

## ISP INTERVIEWS

### Fmr. LA Supreme Court Chief Justice Bernette Joshua Johnson

#### *Donaldsonville, Spelman*

1. Tell me a little bit about your background. **You're from Donaldsonville**, right?
2. Isn't that where **America's first Black mayor** was elected? {Pierre Caliste Landry}
3. What was it like to grow up there?
4. ...And you were **valedictorian** of your class?
5. Why did you **decide to go to Spelman College**?
6. Is that **where you got involved with the NAACP**? How did that happen?
7. Eventually, you ended up working as a **community organizer**. Tell me about that.
8. What did you do?
9. Where did you go?
10. Did you like that work?

#### *Summer of 1964*

11. In the **summer of 1964, you worked with the NAACP on school integration**. How did you end up doing that work?
12. What exactly did you do?
13. So **your job was to convince Black parents to send their children to integrate white schools**? What did you tell them?
14. What kinds of **reactions** did you get from parents?
15. You told me on the phone that **"this was the hardest job in the world."** Why?
16. Were any parents **enthusiastic** about this?
17. Were they scared?
18. What were they scared of?
19. So what would you say **when people told you that they were afraid of losing their jobs**?
20. What would you tell them if they were **concerned for their children's safety**?

21. Did you **travel around** for this work?
22. Are there any **particular cases**, any interactions you had with families, that stand out in your mind today?
23. In **1960**, New Orleans had violence in the streets when just four first-grade girls integrated two public schools there. **Did you watch those events on television?**
24. Do you remember what you thought when you saw that?
25. Did you ever have any **doubts, or misgivings**, about your work?
26. Did you worry for any of the families you spoke to, or their kids?
27. Did you ever feel like it was **just too hard**?

### **64 Parishes**

28. **Louisiana integrated its schools parish by parish**, over many years. Describe this legal process to me.
29. Why did it have to happen one parish at a time?
30. And Louisiana has 64 parishes, right? **So are we talking about 64 lawsuits?**
31. **Was this the reason that you decided to go to law school?**

### **LSU decision**

32. Tell me why you decided to go to **LSU law school, instead of someplace** in, say, Boston.
33. And **how long had it been** since a black student had been at LSU law school?
34. So, in effect, you yourself were helping integrate your own law school?

### **Today**

35. Some of Louisiana's parishes never did fully desegregate. **In 2018, 23 of Louisiana's 69 school districts were under a desegregation order.** Do you know how a desegregation order works? Can you explain it to me?
36. **2018. That's 54 years after you were working on this issue, 64 years after Brown.** Why do you think it's so hard to do this?

37. We've spoken to some people who say that, even if this is a good fight, they feel like the **Black community has given up more than they've gained in school integration**—that, by losing their Black schools, they've also lost a place that perpetuates their history and culture. **What would you say to that?**