

Oral History Collection

Joseph L. Atkins

Interviewer: W. Marvin Dulaney Date: September 30, 2011
and Alfred L. Roberts

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Mr. Dulaney: This is September 30, 2011. We're at Inter-city
Community development Corporation and we're
interviewing Doctor Joseph Atkins. Doctor Atkins,
tell us when were you born and when did you come
to Dallas?

Dr. Atkins: I was born in Jefferson, Miriam County, Texas.

Mr. Dulaney: [affirmation]

Dr. Atkins: We lived out on a farm that was owned by my
grandfather. When I was born, I was born, they used
a midwife, and her name was Miss Suzie Bruce. And
growing up there, Miss Suzie always used to refer to
me as one of her babies. [Laughs]

Mr. Dulaney: [laughter]

Mr. Roberts: [laughter]

Dr. Atkins: And, when I got old enough, she would always, she
never called me by my name, and it was always one of

her babies. And I asked my mother, I said "Why does she keep calling me one of her babies?" And my mother explained to me that she had been the midwife when I was born.

Dulaney: Okay, when did you come to Dallas?

Atkins: I came to Dallas...I grew up there in...I spent time there on the farm in Jefferson. We farmed there and I was born during the depression, and of course you know, World War II was going on...started, started. And my father's brother was drafted into the military and my dad left the farm and came to Dallas. And he was planning on bringing his family to Dallas, and, this was in the early forties. And while he was here working, his draft board notified him that if he didn't come back and start farming that they were going to draft him into the military. So he came back, and he farmed until 1948. And, of course, the war had ended, he wanted, you know, everybody was leaving the rural areas going to the cities looking for work. So, he came to Dallas and he got a job working at a plumbing company working as the helper. And from that job, my daddy learned plumbing and he got his license. Eventually, he became a master plumber and had his own business. And, he brought

his family to Dallas in 1950. This is when we left the farm and moved to Dallas.

Dulaney: Tell us more about your family. Your mother and father. We already know that your father became a plumber, but he was a farmer before that.

Atkins: Yes...right. [Laughs] When we lived on the farm...I guess it was...

Dulaney: What were their names, by the way?

Atkins: My mother was Mabel Edna Atkins and he was Willie Atkins. They called him Bill. And, living there on the farm, we raised practically everything. I recall, that we'd have a garden. Then, we'd have... they'd plant cotton and corn and those kinds of things. And, then, my mother used to can the food and then they would have what they called the hog killing time. And, then the county agent, I believe they call it, would come out and the people in the community would all come and they would have this Killing of the hog - even show them how to cut up the hog and all that. [Pauses] How to preserve the meat...we had a smokehouse. And, I remember then, putting the meat in the smokehouse. At that time, we didn't have all the modern facilities we have now like, electric and running water, indoor plumbing,

all those kinds of things. We got those, though, before we left.

Dulaney: Hmm-mmm...

Atkins: I remember them modern facilities we had. I think it was Roosevelt had created, the, some kind of rule, cooperative...who brought...

Dulaney: The Rural Electrification Corporation.

Atkins: Yes sir, and that brought that electrical. I remember that coming through. [Laughs] And we getting the electricity. And, of course once we got that the put a pumping wheel, and we had running water. And, and, so forth, I remember those days. But when we came to Dallas, about when we came to Dallas, the houses...There was a shortage of housing here.

Dulaney: [Non-verbally agrees] Uh-hmmm.

Atkins: And, but when we came to Dallas, we moved to a brand new apartment. A place called Southern Terrace off of Apache street. There were just building these apartments. And at the same time, Blacks were moving into South Dallas and whites were mving out. And, I remember, as the Whites were moving from South Dallas, there were some bombings. One evening, we were eating and a bomb... Some developer had built

some houses out on Apache Street. And, this house was purchased by one of the local doctors. His name was Dr. Shelton. But, Dr. Shelton had not moved into that house and they blew it up. And, then, I recall several weeks later there was a grocery store down on, at this time it's Malcom X now, but it was called Oakland Avenue. That was a...the grocery store was owned by Bill Smith. And, they blew up Mr. Smith;s grocery store. And of course there were other people they bombed. Living there in Southern Terrace, I became a paper boy. [Laughs] I threw papers the four years I was in high school. And, we had professional people that lived at the apartment complex. School teachers, preachers, doctors, lawyers and so forth. And, at the same time, housing had been a problem in Dallas...they opened up...Hamilton park was built. And, I recall, everyone was leaving Southern Terrace and moving out to Hamilton Park, which was at the northern area of town. So, my people didn't go there. They bought a house in South Dallas. [Chuckles] But, those were some of the things that I recall back in that period of time.

Dulaney: Dr. Atkins, let me ask you to do something.

So you're in Dallas, South...tell us about your

education. When and where did you start?

Atkins: Okay, I started my schooling in the community where I grew up -- down in Jefferson elementary school I started there. There was a school there in my community where we walked to...was, I guess, around the first and second grade. It was a two room school. And during that time when I started school, in Texas I think they were beginning to combine these small schools, throughout the state into... what they, they called it consolidation. And they built a school, they called it Victory. And, so we were bussed by a white school to Victory [laughs]. And, I do recall that my parents talking about the fact that we needed to go to the white school. That was not good, I mean, that was not, at that time, they wouldn't recognize that. And, blacks going through as students. So, I stayed there until we came to Dallas. When we came to Dallas, I entered into 9th grade at Lincoln High School. And while I was at Lincoln, it was a happy experience. I enjoyed my high school years. I was a member of the Student Council, National Honors Society. I learned photography and typing. Those two things, [chuckles] especially typing, helped me throughout my career

that I learned at Lincoln.

Dulaney: What was it like growing up in Dallas?

Atkins: Growing up in Dallas... Of course, Dallas was a big segregated city. The theatres were segregated. You'd go downtown, you'd have to sit up in the balcony...

Dulaney: What theaters did you go to by the way?

Atkins: Basically, it was the Majestic. There was another theater called the Melbourne. And during that time the Melbourne just completely would not admit us period. But they did decide, someone had complained about them, and they decided to let us go one, I think, one night out of a week. And, of course that was one of the...when they made that decision, I was in high school. I was a member of (?) Baptist church and our pastor active in the NAACP. And he lead a march down before the Melbourne Theater for them to open it up at all times and not just let us have to come, you know, one night...cause we needed to march.

Dulaney: Who was your pastor?

Atkins: C.A.W. Clark, Reverend C.A.W. Clark, right...

Dulaney: Okay. Alright, did he get you involved in the NAACP youth council? Or did you...When did you get involved in the NAACP? Let me put that in the form

of a question.

Atkins: [chuckles] I got involved in the NAACP right after we came to Dallas. We...I got involved through Mrs. Juanita Kreft (?), who was the youth council advisor. And, by the way, my parents were active also in the NAACP. And, it was...The NAACP operated a lot through the churches. And they, you know, they always emphasized, join the NAACP, going to the meetings and those kinds of things. So, when I got, I signed up the youth council and got involved with Mrs. Juanita Kreft and of course...With Mrs. Kreft, there was a lot of activities going on with the youth council. She taught us about the... made us more sensitive, you know, about our rights, about wanting to change the law. And those kinds of things. I traveled all over the country with Mrs. Kreft. As a young person, growing up, that was, you know, that was exciting [laughs] to, you know, she would take us to various places.

Dulaney: Where did she take you? Give us some examples of some places she took you?

Atkins: Washington, D.C.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: All right. We went to Washington, D.C.. I'll never

forget it. We drove. Let's see: Mrs. Kreft, myself, Miss Lula White from Houston, and then there was another lady, I can't think of her name, out of Houston.

Dulaney: Miss Christie Adair.

Atkins: Miss Adair. [Laughter]

Dulaney: [Laughter]

Atkins: You got it! Miss Adair, right!

Dulaney: [Laughter]

Atkins: [Laughter] We drove, and we drove through the, we took the Southern route. And, I never will forget it. I think our first stop was in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. And they wouldn't let us stay in the hotels, so we stayed with families. Mrs. Kreft knew people along the route. And we stopped in Tuscaloosa and spent the night and then we left Tuscaloosa and went on into Atlanta. And, we spent a night in Atlanta. We sort of toured Atlanta while we were there. And on leaving Atlanta, we was driving and there was Stone Mountain. We stopped at Stone Mountain and I hopped out of the car, to go into, we saw a souvenir shop. And, I didn't see the sign that said: "No Colored Allowed." [Chuckles]

Dulaney: [Snickers]

Atkins: I ran in and they was shooin' me to get out, and Mrs. Kreft said, "Come on, come one back, come one back!" [Chuckles] And I never will forget that experience on Stone Mountain. I think she tells the story about the...

Dulaney: Clans...

Atkins: ...the clans that gathered and so forth. So we left that and we went on to, I think, North Carolina, and we spent a night in North Carolina. We stayed at a little hotel. There was a black hotel and, of course, they had a community bathroom. And, I never will forget it. I had an uncle, my mother's brother, who served in the Korean Conflict. While he was over there, he bought me a camera. I had used that camera to take pictures and so forth. I left that camera on my bed at this hotel. I was in the community bathroom taking a shower and when I came back someone took my camera. [Laughs] And, I never will forget that experience. And we left there, but we stopped at all the historical sites and so forth.

Dulaney: [Agrees]

Atkins: We got to Washington, D.C. This is my first time going to Washington, D.C. And we stayed with a family in Washington, D.C. And one of the things, I guess,

kind of a, I guess you call it a cultural experience, was how we lived in Dallas. Never locked our doors... My mother had a washing machine, but we had a clothes line outside. We had to hang our clothes outside. Nobody, we never locked our doors, nobody bothered. But when we got to Washington that night, where we stayed, they told us to make sure you locked the car. Take all your things except the car...so... [Laughs] So, that was part of the experience. But we spent time there in Washington. We visited the representatives then, the Congress and so forth, who were all white at the time.

Dulaney: [Agrees]

Atkins: But they were very nice and cordial to us and I remember them taking us to the dining room there. One of the House of Representatives, I think, we ate all...they had feed us and so forth.

Dulaney: Who did you see? Who did y'all visit?

Atkins: Ralph Yarborough.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: Uh-huh, right, Ralph Yarborough. He was a senator at that time.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: And we visited...we went by, one of the

Representatives, I've forgotten his name, from Dallas. But I don't think we got a chance to see him, but we got a chance to talk to one of his aides.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: And then Lyndon Johnson, he was there too, but we didn't a chance to see him. But, it was Ralph Yarborough who was the one who...and he was one of the more liberal Senators.

Dulaney: Liberal Democrat, right?

Atkins: Yes sir. Right, right, uh-huh...

Dulaney: What else was the highlights of that particular trip?

Atkins: Was that a...Did we go to a convention at the end of that trip? It seemed like we went to the National NAACP convention. I believe that's where we ended up -- at the National NAACP convention. Was that in New Jersey or New York?

Dulaney: I don't know in that particular year. But there was one here in '54...

Atkins: Yes...

Dulaney: That you could talk about. Did you participate in that?

Atkins: Yes, sir. I did participate in that. The Supreme Court handed down that May 17th decision. And one month later the National NAACP convention was held

in Dallas. And, of course, being a member of the youth council we all participated. I got pictures now of Thurgood Marshall, Walter White, who was the executive secretary... all of the you know, leading people at the national level who I had an opportunity to meet here in Dallas. And, we met in churches over in North Dallas. What we called North Dallas, its now Uptown. They met at my church Good Street, St. John, and maybe New Hope. And then that was...there was several churches over there. And the YMCA...

Dulaney: YMCA, right...

Atkins: They had designated a place for the youth to meet and that's where we met most of the time. At one of the churches and so forth...

Dulaney: What did y'all do at your meetings and at the 54th convention? What did the youth do that their meetings, at the 54th convention, at the 54th convention, yes?

Atkins: Basically, I think what I recall now, they were briefing us and telling us about the impact...what to expect out of that ruling that the Supreme Court had handed down.

Dulaney: Okay...

Atkins: A lot of emphasis on that. Then, there was, I recall, there was an issue with the General in the...The black general, what was his name, Benjamin...what was his name, the black general...

Dulaney: Davis, Benjamin O. Davis.

Atkins: Benjamin O. Davis. Right, there was an issue with him. He was supposed to come to Dallas. Some group here was going to give him some kind of award. We didn't want him to come. We wanted him to turn this award down, because of the fact that they would not open up, you know, places for us to attend. And that was an issue. And He decided not to come...

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: He wasn't coming here to the convention. He was coming here to accept that award, but he turned that down. I think later on, they were going to bring him here. And, we still protested it... [Laughs]

Dulaney: [Laughs]

Atkins: And he didn't come... I remember that, I remember that. That was one of the things we talked about. As I can recall, everything was centered around, you know, that ruling...

Dulaney: Sure.

Atkins: From that, from that Court, it's basically what I

can remember at this point. Umm-hmmm.

Dulaney: Umm-hmmm. They brought in Ross Bunch and... For the big mass meeting.

Atkins: Yes, sir...Ross bunch was here for the big mass meeting.

Dulaney: Yes, and did you go to that?

Atkins: Yes, sir. What was it 'Explore the Koran (?), I believe?

Dulaney: Yes...

Atkins: Yes, right, I did attend that.

Dulaney: Alright, okay. Let's go back to education and we'll come back to the NAACP, and what the youth council did, and as well as what you did with the NAACP after you became a professional. You graduated from Lincoln in 1955.

Atkins: Four...

Dulaney: 1954, okay. And, you went to...

Atkins: I went to Philander Smith.

Dulaney: Philander Smith, Pine Bluff...No...

Atkins: Little Rock...Yes...

Dulaney: Little Rock...

Atkins: Right, uh-huh, I spent one year (?) over there.

Dulaney: What made you decide to go to the University of North Texas? And then we can ask you, just give me the answer, just go into Atkins vs. Matthews and the whole case.

Atkins: Okay... Okay well, I always recalled that, I had been to North Texas while I was in high school. Mrs. Kreft had took us to, to Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, and I recall us touring that campus and, I, and I always thought, it's a beautiful campus. I never will forget it. And, close to Dallas, and I always, you know, we can't go there...And I always had a feeling, hmm, you know. Once the...After I heard about the Supreme Court ruling, I was saying, hmm, that school is close to home. Why don't I try and go up there? [Laughs] I spent a year at Philanders Smith and I came home for the summer. I decided if I could see if I could transfer into that school. And, in June, I think it was around June 13th. My mother, Mrs. Kreft, and myself we went up on the campus. I never will forget it. We drove to Denton. Drove down to the Administration building. And, it was a tree lined walk up to the Administration building. And, while we were going up the walk, they were black men who were ground keepers, taking care of the grounds.

And they noticed us, and they spoke to us, and we spoke back. I'm sure they wandered... [Laughs] I don't think their looking, probably said, "I don't think...they're not looking for a job so..." [Laughs]

Dulaney: [Laughter]

Atkins: We went on in to the Administrative office, went to the registrar's office. And the young lady who was at the counter asked us, "Can I help y'all?" I told her that I was there...That I wanted to pick up an application to transfer into the school. And, she turned around and said, "I'll be back," and she went into back into one of the offices. And, a fellow came out and introduced himself and we had a little chat. And then, you know, we explained to him why we were there. And he suggested that, "you know what, I think y'all need to talk to the registrar." So he took us to a little conference room and then, the registrar came in. His name was Dr. Dickie. And, he came and we had a little chat. And we told him our purpose and so forth. And he said, "Well, I tell you what. I think I need to call the vice-president who was in charge. I think his name was Dr. Sampley. And, so he went and got Dr. Sampley. They both came

back and we had a long chat. He was very cordial and so forth. And, they gave us all the history about the, about North Texas. They were aware of the Supreme Court's ruling. They were planning on admitting blacks. And it was kind of in a reverse order. Transferring in, starting at the the senior level and so forth...no timeline, there was no timeline there...

Dulaney: Umm-hmmm...

Atkins: The year before they had admitted A. Tennyson Miller into a doctoral program. And, they talked about that. And the emphasis was: we'd like to do this voluntarily, on our own, we don't want anybody to, you know, force us. We don't want a test case. It was the term that they used. And, so they, after they completed their talk, we insisted again, could you please give us an application. And they finally gave us the application. And, once we got the application, we left. I came home and completed it and sent it back. And, of course, I had Philander Smith to send my transcript over there. I received a letter from Dr. Sampley stating that they had, that they were going to deny my application because of my race and color.

Dulaney: Umm-hmmm...

Atkins: And once I got that application, we took it to NAACP attorney, U. Simpson Tate...who was the regional...NAACP had a regional office in Dallas and he was the attorney assigned to that office. And, of course, he took the matter. And, my father had to...At that time, they considered me a minor. I was nineteen years old, you had to be twenty-one, so they had to file it on my behalf. And, they, he drew up the papers and filed the suit in the district court.

Dulaney: Umm-hmmm...

Atkins: And, I think it was in August the suit was filed and the attorney asked for a restraining order for them to admit me in September. And, of course, in the meantime, Texas Western out in El Paso had opened up. Now, there was a suit filed against that school out there. And, of course, before the hearing they went ahead and opened it up. And Mr. Tate told me about that so, and said we've asked for a temporary order, but you might consider going out there in case they don't let you go to North Texas, and you don't go back to Philander Smith. Anyway, I went ahead and made an application out there and got

accepted. However, the case came up in Tyler. The judge moved around at that time.

Dulaney: Ummm-hmmm..

Atkins: He was from Sherman, but he was having a hearing over in Tyler. So we went to Tyler for the hearing. And, the administrators were there: Dr. Matthews, and Sampley, and so forth. And, Mr. Tate, the one representing me. I think the school was arguing the fact, as I recall, about the fact that they were overcrowded, and the legislature was going to give them some money and they needed to build some new dormitories. And, all that kind of stuff.

Dulaney: [Laughs]

Atkins: That was...they didn't argue about the law. You know, they took the stance that...That they was so crowded that they couldn't take on anybody. If they admitted me, what, they would have to admit, what, three-four other hundred African Americans. And, so forth, so anyway, at the end of the presentation, the judge decided, well he needed more information. He said, well... He reset the hearing, for December, December, up in Sherman. So, in the meantime, I went on out to El Paso. And, the hearing came up in Sherman, in December. I didn't have to go to the

hearing, because they said it was a case appeal. Of course, I do know at the hearing the judge brought up the fact that what they argued about, the fact about being overcrowded. And, He noted that at the same time they admitted further whites, so he overruled. And opened up the school for me and any other African American that very next semester. So, I elected to stay at Texas Western, which was where I was at that time. It was where I got my degree. And, I mean, I had got comfortable out there and I didn't want to go. [Laughs]

Dulaney: [Laughs]

Atkins: ...through another process. So I stayed out there and got my degree. But, now, there was one person I understand who entered North Texas that second semester, which was 1956 in January. And her name was Cephus, Miss Cephus. I understand she was a transfer from out of Fort Worth.

Dulaney: Okay, when you finished UTEP, well Texas Western, what did you do? What was your first job?

Atkins: When I...While I was at UTEP, I got a real estate license through the school. And, I sold real estate for a while. And, after I graduated I came home and I applied for a job in Dallas. They were advertising

for an abstractor down at the Courthouse. And, I went down to apply for that position. And, they told me they were hiring janitors, down on the bottom or something. [Laughs] That was the kind of comment I got, you know. So, but anyway, they didn't, they didn't, they didn't give me the job. And, I worked with my father until...Oh, by the way, I was out of school about, I think about a month or two months and I received my grievance. From the, uh, from my draft board... [Laughs]

Dulaney: [Laughs]

Atkins: I had been deferred when I was in college. So I got my grievance. During that period of time, I worked with my father, he had his own business, until I went into the military. I got drafted into the military. I spent two and half years in the military, the army. I got drafted for two years, but I got extended. I was drafted under President Eisenhower. And, President Kennedy got elected while I was in the military. And of course, I almost had an opportunity to participate in his parade. My unit, they had me stationed in a fort in Maryland when they had his big inauguration and so forth. The Berlin, remember, that was when Prussia built the

Berlin wall. I got, we got, what was called the Kennedy extension. And, I spent six months extra in the military.

Dulaney: Okay, what did you do after you got out of the military?

Atkins: After I got out of the military, I came home and got a job in corporate America. I worked at Collins Radio for a year. [Clears throat] They hired me...they put me on a night shift at Collins. I would go in at four and get off, I think, around 11 at night. I had good job, I liked my job, but at the time, young man...[chuckles]...working at night. And, so forth, so I left Collins and went to work for Western Union as one of the first blacks that Western Union had hired to...they trained me to transmit the, you know, their messages or whatever, here in Dallas. And, I worked for them for a while. I didn't work for them quite a year. I went and applied for a job teaching. I went into teaching. And, I taught school for about ten years in Dallas at James Madison High School. I started out at James Madison. I started in 1963 at James Madison and stayed there until 1971. That's when the TASBY(?) case became implemented. [Clears throat] Madison was a...one of the high

schools they discontinued and they sent me over to North Dallas High School; where I stayed until I left teaching.

Dulaney: North Dallas High School is a white high school.

Atkins: Yes, right, at that time [Clears throat] they were having a lot of problems in North Dallas and the faculty, up until that point, had been almost all white. And, when I went over, the faculty was about 1/3 African American, 1/3 Hispanic, and 1/3 White. I think they moved a lot of people out of that high school that year and moved in a new principal. I guess they wanted a new, attitude, I guess whatever you call it, there. So... I taught English and Journalism.

Dulaney: Where those your majors?

Atkins: Uh-huh... And they wanted a new journalism. I was in charge of the newspaper, and so forth. And by the way, that first year we won the UIL award in Journalism.

Dulaney: Better tell people what the UIL is... the University Interscholastic League...

Atkins: Interscholastic League...right...

Dulaney: Again, we're talking to the third person in the room...

Atkins: [Laughs]

Dulaney: ...Who's going to be looking at this twenty years from now. Okay?

Atkins: [Laughs] Okay.

Dulaney: And they won't know what the UIL is...

Atkins: [Laughs]... oh, thank you... Yes, sir.

Dulaney: Okay, when you came back to Dallas to work from 1963 to 1971, what was taking place in the Civil Rights movement here? And, were you participating in it?

Atkins: I was always active in the NAACP.

Dulaney: Uh-hmmm...

Atkins: At that time, the attitude of public employees, school teachers, and so forth, that if they participated in the NAACP, they'd fire you. I never subscribed to that philosophy.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: And, I participated with them. And, now, NAACP basically, was fighting the legal part of the Civil Rights, like housing and education.

Dulaney: Sure.

Atkins: At the time, we had the poll tax. That was, that was a big issue. Voting rights and all that is basically what the NAACP was involved in. There was not a lot of protests in Dallas, like throughout the South.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: And, basically Dallas did not have a college here, I mean for African Americans. We had SMU, but not a college for you and I. Most of the people here were coming from the rural areas, East Texas and Louisiana for work. A lot of them were in domestic work. TI was hiring a lot of people at that time, and so forth. There was just not a lot of active, active, activities going on in these places. And, I think what the leaders in Dallas would do, they kind of stayed ahead. They were monitoring what was going on in the rest of the country. Of course, the state fair had, I think they had opened up at that time... in 1963, right. But, I remember the, what is it, the Citizen's Council was one of the ruling... [Laughs] It was not a government by the...but they kind of ruled Dallas at that time. And they would call the shots.

Dulaney: What was the citizen's council? So, who was on it?

Atkins: I understand it was all of the corporate "execs" [executives] that was on the citizen's council. The reason, about the history of it, it was organized by R.L. Thornton, who was a mayor here. He brought all the corporate "execs" together. And said he wanted

an organization and called them the Yes or No Men. When he'd say yes, they'd say yes or they'd say no. And, they called the shots. And, of course, with the bus boycotts going on in Montgomery, and those kinds of things, he decided...when they decided, we need to integrate the public facilities. He called that group, _____. This is what we're going to do and that's what happened. And, he said, the term he used was, it's good business, to de-segregate and integrate. And, that's what happened, it was not pushed, or brought on by the community itself.

Dulaney: Given, that you had been in the Youth council and y'all had been very active, say picketing the state fair, some of the downtown theatres...Were there any picketing that took place in the 1960s that you know about? That the NAACP or any other groups did?

Atkins: The NAACP did not do a lot of picketing. Now, there were a lot of other group here doing some picketing. Some of the OSCLC, some of those groups were picketing the downtown.

Dulaney: Okay...

Atkins: It was a restaurant...there was a lot of picketing there. That was the only picketing I recall. Maybe some of theatres, they'd have a little picketing

every now and then, but there was just not a lot of pressure in Dallas like other places in the country, as I recall.

Dulaney: Okay. You said you left your classroom eventually, what did you start doing?

Atkins: When I left the classroom and went to work for the Texas State Teacher's Association.

Dulaney: Uh-huh...

Atkins: And, at that time, TSTA was an organization of administrators and teachers. And, I was, I guess, you call an organizer, with the TSTA. They...they organization established what they called regional offices all over the state. And, I worked out of the Arlington office, at that time, and we covered a large territory. Our work at that time was...there was only one teacher organization in Texas, and that was Texas State Teacher Association. I recall, during one legislature session, some bills I saw from the TSTA headquarters, they signed off on them. [Laughs] Whatever they said that basically was the law. Of course, there was a lot of discord in the organization itself, among the teachers and the administrators. The teachers felt like they didn't have the representation that they wanted, needed.

The organization was actually dominated at that time by administrators. So we were affiliated with the National Education Association, the NEA. The NEA had put into their constitution, any of their affiliates had to have certain standards and one of those standards was proportionate representation. So that was the big battle in Texas with the TSTA organization. We were voting and so forth, and finally the teachers outvoted the administrators, and they got proportionate representation. And, once they got proportionate representation that meant that teachers dominated the organization rather than administrators. So, administrators left the organization, basically, after they mandated, you know, that constitution of the NEA, because they didn't have the control that they wanted. And they later moved me from the Arlington office into the Dallas classroom teacher's office where I served. And, basically, I worked with Dallas teachers; lobbying the legislature, lobbying the school district. Grievances, dealing with their grievances, and so forth...One of the philosophies of the administration of DISD at that time when I moved in, was the fact that, the association...What you need

to do is come up with a system where you keep the association's employees, like myself, all tied up in grievances. So, they came up with a long drawn up grievance process, and let me tell you, it worked for the district. [Laughs]

Dulaney: [Laughs]... Let's go back to your teaching from 1963 to 1971. Where there any efforts made to desegregate the schools between 1963 to 1971. You know, you bringing up the TASBY case, as sort of a benchmark of what happens in the school district. So what's happening between 1963-1971?

Atkins: With the desegregation of the schools?

Dulaney: Yes...

Atkins: Uh...

Dulaney: As far as what you saw...

Atkins: Basically there was, while I was at Madison, I think they sent over one white teacher and we had an assistant principal who was white. And there was just really no mixture, we didn't have no students at all.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: There was just a few teachers and administrators that they could send over, kind of mix it up a little bit. But, with students, it was not... And I guess,

you know, we think about this in terms of, how it impacted in the African American community. I was talking to a fellow who grew up in Oak Cliff. He's Anglo. And he was telling me that he had moved. He had attended, on growing up, he had attended eight different schools. He lived in Oak Cliff and he said, "I would be at a school, then all of a sudden they would designate this school for blacks."

Dulaney: Uh-hmmm...

Atkins: And tell us we'd have to go, you know, to another school. So, the district helped maintain, as far as I'm concerned segregation, by turning schools over to blacks, and running the whites off, rather than saying, you know, anybody can attend these schools.

Dulaney: Uh-hmmm...

Atkins: And actually, there was no real desegregation here in Dallas until the TASBY case.

Dulaney: TASBY case...

Atkins: And the jury said the races had to be 75/25. That was for the faculty.

Dulaney: Uh-hmmm...

Atkins: And, of course, the whites boycotted the...the black schools they wouldn't attend. And it was kind of like a big bus with a one way process of bussing.

Dulaney: Why did you decide to start working with the Texas State Teacher's Association?

Atkins: Well, at that time, they offered me...they the ones that invited me to come work for them. And, at that, you know, I was young, and when your young, you know, you go as they say, going up the ladder. [Laughs] And, I was active in the association, by the way, I had been active in the association as a teacher with Classroom Teachers of Dallas... I had been active addressing concerns, you know, that they had as teachers and so forth. So they, I guess, took note of me and asked me to apply, which I did.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: And, they gave me the job.

Dulaney: Okay. You mentioned my article and one of things that I say is that there's a decline in the NAACP in Dallas, starting in the 1960s. What happened to the NAACP in your observations? Since you were a member consistently, and I ran across several things that were happening in the 1980s and 1990s, the fight over leadership with Don Robinson and Curtis Watkins, and several other people who were in constant battle with each other, versus dealing with some of the issues we were facing in the community.

So in your estimation, what happened to the NAACP in Dallas?

Atkins: I think it was back in the...was it the 1960s when the NAACP...had...they decided to come up with multiple branches. We had multiple branches here for a while.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: And, then, it was in the sixties or the early seventies when we went back to one, one major branch.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: I remember, it seems like it was H. Redd James, who brought us all back together under his leadership. And, NAACP, had been kind of controlled by a lot of the ministers that controlled the organization. And, that control had moved away from the churches to, I guess you say, lay people in the community.

Dulaney: Uh-hmmm...

Atkins: And, of course, you're right, there was a lot of fights. The branch...they're actually controlled by the National office. They've got what they call an article, I forget, article where you can file a complaint against another member, one of the officers. And, for some reason or another, a person would get elected, and as soon as her was elected,

somebody would file some kind of complaint against that individual. And they would send down investigators, and they would come down and investigate. They'd make a determination, and because of the determination, they would remove, remove the leaders. And that was the case with Don...

Dulaney: Robinson...

Atkins: Uh-hmm, Don Robinson. I remember Ted Watkins. They filed on of those complaints against him. Now, Ted was doing some things, I thought, locally in the community that were good. But, they didn't see it that way. And, if you violated their policy, or didn't get their permission to do something...You always had to get permission. They always had to know what was going on. They always...Well, a lot of them just decide you know, were local we can just do this on our own. And, they had a way of pulling you in. I remember Charlie ___ Price. He was very active in Lee Alcorn's administration. And Lee was cited, someone filed a complaint against Lee. Oh Lee made a...[chuckles] During an election, who was the candidate that, Lee was ousted on the radio station being interviewed. And, word had come down that: Oh, he became and independent senator. He was going to

be a vice president candidate. He was Jewish. What was his name?

Dulaney: Ummm..

Atkins: Very conservative, and that he was going to be on the ticket [chuckles] and Lee, you know, made some remarks that were not positive about the individual. And, the national office removed him from office, but they reinstated him. Later on, Lee got into trouble and somebody filed a complaint against him and they removed, they removed him.

Dulaney: Were you talking about Joe Lieberman?

Atkins: Lieberman, right! That's the one. Yes sir. [Chuckles]
I never will forget that...

Dulaney: Yeah...

Atkins: That was...

Dulaney: Okay. Dr. Roberts do you have any questions?

Roberts: Yes, [clears throat] the attorney general John Benn Shepard, was attempting to outlaw the NAACP in Texas. And, he came to Texas Western...what was the name again?

Atkins: Texas Western...

Roberts: Okay, Texas Western...

Atkins: Uh-hmmm...

Roberts: John Ben Shepard tried to intimidate you and he went

into the Dean's office and requested to see you and so forth. The dean did not send for you and asked them to leave. Do you have any recollection of that?

Atkins: Oh, yes sir! [Laughs]

Roberts: Okay. [Laughs]

Atkins: Yes, as you pointed out, he was trying to outlaw the NAACP and he was going around intimidating those who had the NAACP, had represented. So, they came to El Paso and came on campus and talked to the dean. And, the dean would not permit them, would not make me available to see them on campus.

Roberts: Uh-hmmm...

Atkins: And, of course, then they went to the law enforcement in El Paso, and they would not cooperate with them either. Well, the dean called me in and asked me if I wanted to talk to him, and I told him no. And, he said [chuckles], well we will not permit them to bother you. And, they did call me up on the telephone, when I was living, where I was living in the city. And, of course, I mean, I didn't talk to them at all, no.

Roberts: In that same line, did you receive any kind of intimidation, calls, [editor: and] threats on your life, when you filed...did your parents go through

any situations like that as a result of being a plaintiff against North Texas?

Atkins: No, not that I recall. We had no, there was no complaints at all that I can recall of...or my family, period. [Gestures head no]

Roberts: Okay, the next question, is in the real estate area. I know there are two separate, I know one was called the Realtor's Association...

Atkins: Realtor's [Gestures head yes]...

Roberts: Can you comment on how the two evolved and who was the first presidents were of the black organization?

Atkins: In the real estate world, they were, you know, they were segregated. So what happened is, in reading the history of the Realtors-- that was the black organization. They formed...M.S.U. Smith, by the way, was one of the leading blacks...of African American citizens in Dallas. And I think 13 or 14 of them got together, in Florida, back in the late 1940s. And, they saw the need for blacks to come together, to have some sort of organization. And they put together what they call NAREB-- National Association of Real Estate Brokers-- and that was the black organization. And, of course the local became DAREB-- Dallas Association of Real Estate

Brokers. Where ever you were, you would put that in there...And, then, in Dallas now, they did have access to the Realtor's group, and of course, eventually, because of the MLS, what we call multiple listing services, where you'd put all your listings where everybody would have access to them, and so forth. They finally, they finally opened up and gave them access to that service. Now, I lived in, when I was in El Paso, I became a realtor in El Paso, we had access to that group out there, they did not discriminate like they did back in Dallas. And, let me point out to you that...about El Paso. El Paso was more of a western type city. It's not a hardcore southern city, like Dallas. In El Paso, when I got there the schools were integrated, the public school system. They just did away with the black schools. [Laughs] And admitted everybody... [Gestures with hands]

They didn't enforce the laws like they did back in Dallas. You know, the segregation laws. Of course, there were some places out there they didn't want us to, to... like the theatres were segregated. And, they had the military there. At that time we had Fort Bliss and Biggs Air Force base-- all that

was mostly military. And, of course, they wanted that business. So, it was not hardcore like it was back here. I participated in the desegregation of the theatres in El Paso as a student. Oh, and by the way, I'm going to put this in, I participated in the election of the first Hispanic mayor of El Paso, Raymond Telles. Yeah, desegregation of the theaters was part of his election and President Kennedy appointed him ambassador to Mexico.

Another thing I want to tell you about, Texas Western too, is...my big disappointment was when I got out there, I thought I was going to be able to stay on campus. [Laughs] And, when I got there, they called me into the office and told me that they had made arrangements for me to live out in the city. [Laughs]

Roberts: [Laughter]

Atkins: Now, everything else was open, but they would not let us live on campus. And, I understand, it was some kind of thing that was going on throughout, as they opened up. The cafeterias was open, all the...oh, by the way, during Rush Week out there, I was invited to join a fraternity. Then, I was later told, that the graduate chapter had told them they

would throw them off campus if they took me in.

[Laughs]

Roberts: [Laughter]

Atkins: And, that first week of orientation, there was one group out there I have to give credit too, it was called the ____ Baptist Student Association, which I joined. And, they had a retreat up in the mountains, in White Rock, New Mexico. We all went up to White Rock and stayed in the tents together, ate together and so forth. But, when we came back, they didn't want us in the dormitories.

Roberts: And, one last question, in your wildest dreams, you probably never thought that the University of North Texas would invite you back to the campus to honor you and make you, give you an honorary degree, is that true?

Atkins: That's true. Right, I mean, I was sur...well...

Roberts: And how did it make you feel to receive that honor?

Atkins: Let me...they had a very progressive president up at UNT at the time that was back in 2005 when they gave me that degree. Progressive president, and they had what they called the Office of Diversity, and the head of that office was an African American. And, she was upbeat, very progressive. She made sure that

our presence was known. By bringing in speakers, African American speakers, and very active on campus and taking care of those concerns of African Americans, and all the other students too. Cassandra, anyway, I think she was the motivating force with the president. They wanted to do a fifty year recognition of the desegregation of the university, and were proud of their accomplishments. And, one of the things that they decided would be...was to give me that degree. And, I mean I was, when I got the call I was shocked [Laughs] but, it shows, it just shows the progress over the years...uh-hmmm, right.

Dulaney: Mrs. Kraft, did you continue to work with Mrs. Kraft or have a relationship with her after you came back from the army?

Atkins: Yes, I did.

Dulaney: What was...what did y'all do?

Atkins: After, I started the, came back... Let's see, when I worked for Mrs. Kraft, I helped Mrs. Kraft get elected to the city council.

Dulaney: Okay, alright...

Atkins: You know, and I would go with her and her Youth Council drive them different places and so forth,

whenever she would need me, and so forth. She was...the NAACP was her life. [Laughs] She spent most of her life promoting that organization, and promoting its cause and so forth. And, I did assist, you know, during that process.

Dulaney: You, of course, were quoted several times, that Mrs. Kraft probably had more impact on you in who you are, than anybody.

Atkins: Probably so, yes sir.

Dulaney: Talk about that. What kind of impact did she have on you?

Atkins: Well, participating in the Youth Council. During the travels, dealing with the various issues we dealt with. We dealt with the civil rights issues, we dealt with the political issues. I met a lot of people who were more liberal, I guess you might say, in their thinking. And, all this kind of just set my...molded me in the things I was interested in for life. I recall that the poll tax. We used to _____ the poll tax. [Laughs] That was one...I guess that got me interested in politics and so forth. The... you know when you're growing up, little organizations like that, there's a lot of little social life that goes along with it, all that kind of thing. All that had

an impact on me.

Dulaney: Okay, alright. Dr. Atkins anything you want to add?
I'm going to, I'm going to take you off the stand
now. [Laughs]

Atkins: Well, I guess, the things that I can add is, during
that period of time, one of the things that I regret
is that fact that the state of Texas didn't put forth
any kind of effort to, to plan, you know, and try
to, you know, make these things work. They were
fighting against the Supremes Court's ruling.
They... I'd never forget it. When I was in high
school, when that ruling came down, the principal at
the school over in Lincoln, turned on the PA system
and we could listen in on the news commentator's
talk about the ruling, and the teachers were
explaining to us what it meant and telling us the
fact that y'all are free and you can do this and so
forth. Everybody was just, you know, jubilant about
the ruling at high school. And then I went home at
night, and we had a television, and these southern
governor's was calling saying never and... [Laughs]
Calling for the impeachment of the chief justice.
Talking about words like interposition and
intermarriage, and bringing up all this negative

stuff and not, you know, being supportive of the change. And, that we had to fight. I mean, we fought that for a long time because a long time ago in the State of Texas came up with efforts to help people implement that process.

Dulaney: Yeah...

Atkins: And I think it could have been much easier, and wouldn't have caused any frustration, all the problems that we had, had the state done that, you know. They used our tax money to fight us. And that was one of the things that I think that would just...it just didn't make sense to me.

Dulaney: Okay, two final questions. I told you I was going to stop but I want to find out two things that came to mind. One: would you file that law suit again that you filed in 1955?

Atkins: Would I file it again? Oh, sure! I have no problem with it.

Dulaney: Okay.

Atkins: Uh-hmmm... yes, sir.

Dulaney: And then two: what's your secret to staying youthful and young looking as you do?

Atkins: [Laughs] I wish I knew... [Laughs] I wish I knew...

Roberts: He can't tell that...

Dulaney: Yeah, he can't tell me... [Chuckles]

Roberts: That's why it's a secret... [Laughter]

Dulaney: Oh, okay... [Laughter] I'm thinking you are fifteen years older than me, but you look much younger than I do.

Atkins: [Laughs] Oh, sure...

Dulaney: I got more gray hair... [Laughs]

Atkins: [Laughs] a lot of stress?

Dulaney: Yeah, it is stress, yeah it's probably stress...

Atkins: [Laughs]

Dulaney: Okay. Thank you very much we're going to stop it right there.

Atkins: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

[End of interview]