Selma to Montgomery in demonstration against discrimination in voter registration. This caused Congress to pass the Voter's Rights Act which made more than one-hundred thousand blacks in Alabama eligible to vote.<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther King Jr.'s name would then be associated forever with the Civil Rights Movement. When King was assassinated many whites viewed it as a victory, while blacks mourned the loss.

In direct contrast to Martin Luther King Jr. , was the Ku Klux Klan. While everyone did know about the Klan, it was more secretive than many people think. Mr. Duncan said, "When I heard the Klan was going to be around, I got out of there."\* The Klan would harass any black who caused trouble or any whites who were sympathetic towards blacks. The Klan was a violent organization sometimes committing murder. The police were basically helpless against the Klan for several reasons. Many of the police force were in the Klan and other important officials were also in the Klan. Another reason was that people wouldn't come forward against the Klan. The Ku Klux Klan used fear as a weapon. Most whites supported it, even if they were not directly involved.

Despite the Klan, and other forces against blacks, laws began to change for the blacks. It was a gradual change and the blacks were often afraid. Laws now made segregation illegal, but most whites fought it the whole way. They made life very difficult for blacks, because the white man still controlled the state. The whites controlled most local governments also.

The whites greatly resented the blacks new role in society. Mr. Duncan said, "When we saw a black drinking from our fountain, we wanted to hurt him."\* Whites had a hard time dealing with the social revolution which was taking place. Blacks were no longer content to be second class citizens. The blacks had organized and their voice was heard. The whites did all they could to stop it, but while there are often setbacks, blacks and whites are closer to equal today than ever before.

Mr. Duncan has watched Alabama change drastically over his lifetime. Mr. Duncan watched as Goodyear, his employment place, went from only a few black janitors to where blacks are now equal to whites in both opportunity and pay. They now have the same opportunities as whites. The technological advancements have been even greater. Mr. Duncan remembers huddling around battery radios and now he flips a remote control for his cable television. The neighborhoods are different now as well. People aren't as friendly as they used to be and generally don't take care of anyone but themselves. Mr. Duncan feels like there should be more looking out for each other.

Mr. Duncan does feel like kids are better off in many ways today. While the environment is not as good as it used to be, the

technology and opportunities are far superior today. Special government programs assist people today, that people growing up during the early 1900's did not have.

Mr. Duncan is a man that feels fortunate to have had the opportunity to live in Alabama. He is generally proud of Alabama and he resents it when he feels Alabama is unfairly criticized. He is a strong Christian man and a proud southerner. He also holds certain opinions that only southerners have. He has some negative feelings towards blacks and northerners, but he has learned to love everyone and change along with Alabama. W.F. Duncan has led a very long and fulfilling life, and is glad he did right here in Alabama.

<sup>1</sup> Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt, William Warren Rogers, and Robert Ward, Alabama: A History of a Deep South State (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1994)

<sup>2</sup>The World Book Encyclopedia, 1986 ed., s.v. "Alabama," by Jesse M. Richardson and Charles G. Summersell.

<sup>3</sup> Leah Rawls Atkins, Alabama: A History of a Deep South State.

<sup>4</sup>The World Book Encyclopedia, 1986 ed., s.v. "Alabama" by Jesse M. Richardson and Charles G. Summersell.

\* Interview with Mr. W.F. Duncan, Hokes Bluff, Alabama , November 14, 1995.

## Bibliography

Johnson, William Thomas Jr., Richardson, Jesse M., and Summersell, Charles G. "Alabama." The World Book Encyclopedia. 1986.

Atkins, Leah Rawls, et al., aut. Alabama: The History of a Deep South State. University of Alabama Press, 1994.

Hudson, Chad. Personal interview with W.F. Duncan. 14 Nov. 1995.

## Chronology of Events in Alabama History 1920's-1970's

1920's - Ports built in Mobile-increased trade with other counties.

1930's - Great Depression caused financial setbacks for many Alabamians.

1933 - Tennessee Valley Authority created by the federal government.

1939-

1945 - World War II caused agriculture and industrial production to expand in Alabama.

1941 - Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville was established.

1955-

1956 - Martin Luther King Jr. organized Montgomery bus boycott.

1956 - Federal court orders Montgomery to desegregate bus system.

1960 - The George C. Marshall Space Flight Center established in Huntsville.

1963 - George Wallace stood in the doorway at the University of Alabama to prevent blacks from attending.

1963 - Four black children were killed in a Birmingham church.

1964 - Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed.

1965 - Martin Luther King Jr. led a march from Selma to Montgomery to demonstrate the demands of blacks for an end to discrimination in voter registration.

1965 - Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed.

1972 - Governor Wallace was shot in an assassination attempt.



## Chronology of W.F. Duncan's Life

- 1917 - He was born in Etowah County, AL.
- 1938 - He was a member of first graduating class of Hokes Bluff High School in Etowah County, AL.
- 1939 - Hired in at Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. in Gadsden, AL.
- 1945 - Married Lois Taylor of Ozark, AL. in Dale County.
- 1946 - First child born, a son, John W. Duncan.
- 1950 - Second child born, a daughter, Glenda C. Duncan.
- 1979 - Retired from Goodyear with 40 years service.
- 1995 - Celebrated his 50th wedding anniversary.

## List of Questions for Interview

- \* Where and when were you born?
- \* What occupation was your family involved in?
- \* What sort of education did you get?
- \* How did work interfere with your education?
- \* What kind of education did blacks get, compared to whites?
- \* How were blacks accepted in public places?
- \* What were some examples of discrimination against blacks?
- \* How were whites treated that were friendly to blacks?
- \* Were there any integrated churches?
- \* How were blacks treated on the job?
- \* How did blacks react to their place in society?
- \* Why did the blacks change their attitude?
- \* How did white people respond to the blacks protests?
- \* How active was the Klu Klux Klan?
- \* How visible was the Klan?
- \* Did the police do anything about the Klan?
- \* How do you remember Rosa Parks?

- \* Who was Martin Luther King Jr.?
- \* What role did the media play in the Civil Rights Movement?
- \* What things changed as civil rights came into effect?
- \* How did whites react to changing times?
- \* What were Alabamians' views about George Wallace?
- \* Were there any alternatives to George Wallace?
- \* What was the reaction to George Wallace's attempted assassination?
- \* What was the view of politics and what was the dominant party?
- \* How were the different parties viewed?
- \* What changes have you seen in Alabama during your lifetime?
- \* Is Alabama better today than when you grew up?
- \* What was the reaction in Alabama when the U.S. landed on the moon?
- \* What did people in Alabama think about living in the U.S.?
- \* What were Alabamians' attitudes towards the North between the 1920's and 1960's? How has it changed?
- \* How was the Depression felt in Alabama?
- \* How did World War II affect Alabama?

- \* How do you remember WWII?
- \* Was dropping the nuclear bomb a mistake?
- \* Did you know people who served in the war?
- \* How was Vietnam viewed in Alabama?