

Oral History Collection

Roy Williams

Interviewer: W. Marvin Dulaney, Alfred L. Roberts

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Place of Interview: Dallas, TX

Mr. Dulaney: Alright, [claps] synchronizing. This is October 6, 2011. We are at the Intercity Community Development Corporation in Dallas [Texas], interviewing Mr. Roy Williams. Mr. Williams, we told you that we're doing a project called Documenting the Civil Rights in--and the History of the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas County. So, we're very happy and pleased to interview you. I'm going to start out asking you about your background. Where were you born and then when did you come to Dallas?

Mr. Williams: I first came to Dallas in 1963. The first time, I came to live and I was here for a

short period of time. Then I left--I think it was in June of 1963 I came, and I was sort of on an adventurous tour. I was traveling with a guy that was a professional gambler. We went out to West Texas and I learned about West Texas Hold'em. During that time, I had no success at it. We ran across a band that was from Dallas and their car had broken down in Midland [Texas]. So, this friend and I, we had a car. It was a 1954 Ford Coup and the car was in such bad condition that we couldn't turn the key off because we couldn't start it back up. So, every time we stopped, we had to leave it running. Anyway, we made an agreement with these guys--there was six of them, and there was two of us. So, eight people in a Ford Coup. Back in those days, I mean, we were packed like sardines in the car. They agreed that if we brought them back to Dallas, they'd buy the gas and they would put us up for a week or two. This was in November--first part of November 1963. We got back here [to Dallas], and I happened to be here through that transition when the

president was shot. As a matter of fact, I was on my way downtown to go watch the parade, but I had some parking tickets that were delinquent so I said, "If I go down and a cop stops me, I probably will be arrested and end up in jail." So, I stopped off to pay the tickets on my way to the parade at the old city hall there on Commerce. When I came out and went walking towards the Houston St. Viaduct where the parade--where I planned to see the parade. I heard gunshots, and it really frightened me because I'd had a dream the night before that something like this was going to happen and it just really put the fear in me and so I turned around and headed back the other way. When I got home I heard that the president had been shot.

Dulaney: Now, where were you born?

Williams: I was born in Gregg County Texas, Longview. The City of Longview, which is one hundred and twenty-five miles east of here on I-20. Piney of wood of East Texas, I grew up in a segregated situation where all my early schooling was done in a segregated setting.

You know, separate but I fell up on the Separate but Equal Doctrine. Which, as we know, didn't really exist. I went to a black high school. As a matter of fact, my senior year of the school--at that time, the name was Longview Negro High. And I had gathered a couple of friends of mine, and I said, "I don't want colored high on my diploma." So we went to the general superintendent and ask him to change it. Without any resistance, he changed it. It was so easy that it was sort of frightening in the sense, he said, "Well, what do you want it changed to?" Well, there had been a Native American woman by the name of Mary C. Womack that was the first teacher of African Americans in that town. So, we thought it would be an honor to her to name it in her name, which we did. In 1960, also I became the Chairman of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] Youth Chapter. My pastor, who was a Baptist Minister from Louisiana by the name of Reverend S.Y. Nixon, was the president of a local NAACP chapter, so he had urged me to

become of the NAACP youth movement. Matter of fact, I became the president of the organization. Through that experience, I led the first sit-in demonstration in the State of Texas after the Greensboro Five initiated theirs in that same month of February. I think it was like eight days later that I led the sit-in demonstration in Longview to bring the colored barrier, as we called it, on the bus stations. Actually, the sit-in happened at the Woolworth Department Store and it was a very trying time. It was somewhat frightening, because we didn't know what they would do. This territory had been known to be a clan, you know--nest. And so my parents and my relatives were really frightened, they didn't know what was going to happen. They said, "Well [his] stepdad could lose his job," and I said, "Well, I've considered all that, but this is something that I must do. I can't sit back simply because of speculation of what would happen. This is the right thing to do and no one is going to do it do it fell in my lap so I take responsibility and moved

that project forward." It was a grand experience for me. It initiated my soul journey into the Civil Rights Movement to become a community activist. That summer, I had the pleasure to ride from--matter of fact, we drove from Longview to Dallas, my minister and two other young people, to go to the National Convention of NAACP in Saint Paul, Minnesota. There was an attorney here [in Dallas] that we hooked up with and she drove and the three of us and another lady drove from Dallas to Saint Paul for the convention. It was probably one of the highlights of my life because we got there on a, I guess, Thursday evening. So, that Friday morning, my minister had arranged for us to have breakfast with a group of high executives in our organization. You know, some celebrities and the stewardship of the NAACP. That morning, when I got into the breakfast setting, I was sitting--on my left was Thurgood Marshall. On my right was A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, and a host of other ones. At that time, little did I know

that these guys were going to become giants in their individual careers, their profession, and their life? That's a cherished moment that I'll never forget. It really exposed me to a lot of history, a lot of civil rights opportunities that was to come in the future. I think that was a blessing from the Creator that I was able to have that type of association with such giants, as we know Thurgood Marshall went off to become supreme court justice, Roy Wilkins became one of the Big Five, I guess it was called that led that--

Dulaney: The Big Six.

Williams: The Big Six. Excuse me, I stand corrected.

[Laughter] They led that March on Washington. It reflected back--A. Philip Randolph became my hero. He's not remembered as I think he should be remembered, because he was really the strategist for the March on Washington. Little be known, but it was he. Roy Wilkins and Thurgood got most of the attention, but it was A. Philip Randolph that orchestrated

that and pushed for them to march on
Washington.

Dulaney: Go back, tell me about your parents.

Williams: Well, I was born in a single--well, almost single-family house should I say. My father left my mother when I was two years old. They had gone out to LA [Los Angeles, California] and he left her at the train station--just me and her. I was just two years old and he was never to be seen any more for the next ten years. My mom managed to get back to--

Dulaney: What were their names?

Williams: Dorothy May Williams and Jeremy Williams.

Dulaney: Okay.

Williams: So it happened that they both had heritage that came out of Oklahoma. My great-great grandfather on my father's side was Kiowa Apache and my great-great grandmother on my mother's side was full-blooded Cherokee. So I have that cross between the Native Americans, indigenous people I should say, and African heritage. Growing up, I didn't know that I had that much Native American blood running through my veins. As I started to research

once I left home to look back into my family history, I found that they both were endowed with Native American blood, which gave me sort-of a sense of pride to know that not all my heritage didn't come from Africa. That I, you know, right here was someone--

Dulaney: Well I see your T-shirt. [Williams' shirt reads: "Native American Knowledge Quest"]

Williams: Yes, that's why I wear it, exactly. It's really important to me, and I have done some study with the indigenous people and their religious practices and, you know, sweat lodge, the drumming ceremonies, the vision quest. A lot of their spiritual methodology I have also embraced and still do.

Dulaney: All right. Go back to Los Angeles, you said that you and your mother were left at the train station.

Williams: Yes, I was. I guess my father had gone to look for work, I suppose, or whatever. He had planned to come back to bring us back to Longview and my mom waited at the train station and he never showed up. I always wondered about that, but I never did find out the truth of the

matter. Going forward, my mom had two sisters and her mother all lived in the same house. So, I grew up in a house of four women from that point on. I didn't see my dad until I was about ten years old. It just so happened that he was walking down the street and someone said, "There goes your father!" I said, "Where? Is that him? Is that was he look like?" That was the first time I had the chance to see him and to recognize him as a person. It was always like a vision in my mind, because I never knew what he looked like growing up from two up until ten. Never had a real close relationship with him because he was always gone. He was a blue-collar worker and he'd travel all over the country by freight train. He would ride the train. What we called back then in those days as hobos. He would travel all over and sometimes there would be a hobo camp near where I lived and I would go down there and ask if anybody down there knew him or had seen him and a lot of the time, I'd run into people that had seen him. "The last time I saw him he was in

Arizona." "The last time I saw him he was in Kansas City." So, I got those types of reports from total strangers. I said, "Okay, well this guy's gone." My grandmother, who was his mother, lived like a block from my mom's house. So, I had two families within close prox--or close relations. On my dad's side, he had three sisters and a brother, and my grandmother. They lived like a block away. I was the first child to be born on either side of that scenario so I had a lot of family close to me. Being the first child born, I got all the love and nourishing that a person could expect. I really enjoyed it, it was great. I'm often asked, "But do you miss not having a father in the house?" Well, I didn't know what that was so I couldn't miss it, you know? I'm thankful that the Creator saw the placement in that scenario, which I think helped build the character that I have today as--by that I mean, understanding people across gender. It didn't matter whether it was male or female. [I] just [tried] to understand their perspective and that's what I always do

in all my activities is try to understand that another person's position.

Dulaney: After you left high school, what did you do?

Williams: Well, I had a basketball scholarship to go to a small school up in Colorado. Up in the Northeast of the state. Sterling, Colorado. So, I went there on a basketball scholarship. After about a year, I became disillusioned, so I left. Now, mind you, I'm coming from an all-African American environment to an integrated scenario, which I was okay with, it didn't bother me, but it was the first time I had gone to school with the Anglo component of our society. It proved to be an eye-opener for me because I began to see things in a different perspective because I'm in a new environment and a new setting and there were new components here which would afford me a different view of what different society was really about. So that was quite interesting. I left Sterling and came to Denver [Colorado]. I lived in Denver for maybe a year and then a fellow that I met at a Jazz bar in downtown Denver was traveling to Washington D.C. He was

looking for somebody to help him drive, so I had just about had my run in Denver. I wasn't excited anymore about being in Denver. Denver is a nice town and it was good to me, but I said, "Well, maybe let me go look at D.C and see what it look like," because I had heard a lot of stories about how African Americans were very prosperous and were experiencing the great American Dream in Washington and that the government engine, economical engine that afforded these African Americans from all over the South to migrate there and to become very successful. So, I went there and drove with him over there. When we got there, I had to live with one of his friends for a couple of weeks until I could try and find a job and get situated. I overstayed my welcome at this place, so I had to move out. Oddly enough, at that point, I became homeless. Now, all I had to do was--the term we use is "to drop a dime" and I could have got some help. All I had to do was call home, but at that time, a phone call was only ten cents. So, this was in 1960 or 1961. I refused to call home to be rescued.

I said, "Well, if I'm to become a man, this is my test. This is where the tire meets the road. I'll either make it here or--then I can call home if worst comes to worst." I made friends with a local there, a guy that ran a night club. He said, "You from Texas" and I said, "Yea." He said, "Do you know where your congressman is?" I said, "No, but I can find out." I called home and they told me the gentleman name, I'll never forget it. It was Congressman Lindley Beckworth. I went to his office down on the Hill [Capitol Hill, Washington D.C.]. I said, "Look, I'm one of your constituents. I don't have a job." He just took off a piece of paper and wrote a name and address on it and said, "Take this over to the Department of Commerce and they'll give you a job." I took the paper and went to the person that he had instructed me to go see and I got a job in the [U.S.] Patent Office. I worked there until February of 1963. My mom passed away, and that's what forced me to come back [to Texas]. So I left a job, a good secure job there and came back to Texas to

bury my mom and to make sure my two young siblings were situated enough. I felt that it was my responsibility. I have two younger sisters. I felt it was my obligation and my responsibility to see that they were situated. Which, my aunt and their father, who was my step-father, was there. Once I saw that, I left and began gambling and started my sole journey to Dallas and West Texas, and all of that. This happened up through 1965--1964, I'm sorry. I was up in Amarillo [Texas] at a big gambling shindig and I just happened-- something told me to call home, so I called home and reach my aunt, who was my mother's sister. She asked me, "What in the world have you done? The FBI's [Federal Bureau of Investigation] been here looking for you." I said, "The FBI? Oh, okay, I know what it is." I remembered that I had gotten two deferments. I got a college deferment from the military and then I got a government deferment because I was working in the federal government. But once I left that job, they immediately drafted me and I didn't know that I had been drafted

and six months had passed by so I said, "Well, I'll take care of it, don't worry about it." So, when I got back here in November, I went to the Selective Service Office and they said, "We've been looking all over for you." I said, "Well, it's a long story." They said, "You know you can be fined \$10,000 and get a year in jail?" I said, "Well, I can give you the year in jail, but \$10,000, I don't have." The lady told me, "Well, you report here on January the 15th. You better be here or else you're going to be in big trouble." So sure enough I said, "Okay, I surrender." I came back--I went home for Christmas. I came back to Dallas the morning of January the 14th, so I went downtown to the Selective Service Office and, from there, I was transported from Dallas to Ft. Polk, Louisiana where I was initiated into Uncle Sam's Army. Now mind you, at this time, this was the beginning of the Vietnam War. It hadn't really kicked off. I recall that, at that time, if you saw where one soldier had been killed, it was all over the headlines and a major news item. I did eight

weeks of basic training at Ft. Polk, Louisiana. I came home for two weeks furlough. Then my next duty station was Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, where I was going for A.T. Training. I went there and I really was not happy camper because now I have to take orders, I had somebody telling me everything to do and when to do it and how I can do it. That didn't sit very well with me. One night, I was talking with a guy from New York, and he was going to Law School at NYU [New York University] and he and I became friends. I'll never forget his name, it was Maurice Sasson [?]. He and I became friends, we would talk philosophy and about jazz and that sort of thing. And so he said, "If I were you, I'd try to get the best grades that I can get," because we had an instructor that awarded his best students a three-day pass on the weekend--I mean, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. So, I started to study the material, and I started to score on the test in the ninetieth percentile. If you scored over a ninety, ninety or above, he would give you a three-day

pass. For eight weeks, I had three-day passes. I would leave Aberdeen. Excuse me, can I take a moment?

[End of Video 1. Begin Video 2]

Williams: Clap again?

Dulaney: Clap again, yes. [Laughter] [Claps] This is part two with Roy Williams.

Williams: So, having lived in Washington [D.C.] prior to being inducted into the military, I had a second family there in Washington. So, on the weekend, this friend of mine, a fellow soldier, and I would drive ninety miles into Washington and spend the weekend. I would stay with the friend that I had made when I was living in Washington. I thought it was very ironic. It seemed like I had come full circle. I had a relatively good time. I love Washington D.C. because it was like being in paradise. I mean, you saw such beautiful African Americans of all color and all styles. The great Howard Theatre was right there, you know, which I got the chance to see a lot of

entertainment and celebrities of all venues like the Ray Charles band, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Sam Cooke, Redd Foxx, Slappy White, Flip Wilson, Pigmeat Markham, Jackie Miles. I got the chance to visit and engage in conversation with all those people simply because I was living relatively near the Howard Theatre and I became friends with the security guard, so he would let me come in and go backstage. That was a great time for me. After that, as I said, I came back home to bury my mom and situate my sisters. I got drafted, went into the military, and after Aberdeen [Maryland], I was on the parade grounds, getting ready to get my next orders of where I would go. We knew if you got orders to go to Fort Ord, California that that meant you were going to Vietnam. It just so happened that one day I was standing in the shower room and--shower line, and talking to an administrator. He said, "Well, isn't your name Roy Williams?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I just finished looking at your records and it appears that you are protected by an unwritten

law that says that you don't have to send the only surviving male child into a battle zone, so you don't have to worry about going to Vietnam." So, I hugged him and thanked him [Laughter] and I said, "Man, this is the best news I've ever heard." [Laughter] Indeed, that was a great relief because I was concerned because--I didn't want to go to a war zone. During this time was when Muhammad Ali took that stance of being a conscientious objector. I said, "Well, if it's good enough for Ali, I may have to go the same route." But fortunately enough, I got a pass to go into another theatre, which was Europe. I went to the European Theatre of West Germany. I played basketball there. Leaving the United States-- at that time, they were transporting troops by ship. So, we took a bus from Aberdeen Proving Grounds to Brooklyn Army Terminal and then loaded onto a ship and was out on the Atlantic Ocean for nine days. The worst trip of my life. I had never seen so much water. I had never been on a boat. It was a very trying experience, to say the least. I was so glad to

see the earth again. I kissed the ground when I got off that boat, [Laughter] because the whole voyage, I was sick. You know, because of sea sickness. Part of it was that I had been quartered in the very front of the boat, which was where the prisoners were kept, but they had so many people on the boat, they had to use the stockade on the boat to house people. My group was the last group to get on the boat, therefore we had to go to the front of the boat. And I mean to tell you, every time the boat would rise and go down, you felt it, I mean without a doubt. There was no mistake about what was happening to you. Through that motion, you go sick. I was wondering why they had handed us those brown bags coming in. They knew what the deal was. That was a very, very memorable experience, those nine days out on the Atlantic Ocean. Once we landed, we got on a train, and we were taken into Westburg, West Germany. Just so happened to be where the Maverick basketball star is from--Dirk [Dirk Nowitzki]. He's from that same town. We were all assembled in the gym. This guy that was

running the operation said, "Who can play football?" Guys raised their hands and he said, "Well, you go over in this corner. Who plays baseball?" Guys would raise their hand and he'd say, "You go in this other corner. And who plays basketball?" I raised my hand and he said, "You stand right here by me." Little did I know at that time, I thought I was in trouble, but what he was doing was securing me to play for the division basketball team which was housed on that post. I stayed on that post and got inducted into their basketball program and the basketball coach was a full-bird colonel. He had played at Seton Hall. He played with, I think, Walter Dukes. He and I formed a good relationship. Now mind you, at that time, I was twenty-two years old. So, most of the people that I was in the company with were like eighteen, nineteen, twenty. But, I'm twenty-two, so they called me "the old man" at the time. Through that experience, I was able to not have to pull guard duty. I didn't have to do KP [kitchen patrol]. I mean that's worth--that's

invaluable. [Laughter] I also had the opportunity to work with the division boxing team which was housed on that post. They had a little room in the gym, so the person that worked with the team and the boxers was given quarters in the gym. That means you didn't have to make bed check. This is another perk that I had. I got to know the guy that preceded me. He happened to be from Houston [Texas]. He and I became friends, and he gave me all the nuances on how to live in that situation. He had cut a hole in the fence in the back of the gym where he snuck the Fräuleins [German word for an unmarried woman] in at night. This was good to know.

[Laughter]. It was quite a great experience for me, looking back in retrospect. I hated it when I got drafted and all the way up until I got to Germany. Then my attitude towards the military changed and what brought about the change was that I said, "I'm in here. I got to do this two years, so I might as well try to make the best of it and make it easy on myself instead of being resistant." So, I did that. I

got chances to go up into Scandinavia. I got a chance to go up into Holland. It opened my eyes to another way society, humanity, treated its fellow human. In Scandinavia, an African American was treated like a king because of the novelty of not having any relationship with Black people. Sometimes, some towns I would go to it was the first time they had ever seen a Black person. They'd come up and rub your skin to see if it rubbed off and that sort of thing. I had that same experience when I went to Sterling, Colorado, which is a farm town, way in the northern--it sits right on the Wyoming-Nebraska border. This little town, they had never seen Black people before. We would go downtown on the weekend and like traffic would stop. It was almost like the E.F. Hutton commercial. Everyone would listen, everybody would stop when we came to town.

[Laughter] Regressing back to that college scenario--it was twenty-one African Americans in a school of about 460 students. It was nineteen males and two females--two Black females. It was a real interesting situation,

because only two girls on campus that we could truly, possibly date. Guys were juggling and flipping coins and all that sort of things to see who was going to date the two girls. Often, on weekends, we would go into Denver [Colorado] and some of our college mates would host us and we'd stay with their families. It was a great experience. Fast-forwarding back to Germany. Once I got out, came back home, that's when I was in Longview [Texas] to get relocated, trying to readjust myself. That's when I came back to Dallas and tried to find my friend that I initially came to Dallas with, and he had a used car lot here. He had a big house and he was doing well.

Dulaney: What was his name?

Williams: Lionel Knatt from Port-Arthur, Texas. They called him "Cool-breeze." That was his name. He was sort of a fancy dresser, so I guess that nickname--and he was a great football player at Lincoln High School in Port Arthur. Lincoln Bumblebees. He used to talk about it all the time, it was like I actually went to school there. He talked about it so much in our

traveling back and forth around the state, wherever we would go. Then, I came back to Dallas, and I saw that nothing had changed. It was still racist, there was still a lot of bigotry. After having been in Scandinavia, man, it was hard to deal with. So I said, "I can't. I can't do this deal here. I have to find another place to live." It happened that a classmate of mine had moved to New York. And I by chance got his number and called him. He said, "You can come up and hang out with me until you figure out what you want to do. You can stay with me and not have to worry about food and shelter. Soon as you find out what you want to do. Give you an opportunity to venture and look around and see what's out there and what's possible." I took him up on that. I had about \$100, I think. I left Dallas on a Greyhound bus. I wanted to get out of Dallas so bad that I said "I would even take the bus out of here." And I did, so I ended up going there and making friends with some people that were horse-race towers so that peaked my curiosity. I said, "I know nothing

about horse-racing. This is a good opportunity for me to find out and maybe I can win some money." I hung out at the horse-tracks, mostly four or five days out of the week. Didn't never won anything, I always left the horse-track broke. But, I loved looking at those animals. They are such magnificent animals. My favorite part of horse-races was when they would walk the horses prior to the race and you get a chance to see how magnificent these animals are. The muscles in their bodies, you can just see the form. It gave me an opportunity to appreciate horses. Not so much the race, but just the animal itself I surely became more familiar with.

Dulaney: What year did you go to New York?

Williams: I went to New York in '69. 1969. I stayed until about 1978. What happened--I became pretty comfortable in New York. I started to accumulate some finances through different gambling ventures [Laughter]. It was a lifestyle that afforded me the opportunity to be out amongst celebrities and have a nice apartment in mid-town Manhattan. It was a

great life. At some point, I became disenchanted with that lifestyle. What helped me to make the decision to leave New York was that Rent Control Law. My rent on my apartment tripled, and I said, "Nah. I'm not going to suffer the consequences here. For the amount of money that they want me to pay, I can have a house in Texas with a yard and grass and birds and that sort of thing." So, I packed my things and I came back to Dallas. I was living out in Richardson [Texas] at the time and--

Dulaney: Why did you move to Richardson?

Williams: Well, it was because I had had an apartment in Dallas, but at that time, I was in an interracial relationship and so I got the flak from that. They would always come up with excuses why they didn't want me on their property and in their apartments. It just so happened that she had a friend that was in commercial real estate and he had a friend a house in Richardson. He said, "I'll let you guys move into this house. It's a brand new house." That was very fitting. It saved the day for not having to go through all that

racist mentality and having to deal with that. But I began to think that I had made a mistake coming back, because nothing had changed again. This is the second time I had left Dallas and came back and the racism was still as prevalent as it was before I left. One evening, while I was watching the news, I saw where a White police officer had shot a Black man that was an alleged drug dealer. But the irony of it was that the Black man was supposedly had his hands cuffed behind his back and the cop said he tried to take his gun from him. Councilwoman Elsie Faye Heggins was having a town hall meeting to discuss this and to come up with a solution of how to deal with it. So I said, "I'd go to that meeting" and that's where--I drove in from Richardson to the Martin Luther King Center and met Elsie Faye Heggins, J.B. Jackson, Diane Ragsdale, Charlotte Ragsdale, her sister, Al Lipscomb, and John Wiley. I met all those guys that evening over there. Once I saw the bias and the tragedy of what it projected up on people of color, I said "I got to get back involved

in policy." That's where my Dallas activism started. After Michael Frost was shot over there and that whole scenario unfolded. I started to go down and speak to the City Council about the police brutality and the way policeman act in the Black community. It was somewhat frightening, you know, because any time you get stopped by a White cop, you didn't know if you would be able to survive the stop. I became a part of an [unclear] committee that Councilwoman Heggins had formed called the Citizen Police Review Board. They had been lobbying for the City of Dallas to come up with a Police Review Board that had the power to investigate allegations that were forwarded against the police department, but they never did it. So, we formed our own Community Police Review Board, and we would take complaints from people that had encountered bad treatment or abuse by Dallas Police Officers. I got to look at the operations of the Dallas Police Department. We went and got a 25,000 petition to make the--

Dulaney: 25,000 signatures?

Williams: Yes. Signatures. To make the City Council put it on the referendum, which it did, but we got voted down. They voted it down. Because--

Dulaney: Is this the same time you met Marvin Crenshaw too?

Williams: Yes.

Dulaney: I know he was sort of leading that whole front.

Williams: Right, that's correct. That's where he and I originally met--at that town hall meeting that was given Elsie Faye Heggins.

Dulaney: Before you go on, why did you get involved? What motivated you? I know it was wrong, but--

Williams: Yea but, I had been out of the political game for the time I went off to college up to this time. When I came back, something inside of me just said, "You got to act." To see a Black man shot down brutally in an alley by a law enforcement officer just--it irritated me more than any other experience that I've ever had. I told my wife at that time, "I must get involved in this. I don't where it's going to lead to, but I must go and make a statement."

Dulaney: How did your wife feel about it?

Williams: She felt that it was a good thing to do. Amazingly enough, we're not married now, but we were

married for twenty-seven years. Without her, I could not have achieved any of the social achievements that I've been a part of, going back all the way to a congressional hearing being called to come into Dallas to look into police brutality, street name changes, all the voting rights lawsuits which I became a part of.

Dulaney: What's her name and how did you meet her since you've given her so much credit? She needs to be in this.

Williams: Yeah, her name is Nancy Williams. She came from a little small town in Illinois. Dickson, Illinois. She went to the same high school that Ronald Reagan went to. That was her claim to fame, that you know, "I come from a town-- the home of Ronald Reagan, our president." I said, "Okay, that's was fine with me, I can deal with that." She was very supportive in everything that I did.

Dulaney: How did you meet her?

Williams: I was traveling from Denver--I was living in New York at the time, and I had flown to Denver to buy a car because a friend of mine had a

connection with a car dealership in Denver. So, some person had ordered a car, new, and the wife didn't like it and was stuck with the car. He called me and said, "Hey, man, there's a car over here that you might like. It's a brand new car. It's only got maybe 1,300 miles on here. So why don't you fly over here and check it out?" So, I did. I looked at the car, I liked it. The owner of the car dealership was very, very, very liberal. So, he and I became sort of friendly with each other. We'd go out to eat and go different discos back in that time. I bought the car and had to wait around to get the license plates on it before I could travel with it. I drove from Denver to Dallas. I was on my way to New Orleans [Louisiana] to meet up with some friends down there. I came out to eat that night and I just happened to go into a restaurant. It was a restaurant-disco. I was standing at the bar, having a drink, and she just happened to walk up beside me. We started a conversation, we started to dance, and I asked her for her phone number. She said, "Well, I'm in the

book." I said, "Well, that's where you'll stay, in the book. If you don't have the courtesy to exchange your phone number, then. I'll see you later." I left the next day, drove to New Orleans. I think it may have been a jazz festival, or something, that I went down there for. The thought hit me. I said, "Let me call the information to see if this woman is listed." I did, got her number, called her up, and she said, "Where are you?" I said, "Well, I'm still in New Orleans." She said, "Are you coming back to Dallas?" I said, "I may come back on my way to Denver," Because I had planned to go from New Orleans to Denver. She said, "If you would stop in Dallas, I will fix you dinner." I said, "Okay, that sounds interesting." When I got back to Dallas, I went to her apartment, and she had prepared and laid out a golden spread, should I say. We never left each other's company from that time on. We were together for the next thirty years, almost. Shortly there afterwards, we got married. That was a change.

Dulaney: You give her this credit for helping in terms of activism.

Williams: Oh, yes.

Dulaney: In what way?

Williams: She--as you know, activists are not the most wealthy people on the planet [Laughter]. In order for me to have transportation, housing, food, clothes, I mean she took care of all that because she had her own little private business. She had a house cleaning business that she had two or three employees, but she was doing quite well with so she could take care of all the necessities. She did that up until the time that we divorced. That was my economic engine, so to say, because she volunteered. She said, "If you're going to do this type of work, you need support. I'll take care of the household needs and whatever." But during that time, I would get consulting contracts to try to help people get licensing from the City of Dallas. I would charge a fee to walk their paperwork through, because I knew all the labyrinths of pit stops that people ran into that didn't understand how the

system worked. In conjunction with her support, I would pick up consulting jobs periodically that would pay me a nice bit. Through those two means, I was able to stay in the field of battle and wasn't harassed about being on a nine to five or whatever, because as you know activists can't have no job. This is a full-time job. I will forever be indebted to her for the time that she gave to me and to the City of Dallas. Most people don't know that, but without her, I could never have achieved anything that I did.

Dulaney: Okay, you were on the Citizen Review Board, investigating complaints against police. How did you get involved in the single-member district case?

Williams: Well, Marvin and I had formed a working relationship because he was lobbying the City of Dallas to create an anti-Apartheid resolution. I think you were here during that time.

Dulaney: I was here. I actually picked that up in the paper too.

Williams: Right, exactly. One Wednesday, I was at city council and he was talking about South Africa and Apartheid. I had never heard the word Apartheid, I had no idea what it meant. I saw he was by himself and this was such an international--a global issue. Talking about freeing Mandela [Nelson Mandela]. I had never heard of Mandela. All of this was a new adventure for me, and it was exciting, so I started to speak out with him on the South African issue. We became a force against the City [of Dallas]. What happened was, I think, the congressional hearing preceded the soul journey into the anti-Apartheid revolution. Diane Ragsdale was on the City Council at the time, so she and Al Lipscomb had worked with Marvin to call for a congressional hearing to look into the police shooting. What we did, we started to communicate with John Conyers who was the chair of the house sub-committee on criminal justice. We created a paper trail by sending photos of incidents where police officers had shot. One of the most historical events was that they had shot a Black man

running down the street at night and the man was butt-naked and they claimed he had a gun. You know, I said that "This was just too much here." I mean, they were just using any excuse to shoot. One of the problems I had with that [is] if a person is running away from you, why shoot him? Especially if it's for stolen property or what have you. If there's no violence projected at the police officer, I didn't feel like they were justifying shooting anybody. We finally got Conyers to agree to come and hold a congressional hearing here. There had been one out in LA and I can't think of the name of the woman [? Eulia Love], but what had happened was the gas company was coming to cut this woman's gas off, and she came out on the porch with a butcher knife to try to stop the guy, and the police officer came up and asked her to drop her knife, and shot her. That became a big case—a very big case. That encouraged us to call for a congressional hearing because they had one in LA. Conyers had gone to LA and looked into that police department. So, Conyers came here,

along with three congressional colleagues of his--John Bryant was a congressman from here, Steve Bartlett who was a congressman from here that later became the Mayor of Dallas, and one other one. I can't think of his name right now, he was a long-time congressional leader. So, we had--

Dulaney: Was it Martin Frost?

Williams: Martin Frost. That's exactly who it was. I

testified before that hearing, along with Marvin, Diane [Ragsdale], Al Lipscomb, John Wiley Price. It was a host of us that testified. We gave testimony of the police department as we saw it. Out of that hearing came some changes in the way the Dallas Police Department interfaced with the community. Such as, Shoot and Don't Shoot Policy. Meaning, that if a person was running away from you, you couldn't shoot him, no matter what the situation was. That was a major accomplishment. Also, the training. We had them implement a diversity program in the Dallas Police Academy. Promotion--at the time of the hearing, the highest-ranking minority

was a sergeant I think. It broke open that glass ceiling that afforded us deputy chiefs and lieutenants and all the way up the line. Which, eventually, came the first Black police chief. Going from that scenario into the South African scenario, we began to engage in conversation with the corporations that had a presence in South Africa. We appealed to the mayor at that time, Annette Strauss, to put a resolution on the table and have let council vote on it. We had the support from Diane [Ragsdale] and Al [Lipscomb] and other liberal Whites that were on the council. Because mind you, the City Council only had two minorities at that time. That was Diane and Al who were preceded Elsie Faye Heggins and Fred Blair, who died recently. Matter of fact, all three of them are no longer with us--Elsie Faye passed away some years ago, then Fred Blair passed away within the last six months, I think, and Al Lipscomb preceded him.

Dulaney: June.

Williams: In June, that's correct. Out of that, we began to build momentum behind the South African. We

came down the El Centro [College] at the time and got the students involved. They had a student movement down there and Bishop Tutu's daughter came. There was another minister from South Africa that came to Saint Luke's church. Zan Holmes had hosted him. I can't think of his name now, it'll come to me probably before this is over. We really began to get instrumental in the whole protest of South Africa here in the Dallas County area. We had this resolution formulated by Annette Strauss. I never will forget it, she gave it to Marvin. Marvin had asked her to write the resolution, so she instructed us to go to the city attorney and get the city attorney to write it. The city attorney by the name of Analeslie Muncy, sent us to her assistant, who happened to be Ron Kirk. He showed such resistance against fine-tuning this resolution. As a matter of fact, he asked Marvin and I to leave his office. That we didn't have [any] business being concerned about people in South Africa. We have no relationship with them, and on and on and on. I was very displeased with his

behavior. I told him, "I'll never forget this, Ron." He expressed his feelings about it, and we left his office. Ms. Muncy, who was the city attorney, got somebody else to write the resolution. It was presented to the council, and the council voted on it. What it entailed was that the City of Dallas would not have any business relationship with any corporation that had a presence in the Republic of South Africa not Libya. IBM [International Business Machines Corporation] was the provider of all of the computer equipment and programming for the Fire Department, for the Police Department, and for the City Manager's Office. They had the major contract, because they had IBM mainframes. We arranged a meeting with them and one of our counterparts out in New York [City], from the ANC [African National Conference]--it was the Friends of South Africa--I can't remember the exact name. Anyway, they were headquartered in New York City. We communicated with them and they would give us direction on which way to go and what was the program of the country. You know, what

was happening in LA [California], Chicago [Illinois], Detroit [Michigan], Boston [Massachusetts], etc. We were sort of synchronized with these other cities and we were pushing the same agenda across the country. IBM was getting hit big time from coast to coast. So, they sent their top executive down here to wine and dine us and all the other trimmers they had. They thought that these little country bumpkins down here-- we can just throw some lavish foods and party at them and they'll succumb to our wishes. We didn't. There was a couple of meetings that we had. We flew guys in from New York and from Chicago to come down to address the Business Commerce Committee of the City Council. Out of that, I was able to sustain a working relationship with one of the city councilmen here--Jim Burger, who was out of Oak Cliff. He was independent publisher and he had his own printing company. Mandela got freed and he was coming to the US [United States]. There was an invitation from the offices of New York, of the ANC, to invite all the activists from

across the country to be on Nightline with Mandela. Marvin and I were chosen to go. Funds were made available for us to go up there-- accommodations and all. I went, but Marvin didn't go. I went into the office downtown on Broadway. I never will forget it. About 16th and Broadway, somewhere around there. I had lived in New York City, so it wasn't like I was going to a foreign place. I still had friends there. It was a good time to go back and visit New York and then to go and meet Mandela. You know, to be on Nightline with Mandela and Ted Koppel. But what happened was that Harry Belafonte, Dionne Warwick, and a couple other high-profile celebrities had their entourage with them around Mandela because they were the host committee that hosted him, so we got pushed out of the picture. It was 350 mad activists from across the country. [Laughter] Saying, you know, "I'll never buy another Dionne Warwick record. To heck with Harry Belafonte." [Laughter] We were all down in, I think it was a little Presbyterian church down on 35th and Madison.

That's where we were supposed to meet and have our convention. Word got back to us after we found out we weren't going to be on Nightline that Mandela was probably going to come down to the church and pay a visit because he knew that we were the fire that helped get the corporate giant off his back. He did. We were sitting in the church, we were told that he was coming, and that we had to leave the church so that the secret service could come in and sweep down with the dogs and all the technology. We were there. It was in the afternoon. We had been instructed, "Don't try to shake his hand, because he's been shaking hands ever since he got off the plane here in New York. The man is probably well beat up." I said to myself, "There's no way in the world I'm going to come this far and not get the chance to touch a Christ-like being. It's probably the most important person that I'll ever have the opportunity to meet." He was such a giant figure in my eyesight and in my understanding of what he had gone through for twenty-seven years, being incarcerated in a

brutal prison system. To make a long story short, what happened was we went out of the church, they came with the dogs and scanners to make sure there were no bombs or anything. We were gathered in the Sanctuary and we were sitting there talking and waiting for his arrival. All of a sudden, it was like a hush that moved over the church. I told the guy from Chicago that I was sitting next to, "He's in the area somewhere, I can feel it." Sure enough, within ten minutes, he came in the side door with the security escorting him into the church. There were 350 of us sitting there, waiting on him. He went up on the dais and gave us his speech on how much he appreciated the work we had done, that we must continue to fight injustice anywhere. He gave a great presentation. I could tell he was winding down in his presentation, so I got out of my seat and went around by the door and stood near the door where he was to make his exit. So, when he came off the podium and came down to exit, I just stepped through the crowd, and grabbed his hand, and told him how

much I appreciate him and that he would always be a hero of mine. It was like as if time had stood still when I locked eyes with him, holding his hand. It was probably the greatest experience of my life. I treasure that. Even today, I treasure that as one of the most exciting experiences I've ever had. I was fortunate enough to be there and to have that experience and to participate in that scenario--that whole anti-Apartheid movement thing. Out of that came the event of trying to get the City of Dallas to broaden its membership on the council. In other words, to have more minorities. So, one day, Marvin called me and asked me, he said, "Would you like to participate in a lawsuit against the City of Dallas?" I said, "What type of lawsuit?" He said, "Voting rights act lawsuit." I said, "Let me think about it." Being the type of person I am and the philosophy that I embrace--it's sort of the Dick Gregory type of philosophy, you know, adhering to the laws of nature and trying to understand how nature works and looking at a

deity from that perspective as opposed to your regular Judeo-Christian perspective. I said, "Let me fast and meditate on it for three days, and I'll get back with you." So, I did a fast and asked in meditation whether or not this was something I was supposed to do. The reaction that I got from the universe was that yes, this is what you're supposed to do. Go do it, and you'll get help from an unknown quarters [of existence]. That following Tuesday, I think it was, I told Marvin, "Yeah, I'm ready to do this." He took me to an attorney, which was the lead attorney on the case, Mike Daniels. We discussed what all was to transpire and what I needed to do.

Dulaney: What year was this, by the way?

Williams: 1988. It was in May of 1988 that I actually filed the lawsuit. So, it had to be sometime--maybe late April, early May, but I filed the lawsuit May 17, 1988. Oddly enough, Mike Daniels, who was the attorney along with Betsy Julian. Betsy Julian was my attorney and Mike Daniels was Marvin's attorney, but they were both working out of the same office and they worked

together. So, what had happened was that I got the paperwork--it was \$125. I will never forget the filing fee for the case. I had also taken this scenario into meditation, because I always meditate on something before I go do it to find out if I'm supposed to do it and to get support from the invisible planes of existence, if you will. So, I did so. When I walked into the federal clerk's office, there wasn't a soul in there. It was quiet, it was almost scary the way that the scene was set. They had a bell on the desk and I rang the bell and a little, young African American female came out and she was smiling. I said, "I'm here to file paperwork against the City of Dallas." She took my money, took my paperwork, and disappeared into back the back somewhere. She came back and handed me a schedule, but prior to this from leaving the attorney's office on my way to the court to file the paperwork, I had asked Mike, I said, "Out of the courts that's available, what are our chances here?" You know, because it was a Republican administration and I didn't know if

we were going to really get any results from this, but I was willing to do it anyways. He said, "There's six possibilities of courts that we can get. You can get Amarillo, Midland, Odessa, some other courts, and Dallas. I said, "Out of those six courts, if you had your drivers, if I was a genie, which judge would you like to argue this case before?" He said, "Well, there are two liberal judges in the North District of Texas." Which, at the time, he already had a housing lawsuit running in Judge Barefoot Sander's Court. He said, "I'd prefer either Barefoot Sanders or Jerry Buchmeyer." I said, "Okay." That was the day before I filed the papers, so I took that into meditation and asked that the doors be open for the best possibility, the best court, the best judge, etc. So, when I went to file the paperwork and the young lady went away and came back and gave me the scheduling, came to find out that there were sixteen different courts that this case could land in. But, I guess the attorney didn't want to frighten me to show how many different variations that we

could have as it related to the trial itself. So, she came back and she gave me a schedule that had alphabetical bullets on it that showed which judge and what court that the case went to. I had drawn, like, "F", I guess it was. So, when I looked at the scheduling, opposite to the "F" was Jerry Buchmeyer, which was one of the judges that Mike Daniels said he had a preference for. So, I got on the phone and called him, "Guess what happened?" He said, "No, tell me." He was sort of laughing. I said, "You got your choice. We drew Buckmeyer." He just broke out into laughter for about two or three minutes, because my attorney Betsey Julian, she sort of understood the philosophy and the meta-physic and spirituality that I embraced, but he didn't. Being a legal mind, it just didn't fit into his beliefs systems. So, anyway, we got Judge Buchmeyer. Marvin and I called a press conference at city hall in the flag room. Ironically enough, some of the news people were angry with us. You know, I couldn't understand. I said, "Why in the world are you

angry? You're just supposed to report the news. You're not supposed to take this personally." I never will forget it Bud Gillett from Channel 11 said, "Well, I'm not going to film this" at the press conference. I said, "Do whatever you want to do, it's not going to stop the lawsuit. You can be angry. Now I see a different side of you." He told his cameraman to fold up his camera and took his camera and walked out of the press conference. And I have never forgotten that. Every time I see him that comes up in my mind. I remember how arrogant, how uncivilized he behaved that day. Because as a news reporter, that wasn't his position to take whether or not I was right or wrong, I was just following the course of the law. The Constitution. I had a constitutional right to file the lawsuit. So anyway, that kicked off the sole journey of three years through this legal battle with the City. They tried all types of ways to compromise Marvin and myself. They even tried to compromise the judge. At one point during the deliberation, the judge asked Marvin and I

to come into his office, "I want to show you guys something. You think you're catching hell." He showed us a stack of letters that had been written, calling him a "nigger lover," that "he was not fit to be a judge," that "he should resign," just all types of things. He said, "So I just want you guys to know that the heat you're taking on the outside, I'm taking it on the inside." That really impressed me about this man. Heightened my respect for him as being not only a jurist, but a human being. That was willing to put his life and his reputation on the line for a constitutional right that afforded people representation on the City Council. Out of that, we got the 14-1 Redistricting Lawsuit.

Dulaney: Let me ask you this question then. How did you feel that, given what you and Marvin did, that you all have not been able to get elected to the City Council? How do you feel about that?

Williams: Well, my feeling is this--my philosophy and my lifestyle dictates that I cannot become a test to the fruits of my labor. I ran numerous times, but people never chose to elect me

because the system is flawed. I know how we got beat. That first election in 1991, I got 17,000 votes with no money. Had I had money and an organization--I didn't even have an organization, I just had a makeshift campaign, because I was running on my name identification because this was just coming out of the lawsuit, I felt like it was a shoe-in and so did Marvin, but the tides turned on us. We saw there were some unfavorable elements within the Democratic Party that didn't want to see us on the council because they knew what we did. They knew they couldn't control us, they couldn't buy us off. Rather than take that risk, they sought ways and people to defeat us, which they did. So, I have no ill feelings about it.

Dulaney: Would you do all this again?

Williams: Absolutely. Absolutely. I have no regrets. I'd probably do it a little bit different, but I would do the same thing as just what we went through this past week with the redistricting. People say, "Why do you still have a concern about it." "Because we created it, and I'm not

going to stand idly by and see somebody giving it away or selling it away. I invested three years of my life, so I'm not going to stand idly by and not fight to keep the system in place." We have been successful in doing that. One of the amazing things, everything that Marvin and I have teamed up to as it be to cutting-edge politics in Dallas, we've accomplished it. Through the grace of God, I'm happy to say that before you today and make that claim. It's been an amazing soul journey. With nothing! No resources, just guts, and blood, and tears, and sweat.

Dulaney: And faith.

Williams: Yes. We've gotten the results. He and I were talked about this last night. Said, "We've gone just about as far as we can go. We got to train somebody to take this baton," because Marvin is sixty-five and I'm sixty-nine. It's coming to the sunset of this experience. You asked, I wouldn't trade anything for having been in a position, to participate, make such a contribution that will be received by generations to come.

Dulaney: Alright, we're going to give you a copy of this, then we're also going to splice it with some other interviews and do a presentation of all the interviews on the 19th of November at the African American Museum. We'll invite if you want to come.

Williams: Most definitely. If I may mention, I chronicled all this in my book And Justice for All! [: The Untold History of Dallas] which is sold by Amazon. Matter of fact, they were blackballed by the citizen [unclear], it couldn't be in any bookstore. They took it out of the library. I had it in every Dallas Public Library. They took the book out of the library.

Dulaney: We need you to sign the bottom line.

Williams: A disclaimer?

Dulaney: Yes, to give us permission to use it. Like I said, you'll get a copy of it so you'll see what it looks like. Thank you very much.

Williams: Thank you for asking me.

Dulaney: Yes, it's been great.

Williams: Well, you know, I worked with you in the past, and I remember you when they--

[End of Interview]