

The University of Texas at Arlington

E
185.93
T4
S74
2002
70.11

Significant African American Public Figures of Texas

POLITICS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

Interviewee: DIANE RAGSDALE

Interviewers: Emi Williams, Silas Panzu

**Transcribers: Emi Williams, Silas Panzu, Jose Angel
Gutierrez, Karla Graham**

Faculty Supervisor: Jose Angel Gutierrez, Ph.D., J.D.

Date of Interview: December, 27, 2002

Location: Dallas, Texas

Page Length: 62

DIANE RAGSDALE

Emi: Good afternoon.

Diane Ragsdale: Good afternoon.

Emi Williams: On behalf of the of the African American politics class I would like to thank you for allowing us to do the interview with you.

Diane Ragsdale: My pleasure.

Emi: O.K. First of all could you start off telling me first who is Miss Diane Ragsdale.

Diane Ragsdale: Well let me see my, my name is Diane Ragsdale. I was born and raised in, in Dallas, Texas. I'm a native Dallasite and proud of it. I was born I say maybe about three or four miles from where we are located right now. And also I had graduated from Cletus Mead Elementary School and, and came out James Mounsend High School and just really born into a working class family. My daddy died when I was seven years old. My mother was a LVN

and so she made sure I'm an RN (registered nurse) [laughing]. And that's what I do for a living when I'm not working in politics. And so anyways that's where I am right now since I'm an activist a social activist. Hopefully one who's grounded in principles, guided by principles.

Emi: O.K. What's your mother and your father's name?

Diane Ragsdale: My mother's name, both of them are deceased. My mother's name is Lula Ragsdale. My father's name is Cottrell Ragsdale was Cottrell Ragsdale. My mother name is Lula L,U,L,A. And I, like I indicated my daddy died when when I was seven years old and my mother died in 1991, but my mother though was, was a beautiful mother and single parent ummm for the most part. You know cause she never did remarry. In other words she had two daughters, two young girls, cause I have a sister who, who's two years older. And, and her position was that cope, you know. I'm not gonna marry another man you know. You know, cause you know there was some

concern you know about what could happen to her two young girls. So she never did wanna' take that risk.

Emi: So you have two... one of your sister names?

Diane Ragsdale: Well, well I have a sister by the name of Charlotte and I have a older sister by the name of Mary Lee. An,d but anyways so, so but the one who are the... I'm closer to my sister who is two years obviously. And, and I mean obvious cause my other sister was old older much older than I am so...

Emi: O.K. what about...

Diane Ragsdale: Wait a minute! I guess what I'm saying too is that we have...My mother was a single parent and she had...There were three institutions that were very important to her. So she would, she pledged us to the Y.W.C.A. We were in the N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council and the church. Those three institutions the church, the Y.W.C.A., and the N.A.A.C.P. Youth

Council, those three institutions along with my mother which in essence reared us.

Emi: O.K. What about your grandparents? You know anything about them?

Diane Ragsdale: Well very little, very little, very little.

Emi: No names?

Diane Ragsdale: Yes, Merrian Merrian Ragsdale was my grandfather on my daddy's side. And, you know I don't know, remember my grandmother on my mother's side, but I do – but I could visualize but I can't remember her name. She was you know...

Emi: So they passed away?

Diane Ragsdale: Oh they passed away years before I was born. As a matter fact my grandmother, my mother's side, passed away when I was born.

Emi: O.K. what about your parents how did they meet?

Diane Ragsdale: Well let me see that's interesting. They both met in, in a small town called Golfs, Texas. It's no longer than a mile and, but it's, it's was close to Tower. And, and the Ragsdale are from East Texas. Although I was born and raised here most of the Ragsdale's were from east Texas. Oh, I can remember my grandmother's name it was Miss Simpson. I don't remember the first name, I'm sorry. But anyways, so, so that's, so the, so that's where they met. And they, they moved up here and really got married up here.

Emi: O.K. are you married or have you been married?

Diane Ragsdale: I'm single and never been married.

Emi: You don't have any children?

Diane Ragsdale: I don't have any children.

Emi: O.K. where were you educated, your higher education?

Diane Ragsdale: Well I graduated from Dallas Baptist University and really, well really at that time it was Dallas Baptist College and many years ago, 1975

And since then it's D.B.U (Dallas Baptist University). I got my B.S. (Bachelors of Science) degree in, in nursingso from Dallas Baptist, right.

Emi: O.K. so with that being said, what influenced you to enter politics?

Diane Ragsdale: Well that's real interesting. My mother was very political. She was the precinct chair as well as I indicated that were three... My mother was a single parent and as I indicated my mother died, my father died early. And so there were three institutions that were very, very important to her. One was Y.W.C.A., one was the N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council, and, and the other was the church. And so, I was really influenced to become politically involved

through my mom and in particular through N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council. Miss Juanita Kraft was, was the community organizer at that time over the state of Texas, the community youth organizer. And, and so she was very much so involved and really gave us, gave me my fundamental direction along with my mother in the area of politics. So I really began because of my mom in throwing us into the N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council.

Emi: O.K. What religion are you?

Diane Ragsdale: I am Methodist. I'm a life long Christian Methodist Episcopal. C.M.E. it used to be Colored Methodist but we changed our name in I think it was fifty, fifty-nine.

Emi: Um what motivated you or influenced you to become... to take politics to the next level, to be a city council person?

Diane Ragsdale: Right, well you know its really interesting that it was never anticipated that I would that I would

wanna... Because I enjoyed being an activist, a community organizer, so much and what happened as I indicated my, my mother made sure that we were involved as, as children. My sister and I, my sister Charlotte and I, and made sure we were involved. And so, so we were both members of the N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council and then from there we, we moved to the S.C.L.C., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. We, we worked in, we worked with, with the Black Panther Party. So no question about it my, my god brother was across the street. He was a Panther member. And he would in essence invite me to the meetings; and invite me to participate in the free breakfast programs; invite me to sell newspapers; and invite me to, to the political education classes. So that's what Skip did, James Shockley. And so by... My point in making so, so it, it really has been a progression when you talk about Diane becoming an elected official. And so anyway so what happen was is that I was, was active in college in, in the Black Student Union and also I was just active in neighborhood politics and really community

base development like this right here. And so it was a progression. And so what happened was that I was very active in like I say neighborhood politics, and so one of my mentors by the name of Elsie Fae Huggins is no longer with us who died became city council member. A matter fact, I succeeded City Councilwoman Huggins and she appointed me to the influential board that's called a City Planning Commission. And so we, I was very young. I think I was the youngest person whoever served on the C.P.C. And so, anyways after she decided she wanted to resign later on... This is in the 80's. In 1981 she was elected, it was a special election after a single member districts, and then she decided she wanted to resign to run for county commissioner which is a seat that, that Commissioner John Wiley Price holds now. And so you had council member Fred Blair to run. You had council member Elsie Fae Huggins and you had Commissioner John... You had well at that time was, he was a member... He was working for Judge Cleo Steele. So he, he was elected official but he ran, John Wiley Price did. And so anyways , so she resigned

prematurely and so to be quite frankly she needed someone to run and who would. [laughing] And so thus I ran and so it was really not anticipated that I would run, but many people many times when you're active people push you into running for office. Well that's not necessarily my... was not necessarily one of my primary goals in life to run for office. It was really to be an organizer, an activist, working with others to develop institutions. Like I work with others to in essence create and develop this institution right here that's called I.C.D.C .And down the hallway we have a school that we've begun that's called the School of Community Organizing. And I'm one of the founders of that and so that's my whole goal is what you... How do you organize people to, to in essence promote social change? And so anyways that's, that's long answer for that question. I'm sorry.

Emi: O.K. O.K. I know that being a woman in politics it is really hard to get money to, to run for office. What did you or how were you able to raise money to get your seat on city council?

Diane: I think that's a very important question because, so it's not only was difficult as a woman, but also difficult as a black female, as a woman of color. And also a woman of color who was representing a disenfranchised community. So that's extremely difficult to raise money from the existing constituents from the people you'd be serving. And so oftentimes people outside of the district would contribute along with people there. But you know I would have people contribute maybe fifty dollars within the district, maybe five dollars here or ten dollars there. And don't get me wrong, it was, they were supportive and it was helpful, but I needed much more money to buy yard signs, and to you know to print, to mail, etc. And so... to have an office base. So if anything we were going to have to really strengthen our capacity to raise money for our candidates, and that's a real major void. So, and because many times most of our candidates, who represent the disenfranchised, are usually financed by, their campaigns are usually financed for the most part, by people who don't live in the

district, and I was one of those. Most of the money that financed my campaign, for the most part came outside the district. And in particular, since I was a strong neighborhood advocate. Cause we had this, you had this strong, should I say, struggle over zoning. And as a member of the city planning commission, I was really more of a homeowner advocate and a neighborhood advocate. And so many of the neighborhood groups throughout the city would send me money to run. I mean during my campaign they would help me with my campaign so and what happened though I was I was probably financed by people who supported my position. And during that time it was primarily the homeowners of the city, the Homeowner Associations.

Emi: Okay, what organizations are you a member of?

Diane: Right now I'm a member of this one, I'm the chairperson of this organization Inner City Community Development Corporation, which is a non-profit

[organization]. And what we do is promote homeownership opportunities for low to moderate income. As well as we promote, not promote but develop youth entrepreneurs and so that's our primary developers. So I.C.D.C.

Blacks Cinematique, which shows independent films, and promotes positive images about African-American people and African people. I remember the N.A.A.C.P. I remember my neighborhood association. And I believe in bottom up versus top down. And so I believe that's where a social change starts. It's from the bottom up, not top down. Change that tends to be sustainable, or that last a long time, is change that's motivated by the people at the bottom up. So instead of people coming in creating the change for them, or us, because I have a part in this community, then it starts from the bottom up, the direction from those who live in the community.

Emi: Okay. As a city council member, what did you do on a daily basis?

Diane: Right. First of all, it was a difficult task, and I am so glad my mother sent me to nursing school. I didn't know what to do because at that time we did not have pay. Now at this present time, you're talking thirty-seven thousand dollars, I think it was. And so when I served, it was, hey zero dollars well fifty dollars a meeting and that might have equaled up to two hundred dollars or three hundred dollars a month and so it was a difficult task. So I could work part time as nurse, which helped out because it gave me some flexibility. But the key though, there were many things because you had, you know, it's amazing that obviously people who are disenfranchised have so many different needs. And so I was constantly working with... Number one, I would try to do things in an organized fashion. And that is I would have town hall meetings with my constituents, with the neighborhood groups, etc. and say, "O.k. let's identify or prioritize the needs." So I was constantly dealing with prioritizing needs and having meetings with neighborhood groups. And then, literally, we would work with staff, city staff, to help us

develop a plan of action to resolve those problems. Some problems we resolved; some problems we didn't. And then, of course, separate from the prioritized needs, separate from those, you had people come in with individual needs. You know, " Diane my gas is cut off. My utilities this... Or I have a criminal element next door. The crack houses this and the crack houses that..." So but that individual needs, but also, overall, we dealt with the greater needs. Although the violence was a significant need at that time, in the 80's. I mean crack is still prevalent, but during it was extremely prevalent during the 80's and early 90's. I mean, you had just a lot of violence and we lost a lot of people. And a lot of them are in jail now for life. And so, as you know, crack is different from cocaine. You know, you get less time for carrying cocaine that you do with crack, and it takes cocaine to produce crack. But anyway that's a sidebar issue, but it's so relevant with respect to the racism within the criminal justice system. So, but anyway, on a day-to-day I had a good staff. They would work with me to resolve the

individual problems that people might have along with the fact that we had to develop policy changes so that these same problems would not continue to exist over and over again. So it's one thing to individually constantly reacting to problems; it's another thing to kind of slow down for a moment and say we need to develop some policies to kind of resolve the problems or to prevent the problems from taking place.

Emi: Okay. What's your party affiliation?

Diane: Well for the part, if you look at the way I vote, it's been Democrat most of my life. I have voted Independently, I have voted for Lenora Falani, I've voted for Angela Y. Davis. You know so, [laughter] I've voted for progressive candidates, really regardless of their party to be quite frank with you.

Emi: Okay, moving to a more controversial...

Diane: No problem, whatever.

Emi: Why did you, you really feel like you needed stress change in the police force?

Diane: Right, policeman's conduct. It still continues to be a problem, and we're still working with it now. There are good and bad apples in every profession. When I was on the council in 1988, and as well as 89', Dallas, Texas, was number one in police shootings, I mean throughout the country. So we moved forward and tried to develop a Civilian Review Board, although we didn't have subpoena power, it does have investigative powers. And because we just had a series of shootings that we felt were unjust and unfair, and we did feel that some officers would put themselves in a position, which forced deadly conflict instead of a peaceful resolution, and so to that end we had a congressional hearing. We had consultants coming in and reviewing our deadly force policies. It was about trying to rid the department of "problem" officers. We never made a wholesale indictment, but that's what we're about. It's trying to rid the department of "problem" officers then, and

we continue to try to do that right today in 2002.

Emi: How were you able to obtain congressional investigations for the cases dealing with the Dallas Police?

Diane: That's a very good question. First of all, there was an order for black enterprise; cause congress was going around throughout the country doing, Congressman Conyers was going around throughout the country doing hearings, congressional hearings, on police misconduct. So, a friend of mine sent me this article. At that time, I gave the article to young man by the name of Ronald Crenshaw, who was very active in police misconduct, addressing the issue of police misconduct. So he, in essence, utilized the offices and the resources of Councilman Lipscomb and I to, in essence, bring forward a congressional hearing. He identified the process and he followed that process that process and he used our resources. That's another thing too about an elected official, you know some people ask the question, "What is the purpose of an elected official,

particularly one who's supposed to be progressive and represent the disenfranchised, etc.?" And there are several purposes, one of which is to develop policy changes to address the needs of the disenfranchised, policy changes. The other though is to utilize the resources of your office to promote change, and this way a key example whereby the congressional hearings was something that the city wanted, but we used the resources of our office to, in essence, bring forward the congressional hearing. It could be from the staff, which is very important. You know the movement always has problems with the staff. It could be number of things, posters, etc., but using the resources of your office, and then other thing is simply, you know, just to promote reforms. You know to change the policies, promote reforms, use the resources, and to make people aware of what's going on using the influence of your office to promote awareness of the various problems.

Emi: I'm sorry, just for someone who doesn't know it, what do you mean by "disenfranchised"?

Diane: That's a very good question too, meaning people who lack power. The powerless often times are the people who detached from the powerful, if you will, people who simply don't have the power financially, or to be quite frank with you or just intellectually

Emi: Did you want to continue to attain, to stay in office when you received death threats regarding the police shootings?

Diane: There was never a desire to be victimized in such a way [laughter]! But no question about it! I'll tell you what the support base was so strong during that time. You know it was... Al and I were very close and we continue to be very close now, Mr. Lipscomb, the honorable Al Lipscomb. Then we had a number of neighborhood people, a number of... Even some council members were very supportive. We had just a number of who were protective, then we had some officers, cause once again, the wholesale, our position was not to develop or to promote a wholesale indictment of all

officers. We had some good officers on the force, and most of them are good. It's always a few apples that the problem. So anyway we had officers who stepped on to assist us with them.

Emi: Okay. Do you feel that, from what I've read, you were really active, and just a "go-getter"; do you feel like you brought a negative image to the city council? That's what you were accused of.

Diane: Oh no question about that, and even throughout the country, it was stated that, not by the country, it was the struggle over I think convention... The Atlanta Convention and Tourism Division would use the conflict that we had within the Dallas City Council, would use those conflicts here to disconsolate. And that's where many people felt that it was such a bad image for the city to this type of conflict. I tell you that, it is that struggle, it is that confrontation, and I think that confrontation is appropriate at times and that you have to confront bad behavior. I think we are called upon to confront bad behavior and sometimes

confrontation promotes the change, it promotes negotiation, and it promotes just a change in people's behavior. And so anyway, I maintain that while it might have been an embarrassment to the city in many ways, but in the long run I think this city has gained. To be quite frank with you, I suggest, and many people have suggested that there was a desire for this city to change the image. Because of that struggle it was a desire to change the image of the city, and one of the ways that they chose to change the image is to run Ron Kirk as the mayor of the city. That is to promote a different of them, and we now have a black mayor and so I think that was one of those positive other ones that came out of it.

Emi: Okay, can you tell me a little bit about the Unified Coalition for Police Reform?

Diane: Okay. That's right, the Unified Coalition for Police Reform. That was way back then, that was a.... That's a wonderful question too! It's a throw back. It was a multiracial coalition and it was African-Americans, it was Latinos, and it was

Anglos in the Unified Coalition for Police Reform. Joan Smasser and Larry Duncan were the Anglos. Domingo Garcia was the Latino and Faheem Mecca was the representative from the African-American community as it relates to the co-chairs I'm talking about. And so Unified Coalition, we established a petition drive, to in essence, place the Civilian Review Board on the ballot. Now we lost, but that was so progressive in nature though. I mean we had to gather, work together collectively as progressive individuals to in essence generate enough signatures to place the issue on the ballot. We were so proud of ourselves. I forgot it was Faheem Mecca and Fred..... I can't forget about Fred, that's right, he was one of the representatives as with the Unified Coalition. And so anyway, we didn't get the actual ballot, the actual review board. We lost the Civilian Review Board, but we were actually able to develop a Civilian Review Board that we have now with investigative powers. It does not have subpoena power, but what they can do however though is request of the council to allow them to use their subpoena power. So,

but anyway, the Unified Coalition for Police Reform was a multiracial organization that struggled for police reforms, and one of the leading accomplishments was the creation of what we now have, The Police-Civilian Review Board, which is progressive in nature. The following we have with that board now is that council members are not appointing people to that board! That's a key problem, but that's the time when [Ross] Perot came in and communicating throwing himself in the middle. We did wonderful things.

Emi: When Mrs. [Yvonne] Gonzales was the superintendent, why were you so for her becoming a superintendent of Dallas [Independent School District]?

Diane: I do believe, as I said in the paper then, and I still believe it now, that there was a need for an educator, a Latino educator to be the superintendent of the school district particularly considering the complexion of the school district. I regret what happened to her in all sincerity, but I believe then, and I believe now, that it is beyond time for a

Latino superintendent, especially considering the complexion of the school district.

Emi: Ok.

Silas: Alright Mrs. Ragsdale.

Diane: How are you doing young man?

Silas: I'm alright; my name is Silas Panzu. I'm going to excuse myself for running late. I want to ask you, were you bitter after your defeat against Charlotte Mayes?

Diane: Well if I was bitter, it was primarily bitter towards, well that's pretty (unintelligible) for my constituents. Let me just give some background. First of all, the answer is no. But let me give you some background. The district was sixty percent African-American. And for the most part, it still is now, eight to ten percent Latino, and the rest Anglo. We had a small amount of Anglos outvote sixty percent African-American. Now I received ninety-one percent of the African-American vote; she

received ninety-one percent of the Anglo vote. And what that meant was that her ninety-one percent, which was white folks, outvoted my ninety-one percent, which was black. And the district was designed to elect an African-American. That's why it's sixty percent. So if there was any bitterness, it was the fact that we didn't get out and vote. Although in some precincts, they voted overwhelmingly, I mean more so than before. What's clear though, is that Diane continues to be involved. That what I am, I'm one who believes that we have a moral and social responsibility to promote social change, to improve the quality of life of people, and so that's the answer to that question.

Silas: Okay Ms. Ragsdale, did you make threatening phone calls?

Diane: I don't have a problem with that! [laughing] You're talking about to... The answer to that is no! No, I don't have any problems with that, the answer is no! And so, I think that was during the police abuse issue as well the police controversy. She was

such a strong supporter. As a matter of fact, I think her was a law enforcement officer, but no those threatening phone calls were not made by Diane. [laughing]

Silas: What factor do you think contributed to your loss?

Diane: Well, one of which was the turnout.

Silas: The turnout?

Diane: Yes, the turnout. But I cannot ignore the fact, that to be quite frank with you, the area that I represented the most, which was for the most part, the district was overwhelmingly African-American. They voted for Diane. So on the one hand, I won in the African-American community, and on the other hand, I lost in the white community. So it just depends on how you define victory. So to that end, I would say that I won because I still enjoyed tremendous respect, but more importantly, I still enjoyed serving the people. As a matter of fact the center in which where we're located now, although it's not out there, its

named in my honor. And it's primarily because of service. So that's what contributed to the loss was that we primarily didn't get out there and vote. Also, what had to take place is that we had to do consistent organizing throughout the year. This was a brand new district at that time. This was very important, and that is there was a short period between the creation of a new system called 14-1, 14 single member district and 1 at large, and the actual election. So that was a short period. So there was not that much time for Diane to begin to nurture and develop even the new African-Americans within the district. And so that was part of it. I decided not to run again, because prior to becoming it was really completely by accident that I ran in the first place in 1984; it was one of my mentors, in the movement for justice matter of fact, my primary mentor Elsie Fay Huggins resigned. She looked around and wanted to find someone to replace her as city council member. And I happened to be one, in her opinion, to be inductable at that time because of my activism. It was never my intent to become an elected official. As a matter of fact, some

people have tried to encourage me to run again as we speak now. I think there's a possibility that I wouldn't run, but there's a probability that I could run and win if I ran. Because now the district is even more African-American, because it's reduced the number of African-American districts from five to four. So therefore, we have more concentration on those four districts versus five. So

Silas: Branching off, data as far as your reference to the new concentration of African-Americans within districts, do you think a more diversified racial composition within districts would be more conducive to political participation as far as being not so much of a concentrated amount of African-Americans more so ? Do you think that get out the voter turnout a little?

Diane: I think more concentration enhances turnout versus diversity, to be quite frank with you. I prefer for it to be different, but the data shows that even right today. For the most part, people go down racial lines. Now at one point in time, I'm sure based upon

research you realize that we usually have what's called an "at large system" and that was a citywide system where people were elected citywide. From there we went to single-member districts, by way of lawsuit, Nixon vs. Wise, talking about the Nixon vs. Wise. Now one of the reasons why we had to move from an at large system, which was citywide to single-member districts, is because of African-Americans as well as Latinos could not be elected. We could not elect our "preferred" choice. That's the key, our "preferred choice". That's where the difference is made, and when we move into single-member districts then the "preferred" choice is elected of African-Americans the preferred is likely to be elected Latinos, etc.

Silas: I stepped in regards to police coalition or something of that nature and I'd been following a news report on Fox 8 News and they were commenting on police brutality had gone up in the year 2002 as opposed to, you know, what we did at the turn of the century. Now I was just wondering, my question to you is do you actually feel that

police brutality has gone up in the ratio of cops to the general public?

Diane: So you're asking me has police misconduct increased?

Silas: Exactly.

Diane: I remember a coalition today it's called the Unified Organizations for Justice. Really the purpose of that coalition, we really came together over misconduct, police misconduct, initially because we felt like they were just the abuse of power. We do hear... all the while there may be some debates about, "Do we live in a true democracy?" The truth of the matter is, is that civilians are supposed to dictate the direction of the military as well as the paramilitary. The paramilitary happens to be what the police department is, and so to that end, that is why you have the president who's supposed to be the commander-in-chief over the military. And locally, you're supposed to have the mayor and city manager who represent the power over the police department. That's key; that's number one.

We have to understand that if we want to protect a democracy versus a police state. So to that end though, I'm a member because of those principles number one. I believe that the police department should always be under civilian control and anytime that anything contrary to that raises in the head, that citizens need to step in and kinda' get things back in control. So we've begun an effort and reviewing existing policies, and the police department is very responsive. Chief Bolton is very responsive as it relates to trying to work with us and look at the policies that need to be changed. So we've begun that process, we've begun the process of looking at Police Relations Committees of the Dallas City Council. We've had meetings with the district attorney, because often times, the district attorney just rubber stamps. You know, when there's a shooting by a police officer, the district attorney just rubber stamps it and really recommends no deal or just simply puts as a referral versus a recommendation of a charge of whatever. So anyway, we've begun to do that, and it's really in the spirit of cooperation with the police department. We are not adversaries,

our position is to make things better, to strengthen things, to strengthen that police department, so that therefore it might be responsive in a better way to the citizens of the city.

Silas: So basically, has it or hasn't it increased?

Diane: Oh I'm so sorry. I didn't answer that question [laughing]. I thought I did! Yeah it has increased somewhat.

Silas: Somewhat?

Diane: Somewhat. Somewhat, it's not out of hand, but we wanted to intervene before it does. We believe in early intervention!

Silas: We're gonna' change directions okay?

Diane: That's okay.

Silas: What is leadership?

Diane: Leadership has several characteristics to it. One of which is strength, courage,

balance, the understanding of the issues, the ability to pull together the coalition. You know, pull together people's viewpoints. The inclusiveness. You know, you might sit around the table sometimes and you might notice that only Diane is talking, which you know might be the case sometimes. So you might have to ask another student or another member of the organization, "Well, what is your opinion?" So you consciously try to pull people in. So inclusiveness, as I indicated, courage, and boldness and intellect, and understanding of the issues., And I guess many times, most of all, which is something that we continue to always overlook, and that is it's a sense of ethics and honesty. You know, if there is a reason why the masses tend to feel uncomfortable or to have lost some respect for leaders, it's because of a lack of honesty. And so, even if you're right, wrong, or whatever, this is what happened. You need to be honest. We're not sinless or guiltless, you know, we need to be honest. If there is a reason why people simply have, to some extent, lost respect for leadership, it's because some of us, some leaders are simply not honest. So I

think we need to be honest. The other thing that is key when you talk about leadership is guided principles that you got to be grounded in principles. You can't be flighty all over the place. Do you have some principles? What are your guiding principles? You know, honesty, caring, sharing, self-determination, inclusiveness, you know, guided principles. We've got to be guided and rooted in principles. Those are some key elements in leadership.

Silas: Okay, what is the most pressing issues facing African-Americans?

Diane: Well I'll tell you what, there are several, one of which I think overall, I maintain that we do need to return back to our sense of history and our sense of identity. I think many times we don't know who we are or from where we have come. If we really return back to our history, our sense of traditional culture, honesty is one of those values. You see what I'm saying? So we got to return back to some fundamental values. This is, you know, people might say, "Well that's pretty central?" Well for the

most part our agenda has been fairly oriented so that's not a conservative agenda. That's how we've made it in many ways, because of our family and extended family. So there's nothing conservative about that. We would not have made through the middle passage without family and extended family. So we need to return back to family and extended family, the importance of such. Then, of course, the other thing there is another issue, it is the whole.... We all talk about, and then, we realize that, you know that the fundamental education and the variety of different disciplines that's required. It might be history, might be political science, might be information, technology, but just overall education, formal education, and it doesn't have to be a four year education. We need skills and trades. You know, we build homes for instance. One of the difficult things is finding African-American builders. That never was a problem before, but it tends to be more and more of a problem. So we're talking about social development of our skills within the community. We're talking about community based economic

development; economic development from within, not from without. Like people keep talking about that how we turn our money over and how it never stays within our community, and that's no lie, that's the God honest truth. We have to do that, but the overall "What do we need to do to address these problems?" That's the key. We can identify problems all day, and we can do that well, but the key though is, "What do we do to address them?" And that's institutional building and community organizing, building institutions to address our problems and organizing the community to address our problems. Those are the two key solutions.

Silas: Okay to branch off the fundamental education aspect, I'm wondering, how adequate do you feel African-American studies are on various levels within the Dallas community elementary, junior high, all the way up to university level?

Diane: Well I believe that has to be integrated into every level. For instance, I'm

not necessarily supportive of a separate African-American studies program at the elementary level, as it should be integrated. If I go to math then I need to learn about the contributions of African-American and African people made in Math cause it's in the math book. And if my next course is language arts or my next course is whatever Literature or English then you know that's too many contributions, you know. With the respect to the elevator that you just came up, I know you came up the stairs though. And so, well I'm just saying that's just too many contributions that we've made. You know people talk about "The Real McCoy" you know you talking about Elijah McCoy. And so the brother who developed another thing even, even the Texas Utilities honor Mr. Latimore every year himself, for what, for the development of the filament in the, what's that little thing called, in the lights. I mean Edison developed the light but there's something that makes it makes it bright. So I'm just saying we, I'm just saying as you go to your Science class African-American studies needs to be integrated there, your Social Studies etc. Everything needs to be

integrated in the different subjects versus ostracized. You might not have to go to that course.

Silas: Okay, including the latter stages of education, how relevant do you feel African-American studies is? Do feel it's adequate? As far as you know.

Diane: No, I don't think it's adequate.

Silas: Okay.

Diane: No I don't think it's adequate, and I think one of the reasons that it's not adequate because it is not integrated into the various courses. And it needs to be integrated into Science the science books, the literature books, or whatever, your math books etc. And so it needs to be; it wouldn't be separate course over there. And sometime it is selective isn't it or elective. Right, elective and sometimes you might decide not to go there. And so [laughs] to that end, and so to that end it needs to be apart of it, integrated into the whole scheme of things.

Silas: Okay, who is the most influential African-American locally and nationally?

Diane: You talking about in my life or you talking about in general.

Silas: In general as far as the collective is concerned.

Diane: Cause in my life it's my mother, but I guess you talking separate from that. Okay, alright so let me see cause that's a difficult thing because we've had so many leaders. That's, that's a real difficult thing to name. I don't know that I would name one cause see I want to make sure that we don't get off into the Messiah-type a thing. Because there have been too many leaders male and female African-American who have made significant contributions to us. And those who are seen and unseen. Ya'll making some significant contributions right here but ya'll might not ever go into history books. And so it's critical that we recognize that there are people who have struggled but yet we do not know.

Silas: So that on both levels; you wouldn't name one?

Diane: I sure wouldn't.

Silas: Okay.

Diane: Absolutely not.

Silas: What are the underlying tensions between African-Americans and Hispanics?

Diane: I think the underlying tension first of all racism in general is used as a means to divide the races. And I think that's one of the key elements is that when I was coming up in the movement we always had leading African-American and Hispanics who would join hand in hand. I'm talking about progressive elements, and you really don't have that anymore. There's so much. "They're talking our jobs away." "They don't give a damn about us." Or, "They had their chance." That type of stuff. Okay, but when I was coming up in the movement for justice we had on one hand like I said the Madrigal's on one hand as part of the Latinos, and then you had the Al Lipscomb's, and you even had the Anglos. You always had a conscious tri-ethnic committee. And so the problem though is the lack of progressive leadership at the top to force the coalition. Then in the past we had the Boondock Patriots, who was white group, and you had the Brown Berets and that was the Hispanic group. And then you had the Panther Party. Okay? And that was revolutionary group that would come together collectively around common issues

and common concerns. And then you had a unified coalition as I just indicated. You had the Black, Brown, and White. So there had to be a progressive leadership that would pull people together around common causes, and I think we must do that.

Emi: As a member... I mean you said you were raised during the civil rights movement, do you feel like....

Diane: Part of it.

Emi: Did you participate in any parts of it?

Diane: Well the N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council, see I was twelve years old. No I was eleven, eleven years old. I just feel, I just had a young life in the movement that's primarily because of my mother. You know and really that's really the reason where I'm now, that's the reason I am involved now is because I started out so young. And that's perhaps one of the reasons I'm poor now. [chuckles] That's a side point. Let me tell ya'll something cause I'm gonna' tell you something. If ya'll happened to get involved in the movement for justice we going to have to find ways our leadership that the leadership is financed. We can't keep on doing, we can't keep on operating on this

thing that leaders for poor folks need to be poor. And we can't keep on operating on that. We've seen too many examples of that and it causes problems to their families as well. And I might go sexist here but it especially causes problems for men who have wives and children. So that's, we can't keep on doing that.

Emi: Why... From what I've read and from what you said here, I feel that you're roots are here in Dallas. Why so much, why do you feel like you need to give so much?

Diane: Right, right well I tell ya once again I think that it is what I like to do. It's what my commitment... It is an internalized commitment primarily internalized by my mother, to be quite frank with you, as a youth. This is why I think we do need to start with our children young and develop youth programs to address problems within our community to lift up the importance of the movement, to lift up their history so that they will be involved in the movement. And I think also why is that we're able to see... It's always good to see visible changes cause people like to see that which is tangible. You know the question has to be

answered as a result of community organizing or as a result of community activism this or these following things were accomplished. And so that's one thing that we're gonna' try and teach in the school community organizing is that to show people what happens as a result of it, you know. These changes came into play, came into existence because people were involved, because of activism. That U.T.A. [University of Texas at Arlington], for instance, is open up to each of you because of the civil rights movement. These are things that are tangible. This institution in the heart of the 'hood built by black people to in essence promote a social change and to promote home ownership opportunity rights came as a result of people being involved. You know and there are countless examples. But I'm just saying we have to lift up the reasons for change.

Emi: Okay.

Diane: Right, I'm sorry.

Emi: What, what message do you want to send to young African-American women who may want follow in your and be active in politics?

Diane: Right. First of all get a good sense of your history and culture because wherever you go it's going to be challenged. You know, people are gonna' raise questions about who you are and about your identity. So it's very important, first and foremost, to get a good understanding of your history. Also, I maintain that we need to have a good understanding a connection with God, and I think part we've left God. And so once we have a good understanding connection with God, a understanding of our history and culture because it's gonna' be challenged. And then what you do persistence, persistence and you will be successful but you've got be connected with the greater family; you understand what I'm saying? And so and right now I'm talking about the greater family you don't want to leave your African-American roots. And often times too often we do that. And then from there Oh you know you can develop coalitions but you got to be you have to be grounded in your history first.

Silas: That comment you made about don't leave your African-American roots, and I'm wondering Dallas to my understanding has a

moderate continental African-American population, how relevant do you feel their activism is as for as the community based level in organizing and taking part in political participation? And if there is any lack of participation what is a, was... we can overcome the barriers between African-Americans and continental Africans?

Diane: I understand, continental Africans, I understand. Once again people have to have a clear understanding of the history from which there come, that's number one. The only reason that there is a detachment is because people don't understand the history. I mean people... We didn't just drop from the sky over here. We came from somewhere. That's number one. But the other we can not forget even the African in the Diaspora, Africans throughout the world, even those who are here they can't forget too they were colonized. They are victims of colonialization. And so even some of them fail to realize their own history. Now while we were enslaved by the European over here; they were colonized by the European over there in Africa. So they first of all need to understand that some of them need to

have a clear understanding of their history. We cannot assume they understood their history because they're African. Okay, because they have been colonized. So number one we have to understand and get a clear understanding of our history. Then number two though we can establish those common goals that we might have. It might be to collectively economic standpoint, affordable housing, education, etc. But the key though we're not gonna move anywhere it could be education, it could be housing, it could be economics, we're not gonna move anywhere together until there is a clear understanding that we come from the same root.

Dr. Gutierrez: Let me try to bring up some things that were left out.

Diane: Sure, please.

Dr. Gutierrez: The whole section of early childhood, tell us about your childhood? Tell us how you grew up, your hobbies, your activities. You're a little girl growing up, your youth council stuff, young woman, S.C.L.C., Black Panther Party?

Diane: That's right. I was born in 52', 1952, and so my daddy died in 1959, so I was

seven years old. And so my mother was a single parent throughout that period, and my mother had two girls, two young girls, seven and nine, my sister Charlotte. And she made a conscious decision not to be married. I mean, you know, and to be quite frank with you her whole concern was molestation. Her quote, "I'm not bringing another man over my children." Okay my mother made that very clear to us and so therefore she did not get remarried because of the fear with two young girls. And so anyway there were three institutions though that was important to us. One was the Y.W.C.A., one was the N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council, and one was the church. Church, Sunday school, C.Y.F., Sunday school convention it was church scene completely. And I don't mind cause I love God. So I don't have no problems with that, and really to be quite frank with you from a moral standpoint, I mean, I'm involved in a significant part because of my moral responsibility to serve the leagues of my brothers. And so anyway we would always look forward to the State Fair of Texas cause we were rock throwing distance from the State Fair of Texas. We would,

every Saturday we would go to the N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council. We would learn how to do, what's that, silkscreen with those t-shirts, or signs, or whatever with Juanita Craft. We would make cookies; I didn't do much of that. Then we would go to the " Y " a lot over there in north Dallas and really out there close to St. Peters. It's not there, Griggs, I think it was. Its not there anymore. We.... My mother sewed a lot. And so she would sew for Phyllis Wheatley all the different uniforms, and she was a nurse. And the neighborhood was very supportive as well cause many times my mother would rotate the shifts from the 3 to 11. And the neighbors would actually stay with us while she would work. So we had an extended family, you know. And the church was a major part of the extended family. It was a wonderful childhood; I enjoyed it. I can't say anything that uh, you know I'm not exaggerating. You know my girlfriends and I we used to often talk about the devastating problems that kids tend to have these days, but we just didn't have that. You know we lived in the neighborhood that we call the hood now. I still live in the " hood", and I

love it dearly. And we just.... People supported each other and extended their hands to one another.

Dr Gutierrez: Tell us about Juanita Craft. Who was she; what she did, why is she important?

Diane: Right, Juanita... Mrs. Craft was over the N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council; really she was the statewide organizer for youth, the youth community organizer statewide. She was known as a civil rights activist. She lived on One, as a matter of fact her house, right now, is a museum the Juanita Craft Museum on One in south Dallas about five minutes from here. She also served on the Dallas City Council. She was just a strong activist. She really responsible for many youth, you know, for becoming involved. A matter of fact Councilman Leo Chaney and them was also a member of the N.A.A.C.P. Youth Council. And so Juanita she was a civil rights activist; she was the coordinator over the youth programming for the N.A.A.C.P. and many youth were under her leadership.

Dr. Gutierrez: Which is the most effective African-American organization today?

Diane: That's a different thing. I think they all serve different purposes and different roles. It might be the Urban League, it might be the N.A.A.C.P., and it might even be parts of the S.C.L.C. I think they all play different roles. If we lack one of.... You know in the past we had the organization that was considered to be left wing and we had the organization that was considered to be moderate. You know and so one kinda', one kinda' helped each other, but the most radical Black organization that we have now is the Nation of Islam, and I believe it's good. And I think the N.A.A.C.P. under Kwame [Nfume] is good on a national level, and then the S.C.L.C. as well. I mean it's just difficult to say the most effective; it just so difficult cause they all play different roles and we need them all.

Dr. Gutierrez: You made mention of a School of Community Organizing is that a project, is that in existence?

Diane: Well it's a project that has just begun a matter of fact it's officed here. And John Trilivan really he's on the board. We got Marilyn Clark with Black Cinematique. We got a number of people who are on the

board, and that's the goal. I can give you a brochure before you leave.

Dr. Gutierrez: All right well then tell us the story about an organization that was really important and died, Progressive Voters League?

Diane: Yes that's a good, that's a good, a very, that's very good question. I mean it was such a critical organization. It came together and in essence was aggressive with respect of voter registration, and voter education, and also it would identify and endorse candidates. I mean and people it was where we came together as elected officials, and as community activist, and as precinct chairs who also elected officials who came together to in essence say we endorse a, b, c. What do you stand for; we would interview them. I mean it was the standard when it came to African-American organization that would endorse individuals. So it would interview individuals. It would endorse individuals; it would educate people about the issues, and sometimes it wasn't, it was not just about endorsing individuals, it was about educating individuals about issues and resolutions and not propositions is what

it was. Anyway so there was a struggle. This where a clear example where there was an ongoing conflict or struggle from within. A matter of fact my cousin, Paul B. Ragsdale, had somehow legally decided that it was inappropriate for this organization to continue to exist. And somehow the people were unable to override that legal challenge and therefore it no longer exist.

Dr Gutierrez: What was the role of Jesse Jones in that?

Diane: Jesse Jones was ... He was the president for several years of the P.V.L. the Progressive Voters League. He was active, very active and he's very now that was the organization that he helped to build and strengthen. I mean, you know, well to strengthen. Yeah he did; he helped to build it. I mean he didn't develop it, but he helped to build it and strengthen it.

Dr. Gutierrez: You told us one story off and on about the struggle for single member districts.

Diane: Right.

Dr. Gutierrez: Can you tell us two other stories? What led to the Walker Consent

Decree and the Cadillac Heights- Rochester pollution, flooding, and development?

Diane: Sure, the story as it relates to see it was single member districts; it was 14 -1, and what was the other one?

Dr. Gutierrez: The Walker Consent Decree.

Diane: The Walker Consent Decree. The Walker Consent Decree.

Dr. Gutierrez: The reason for this thing to exist.

Diane: Right, the Walker Consent Decree.

What happened there were eight African-American females who sued Dallas Housing Authority. Then in essence saying and a matter of fact the lawsuit was Walker vs. D.H.A., Dallas Housing Authority. That where you got the Walker Consent Decree because consent decree is really nothing more than a name that means a settlement in essence. And so they sued them, and sued them because of segregation, discrimination. And what would happen would be, it was documented. Once as African-American female would walk to D.H.A. and ask for some housing; what they would do, they would send African-American females to let's say Frazier Courts which is across the

street, public housing, and they would send it the white female to Section 8 apartments. And so it was documented that clearly it was discrimination based upon the assignment of housing opportunities based upon people were denied the right to choose where they chose to live. And so therefore these females, African-American females, sued the D.H.A., Dallas housing Authority, and they won. And so the settlement in essence was a elaborate amount of resources to the community not necessarily to them individually, but to the community. A matter of fact you're in an area that's considered to be Walker right now. And the reason why it's considered to be Walker is because it's close to a housing unit, which is across the street, which is called the Frazier Courts named after Jerry C. Frazier. So and that eight year period is about to expire. Now [Federal] Judge Buchmeyer continues to hold that lawsuit, continues to hold it. And I don't know if he is going to release the city from such. To say that in essence it had addressed the problem, which I doubt if he would do that, but anyway so that's one. So that's Walker Consent Decree. Now with

the respect to Cadillac Heights... Cadillac Heights is a neighborhood surrounded by pollutants. It represents the epitome of environmental racism, led smelter uh, what's the word rendering plants, uh etc. It's just the epitome of environmental racism. Now under my leadership we were able to close the led smelter. We used a process; we used a zoning process to close the led smelter, and the name of that led smelter was Dixie Metal, D-I-X-I-E. Dixie Metal. And so we , we closed that, but nonetheless there continues to be some residual led that's there. It continues to be other environmental hazards and so along with flooding. And so there is a move, as you know now to in essence collectively try to buy back the neighborhood.

Dr. Gutierrez: Why does Rochester-Cadillac Heights flood?

Diane: I know there is a struggle. I think... Well how the public works engineers will tell you a variety of reasons from an engineering perspective etc., but the bottom line is racism [chuckles]. And so it relates to in theory, as you know, this is the south and water continues to flow from north to south

as well as Rochester neighborhood and Cadillac are in between the Trinity River and the Whit Rock Creek. And so they are overwhelmed right there in the middle. And so now Rochester a levied was built and it has seemingly stopped the flooding maybe about four or five years ago, well that's a lie about eight years ago. As relation to Cadillac they maintain it's going to require a huge levy, a much greater levy. However though it's going to be difficult to stop it flooding.

Dr. Gutierrez: Engaging in a little bit of political intelligence and rumormongering....

Diane: Sure.

Dr. Gutierrez: It is said that Eddie Bernice Johnson is going to step aside and that there is all kinds of people jockeying... Royce West, and John Wiley Price, and Yvonne Davis for that position....

Diane: Right.

Dr. Gutierrez: ...which opens up the state senate position; which open up the other positions, either commissioner or state representative. What do you know about any of this?

Diane: Right. Right. Well you know what I've heard... I think that's a good question, but what I've heard that the Congresswoman it is uncertain at this particular time if she's going to retire. The...and I believe personally feel that Eddie Bernice would stay there as long as she could, but if there is run for her seat or Royce West, Senator Royce West, Commissioner John Wiley Price, or Yvonne Davis. Senator West hands down, you know, that's just the reality. So there we go.

Dr. Gutierrez: The role of newspapers owned by local African-Americans in black politics. What opinion do you have about their value, utility?

Diane: Their value historically has been very powerful from historic standpoint. I do believe that recently it has begun to lose it's power and I don't know if they have a difficulty to in essence keep staff on a consistent basis or what, but the key here is that is the question is who at this present time who really own the black press. And um that's the greater question, but the role from an historic perspective has been awesome. But there is a sincere question

there has to be who truly owns the black press in general. Although we have three or four different newspapers.

Dr. Gutierrez: In retrospect after all these years of experience.

Diane: Right.

Dr. Gutierrez: In terms of the quality of life for African-Americans does it make any difference to have had and have large numbers of elected officials, a [Police Chief Terrell] Bolton, a [City Manager John] Ware, [City manager] Richard Knight, a [Federal Judge] Sam Lindsey, and so on?

Diane: I think that's a good question; I think the answer is yes. I would not have I think it has benefited for us to have a Richard Knight, a Bolton, but we cannot see that as the solution. And I think that's where the problem is, is that we... That we see the elected officials as the solution versus a part of the solution. That we go home and we sit back and say they will handle things. And so I think that, yes, yeah I know there is this debate by some that there not been much accomplishment to have African-American elected officials. But I overwhelmingly disagree with that even as one who has come

from, in my opinion, more of a like a progressive grass roots politician. And I just really do believe that it has been beneficial to have elected officials. And if nothing else to promote policy changes and procedure changes, etc. However though the problem has been several, but the key is that we seem to think that elected officials, African-American officials, represent the solution when it doesn't, when they don't. And Bolton and others aren't necessarily the solution it's a part of the solution as I've indicated. We have to throw the community organizers in there. We have to throw the business element in there, and the moral and spiritual element in there. It's just a part of the solution, the elected officials.

Dr. Gutierrez: Some individuals from the past continue to make an impact, Al Lipscomb, for example, Martin Crenshaw to name a couple, yourself. Why has Roy Williams not been able to sustain that kind of commitment and support, support mainly? He runs almost every year for something...

Diane: [laughs] You know Roy Williams would maintain that he is maintaining

support, but he plays his role. I think that's the best thing. I think that he does play a key role, and he was one of those leading plaintiffs in 14 – 1. So he does play a role, a key role in our community. Everybody has a different role we just have to....

Dr. Gutierrez: Yeah, he was also active in the Panthers back then?

Diane: Oh was he?

Dr. Gutierrez: I believe so.

Diane: I don't remember him in the Panthers.

Dr. Gutierrez: All right. Well you'd probably have better information than I do.

Diane: [chuckles] I don't remember him in the Panther Party, but I do believe, right now, he does play a role.

Dr. Gutierrez: What about the New [Black] Panthers [Party]? What happened to them?

Diane Well, you know, I see them occasionally with the Unified Organization for Justice. They are, they are active on some level. I see them occasionally, and so, we just continue to have many problems. And I just think that the answer, number one is God and family and institutional building and community organizing. We have to...

We use the word empowerment too loosely,
And we have to gain power to address our
problems. And what way can we gain power
to address our problems? I think, number
one, we gain power through God. Number
two, we gain power through community
organizing. Number three,, we gain power
through institutional building.

Emi: Okay, well on behalf of the African-
American politics class, we would like to
thank you for your time. And we wish you
good luck on everything that you do in the
future.

Diane: Thank you very much. I'm glad that
you guys have come. I'm proud of each of
you. Thank you. Thank you, very much.

Emi: Oh, my hands are wet.

Diane: That's all right don't worry about it.