

Oral History Collection

Kathlyn J. Gilliam

Interviewer: Robert Price

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Place of interview: Dallas, Texas

Mr. Price: My name is Robert L. Price. The African-American Education Archives and History Program and the African-American Museum are documenting the civil rights movement in Dallas county Texas. Today, October 18, 2011, I am interviewing Mrs. Kathlyn Joy Gilliam in her home located in Dallas, Texas. Mrs. Gilliam we appreciate your ability and your willingness to take part in this project. First I wanted to ask you some questions about your early life and something about

the history of your involvement in the civil rights movement in Dallas. Where were you born?

Mrs. Gilliam: I was born in a little town called Campbell, Texas. It's between Greenville and Commerce, Texas.

Price: And what is your--the name of your parents? What are the names of your parents?

Gilliam: Roslyn [unclear]

Price: What is your education background?

Gilliam: Well we moved to Dallas when I was a freshman at high school. I graduated from Lincoln High School and I went on to study at SMU [Southern Methodist University] and also to study at community college system of Dallas community.

Price: If you were educated in a segregated school system, tell us something about the facility, the textbooks, and the equipment within those schools.

Gilliam: Well obviously it wasn't of the highest quality. That was one of the problems that patron's parents had with the public school system. Because they knew very well that the school was not equal and that it was

a lot that could be done to improve the situation for all the kids.

Price: When you were at Lincoln was that during the time when they had some resistance by the white people within the neighborhood of colored students there at Lincoln [who] were going to a school that they thought was too good for them?

Gilliam: It sure was. It was during the time when you only had two high schools in the whole county for African-American students. It was the Booker T. Washington High School in short-north Dallas and then they built the new Lincoln High School. And that's when the community became unsettled and thought that that school was much too nice for African-American students. We went through a long struggle of dealing with that problem. You know, I don't know when it was resolved. Those things have a way of dropping off of the radar. It wasn't much to do about us. And while all that was going on we had burnings [?] in the community. It wasn't many places where African-Americans could live in the city because the housing stock wasn't here. And we did the great migration. People were moving in from the south, from the

north, and the west. It just really had a [unclear] and that's how the government would build those housing projects all over the county side.

Price: Tell us something about your occupational experiences. What was the type of work you were doing?

Gilliam: When I graduated from high school I went to the [unclear] business school of administration and that's where--I worked there for about five years. We had a gentleman by the name of Carter Wesley. You might know Mr. Wesley. He was a resident of Houston, Texas. He owned the chain of newspapers, the Informer chain. I went to work for Carter Wesley and we worked at that project for about five years. After that we started to raise the family and I started to work for the people of Visionary [?] Baptist Church. And I worked there until about--I guess it was about 1937. It was always interesting things going on at the places where I found myself working. I learned a lot from those instances. It was a lot of history being made back then. Of course we didn't realize it the kind of history that was really being made because we didn't capture everything that we should have captured. But be that

as it may it turned out to be better than what it had been for African-American's in the city. We were fortunate to have had Dr. Carter Wesley to be a part of that scene. And I guess--I'm not sure, but Dr. Wesley was one of the first millionaire Negroes in the state of Texas. Very learned person and I remember he used to tell us childhood stories. His mother was a principal of some of the schools down in the county and he was always at odds with her about saying she wasn't trying to do for the schools. They would go up and down about the school [and] what she shouldn't do. "Now why would you treat your mother like that?" He said, "Oh I take care of her until the day she dies, but she's going to sit over there and not give those kids what they need." It was just a running battle with them. So he was quite a character. We see Dr. Wesley's handwriting all over this state in the area of media and education. I had a grandson to recently graduate from Fisk University and of course we were touring the campus there not long ago before he finished and those were a lot of things where Dr. Wesley had contributed a lot to the Fisk University campus. One of the things that his name is on is the bell on the

campus. I just feel fortunate that I had the opportunity to meet such a person as Dr. Wesley and some of the persons that go down in history [for] making definite contributions to what was going on in a beneficial way at that particular time. It's not very much to tell about the desegregation in Dallas because Dallas was one of the cities that sort of kept a lid on things. Very image conscious. Never wanted the real truth to come out about what was happening. So that was a deterrent to the kinds of things that we needed to do. It wasn't that we didn't have the expertise to really capture the kinds of things that we should have been doing, but, I don't know, it's just like Dallas has been kind of lackadaisical in terms of getting committed to real problems. Then they had this group that controlled the city for so long. Not only did they control the African-American community, but they controlled the power structure of the Anglo community. It just was unreal the kinds of things that were going on in Dallas. And of course we had this influx of persons coming in from the rural and of course that didn't help things too much. In fact it probably did more to harm the situation because

the population grew so rapidly. The people were coming out of the rural. They weren't [?] moving into the inner cities and we had people that was upset about that. They would go ask the school board--we had some parents that was complaining about the kids who were tearing up their neighborhoods. That they was coming into these communities. Said, "They don't even know how to walk on the grass." [Laughter] They didn't know how to walk on the grass. So just real, real, real problems. And people would not believe the kinds of things that were going on during that time. In fact we had two separate PTAs [Parent Teacher Association] on a national level. We had the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers and then we had the larger body. And all of that activity was mostly going on in the south. That was quite an education. I think it's a lot to be learned by young people about that area of time when they acted. And it wasn't too long ago that those two congresses merged. That was in 1970. It hasn't been that long ago.

Price: During the time that they had the separate PTAs, the colored PTA and the white PTA, was there ever any time where the colored PTA members--I understand you were president--was there every any time when they were able to have meetings at the administration building here in Dallas?

Gilliam: Oh, no. That was like a sanctum. Black folks didn't cross those thresholds. That was off limits to--and I remember when they elected Dr. Patton [?]. I guess he was the first black administrator. Dr. Patton just lived not quite a block from the school administration. Of course he was the principal at--
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Price: Was that Booker T.?

Gilliam: --Booker T. for years and years, yes. He could not even have an office over at 3700 Ross [Avenue]. I'd see Dr. Patton walking to work every day, going to Booker T. to the office. I think that he had him some little cubbyhole where [unclear] he was there.

Price: Would some of the administrators-black administrators--were they housed in another facility?

Gilliam: No. If they were a principal of a school that's where they were housed. They didn't have a central--.

Price: What about Mrs. Brashear [?]-Janet [?] Brashear.

Gilliam: Brashear and I guess it was Florence Phelps and maybe Yvonne [unclear]. They were the top African-American administrators in the school system at that time. And I think they were called [unclear] or something.

Price: Their offices were not in the administration building?

Gilliam: No. They were I think with Brashear at an office over there at that school on Caddo. [unclear] at that time. And I don't know where Mrs. Phelps was housed. But they had [unclear] for that particular time and place.

Price: Tell us something about what it was like in your position as a school board member.

Gilliam: Well we were all elected with that first round of single member districts and that was an effort that Paul Ragsdale furnished the leadership for, to get the school districts an elector for a single member area because we discovered long ago that we could never elect a person or persons that we actually thought would represent the community because we didn't have the--we still had that at large system where

everybody voted on all of the school board members. So Paul went to work in the state legislature and was successful in terms of getting that legislation passed. So that was the beginning of single member districts. At that time we'd gone on and done some things with the city council and some things I guess with the state. But all that has changed and for the better I would say. And I hope that we'll continue to make progress in the area of politics and economics and education. Those are areas that we need a lot of strengthening going on because those are some very key issues that we done had to deal with from now on.

Price: Prior to you becoming a school board member you served on the Tri-Ethnic Committee. What was the function of the Tri-Ethnic Committee?

Gilliam: The Tri-Ethnic Committee was a court appointed group of fifteen citizens of the city and they were commissioned to oversee the school desegregation order that Judge Taylor had just handed down. During that time there was a lot of shaking and shivering going on because you would have thought the world was coming to an end any minute here in Dallas.

Because people were just wringing their hands in disbelief that we were going to have to send these kids all over town on these buses. And they actually out of that--it was just ridiculous the kinds of things that they were doing to young people to get them in these schools. They were contagious or something. They had to have all these shots and everything. They couldn't miss any of that. "Oh these are some kind of foreigners that's coming in here to invade our property." Unbelievable the kinds of things that were going on in the community. I remember we had those first little girls that integrated the old Sydney Parks School. They were twins, Annie and--I can't remember that other one, but they were twins.

Price: Simms. Were their last names Simms?

Gilliam: Thomas, I'm thinking.. [unclear] They were the ones that integrated those early grades. We were talking with the aunt not long ago. She came to a board meeting and she told us about the things that were going on during that time. And she was saying--she's a very highly religious person and she was telling us about the time that she would come to the board meetings.

She had something in her hand bag that would change their mind. And she said--of course that was before I was saved--[unclear] because I think she kind of took control of that situation and sheperded me through the whole process. I saw those young ladies, one of them out at [unclear]. She was [unclear]. I don't know if it was Annie and the other one. She let me know who she was.

Price: That was a case that was in federal Judge Sarah T. Hughes' court that talked about the inequities between black students and white students and some of the punishment-corporal punishment that was given was not equal. There was a difference. Do you recall any of that information about that case?

Gilliam: Yes. Dallas and throughout the nation in terms of push-outs during that time. Kids weren't just dropping out of school, they were being expelled for minor infractions and things. A lot of kids left the system during that time because they just could not deal with it. You know, during the time that you were on the board we had made some visits out in the north Dallas area to see what we could really find out about what was going on. And of course we found

a lot of kids having to take a long bus ride. They were still having to be segregated in the classroom and they was being put outside the classroom, out in the hall. Found all kind of things that was going on. In fact, we had a series of meetings to try to ascertain what was going on in the different sects of the city. We found out more than we ever thought we would find out. [Laughter] It was quite ridiculous. And the thing about it [was] we just didn't have a lot of help. I guess where we were working with the national PTAs and those national organizations we found that in those communities they a lot of resources that were coming directly from the community. But Dallas didn't ever quite pick up that [unclear] and carry it as an issue. I know that we had done a lot of things in terms of trying to raise money-money that we didn't have. And we couldn't get some of the lawyers to do pro bono work and so we had to go the Dallas Legal Services. That was a poor people's law firm. And of course by the time they got through chewing on that group of lawyers they was just limp as a rag. They had had just about all they could stand. But it wasn't easy, it really wasn't easy.

Price: Tell us something about that case Hawkins verses Estes.

[Hawkins vs. Coleman?] Ruth Hawkins.

Gilliam: Yes. Ruth was a single parent and she had, I think, three boys in the system. It was just insane everyday what was going on with Ruth's young son. They were being sent to the Plymouth Road area and everybody called the Plymouth Road area the Mississippi of United States. They weren't wrong either. They were, that last court order--I guess that was 1987 [?] or 1985. We found that was one of the most difficult areas to desegregate. And those folks acted as though they owned those schools. They didn't get along with anybody but them. And they didn't want anybody out there in it. But they had all these different plays and things and instead of putting on plays that would be relevant to all young people they was doing things like Oklahoma and the kids didn't want to participate in them. It was just an ordeal.

Price: Mrs. Gilliam at this point would you like to take a break and get a drink of water?

Gilliam: No.

Price: Okay. The case with Hawkins vs. Estes I understand that Dr. Estes testified and out of that case there was a ruling by federal judge Sarah T. Hughes on racism. Tell us, what was the decision?

Gilliam: She ruled that the superintendent had gotten on the stand that day and they had testified that racism did exist in Dallas independent school district. And of course to this day I think that was his demise here in Dallas. He had started to act like a big boy, but he was talking about doing a--putting a school downtown at the old Dallas Athletic Club. Everybody knew that was a place where--that was just for the workers. There was not a lot of black folks that would go in there [unclear]. Estes was going to open a school there. He was going to have the administration building and I think on the top floor of the other part he was going to develop some kind of development. They said, "Oh no you're not either." So that didn't go over too well. Of course he--anyway they didn't want Dr. Estes here in the first place because he was too progressive. I didn't have any visions that he would be here for any length of time because he just wasn't the person for this

job. During that time we had people that would come into the 3700 Ross [Avenue] address that Ku Klux Klan [unclear]. I never will forget. It was a [unclear] and her name was Addie [unclear], that was her name. And she would come some days with her red satin stuff on and then some days she would come in solid white. She would just come in there and berate us. The "niggers" and "Jews" were just taking over this whole situation. She didn't miss a trick. They had to let her come because she had to have her say. And she came and she said it too. You tell the young folks that today and they don't even believe that happened. They don't believe something like that could happen in the United States during this time. But we got a lot to teach our young people and I think we need to get in the habit of doing that. We really do.

Price: You were elected president of Dallas independent school district board of trustees in 1980. Tell us about the night of that election.

Gilliam: Well I'll tell you the only thing that I could put any kind of analogy to it would be recently when the President Obama was elected to the President of the

United States. [Laughs] I tell you it was quite a time because nobody thought that that could be pulled off in our lifetime. Of course when that happened it was--I wish we could recapture that night. It was really electrifying.

Price: Do you remember how many rounds of votes were taken before--

Gilliam: Oh my goodness. It took us all night to get the vote count correct. You made the nomination.

Price: Right.

Gilliam: And then we started to count those votes and [shakes head] my goodness, you would have thought the world was coming to an end because they said--I didn't ever figure it out, but somebody said that night that we elected the first African-American superintendent--Marvin Edwards [that] Dr. White died that same night. [Laughter]

Price: He did or he did the next day.

Gilliam: The next day, right. Right at that time. He couldn't stand it.

Price: That night that you were elected president there were about six rounds of voting and finally the person who was

abstaining voted for you. [Laughs] But do you recall how that all came about. What had happened prior to that caused the women on the board to vote for you?

Gilliam: Well we were having some meeting with the city council. Harriett Ehrhardt was on the board then. Harriett had not fared very well with Dr. Estes. They didn't get along for some reason. But anyway, they were having these meetings down at city hall and they were trying to keep some board members out of those meetings and Harriet was one of them. So she decided she was going to the meetings because she was a board member. She went down there and Brad Lapsley was the president I believe. Brad told Harriett, "I don't know why you wanted to go to that meeting anyway. You're just an ornament. You weren't nothing but an ornament down there." So we had a big blowout about that. It looked like we had a new blowout every day. But anyway, we had a lot to overcome and one of the things that I really took very personal and I guess I should not have as member of the board during that time. It was just such a state of fear in this community and people were just afraid to even open their mouths. I was telling somebody not

long ago that we would--some of the white women on the board would be walking down the hall and some of our brothers in administration--they would nearly break their necks to open the door for this white woman, but I had to get in the best way I could. I didn't take that too kindly at all. And I think that while we all have to play in this situation we all could have done much better if we hadn't of been so scared. I was laughing at not long ago when Reverend Al Sharpton was running for the President when he was saying one day in one of his speeches, "If you're scared just say you're scared." [Laughs] So we could have said that back then because we were absolutely positively afraid of our shadows. But I guess rightly so because some of the horrors that they were telling about. You couldn't belong to the NAACP. You'd better not have a membership card in your billfold with the NAACP membership on it. It would kind of scare you out of your wits. That you were trying to raise a family and all that stuff. But they really had this town just in straights. Couldn't go one way or the other. And I think there should be some consequences for that. But anyway, those were the times. I think the young people today

are really a vote of confidence because they were the ones that bore the brunt of all this action. Because I think that if all of us had to endure that day in and day out, I don't know if we could have done it. I don't think so. We had young people-- they were not afraid. They were not afraid. [Laughs] They would hop out there and land on their feet every time. Robbie and little charmer [?] were right in the middle of it. They were the movers and shakers. [Laughter] And I think we should try to point out regularly that the part that those people played in the successes we were able to obtain.

Price: Your charmer was involved in the Skyline incidents. After having these meetings with parents in March of 1980 we formed an organization called the Black Coalition to Maximize Education. Tell us something about that and your involvement with the Black Coalition.

Gilliam: I think we did that out of desperation because we didn't have a vehicle at that time. Down through the years we had teachers--we had an African-American teachers group and then we had a--you know, that whole thing was segregated, even the custodial and maintenance were organized. By that time after the other

organizations had kind of dwindled away it was big rumors told about how much money the teachers group had really in their control. But you never could confirm was that the truth or not the truth. According to them we should have been able to buy anything we wanted with all that money they were saying the black teachers had gave away to the establishment. And I'm not saying they didn't have it. It's not outside the realm of possibility during that time. Any foolishness could go on. Then we came on out. Finally [unclear]the public school system and started trying to deal with some of the areas of higher institutions. We had the Bishop College at the move from Marshall [Texas] to Dallas and we always said that that was just to keep kids from going to SMU. We weren't able to prove it. We had tried to prove it, but couldn't get any takers. It must have been very disheartening to have to go through that day in and day out. And literally couldn't do too much about it because we didn't have the wherewithal to do it. Then we had--even back in those times we had some different ministers that was on the forefront. They had always been the ones that would champion the community cause and they would

try to rise up and be vocal. I remember one of our permanent members that had had served on the special grand jury. When they were bumming the houses out of here, nobody knew who was doing it. They were serving on this special grand jury. Appoint these special grand juries and I think they thought that would stop everything. He served on that committee and it was the area right around in this community [Points to outside] that was the hardest hit because they were bumming these residences right and left. But it didn't stop them from doing what they wanted to do. And I think the only thing that did stop them--there was one night the lady down on Pine [Street] or somewhere down in there. She decided she was going to take the show on the road and so she got her gun out and started to fire back at them. That was the only thing that ran them away. And then it all boiled down to was those bums were being made right down here on Pine at the [unclear] Baptist Church. Found out that's where all the deals were going on, in the basement of that church. It's got to be a book written Dr. Dulaney. [Laughter]

Dr. Dulaney: I'm working on it.

Price: After the findings of those schools that were visited in north Dallas your work on the school board--you formed the learning centers. The learning centers brought some of these poor students back to the schools in south Dallas. What advantages did the schools then in south Dallas have that they didn't have prior to being bussed to north Dallas where we thought they would have an advantage?

Gilliam: To do those things we had to write a lot of stuff in an order that they probably would have never gotten into before. And then we had to reduce the teacher/pupil ratio to one to eighteen with a cap from one to twenty. Then we had to hire other African-American administrators to bring a different perspective to the table. We had to do some things to try to increase the number of African-American educators in the state of Texas. And of course they didn't want to increase that number because they knew that was a danger to their little comfort zone. But it was just so much. And I was reading "Lift your voices, Sing". That's the story of the NAACP--the history. It's really a book that needs to be read by--widely read because

there's things in that book that I never dreamed happen. And I just think that--we don't know our history. [unclear]I just don't think we can continue to hide behind the fact that well it was too dangerous to do those kinds of things in those days. It was dangerous when Harriet Tubman would get those souls across the Underground Railroad also, but it didn't deter her from doing what they could to make it happen.

Price: I understand that after the learning centers were created those students were brought back to south Dallas schools. In the north Dallas schools they were placed in portables and basements of the schools in remedial classes. And once they got to the learning centers that you were instrumental in creating they began to excel. So something happened to caused them to do much better than in those north Dallas schools.

Gilliam: Most certainly. A lot of the kids just dropped out of school in the sixth grade. They just didn't go back to school. As a result we had a large segment of over-age youngsters enrolled in the Dallas independent school district that we just weren't

ready to cope with. We had opened up the Percy [?] Anderson school and I think we had about 3,000 kids in that school. And some of those classes were like thirty-five or more, so it was really--and some of those kids were just turned off from school. They wouldn't go. Their parents couldn't make them go. But after they got back in school--you could see a little light at the end of the tunnel. They just took a different attitude, came back to school and really make those learning centers one of the talking points in the DISD [Dallas independent school district] curriculum. And so that was a good thing.

Price: After you did the work with the learning centers and there some other things that you did--and one was Selena Butler. Tell us something about that and why was that set up and established?

Gilliam: When the kids quit going to school the parents stopped going too. So we didn't have a vehicle to really continue to train our parents and do what we needed to do with them. What we did was basically we just had to create some vehicles to really bring our parents back on board again. So we knew that we

couldn't just go along with what was going on because some of us had come from the rural communities and we did know that the sort of rural schools that we were coming from they were much better equipped than some of the ones over here in big town Dallas at Lincoln and Booker T. We had a lot of lessons to learn and we learned that that wasn't the case at all because those kids would come to the interscholastic league and just put us all in the shade. In spelling bees and all kinds of things.

Price: What were some of the subjects that were covered during the Selena Butler training?

Gilliam: We talked about the rights and responsibilities of parents in the school system and the kinds of things they needed to do to really help the young people. We talked about the--that they did have rights. That they didn't have any rights if they didn't know their rights. It was a worthwhile endeavor. And now it looks like the district is going to try to pick that up and develop a training piece on their own.

Price: You had--some subject was the rights of parents and the rights of the students and you also had some sessions on the court order.

Gilliam: Yes we surely did. That way we were able to keep the patrons and parents informed as much as we possibly could because we had had a cadre of folks in the community that were learning how to broker the system. And it was really beginning to pay off dividends. But that was one of the things that--the district was champion of that. Every time we'd start a project that was going positively for the young people something would happen and it would be cut off just like it started.

Price: These projects that you had such as that, you mentioned that they were cut off. Was the school district or the city or someone to take over these programs?

Gilliam: They never would say that the city wanted to take it over. They were just parceling it out to different--we had I don't know how many consultants we had at that time. Looked like the district was run by consultants. We did a lot of things with consultants and it wasn't long before we were able have the first African-American superintendent of the

schools. Of course we talked about that already. I don't know when we'll get the next African-American. Looks like we going a long way around to try to get one. But all in all I would say that we did, we had a very good [unclear], a very good staff. They really did a lot, going beyond the call of duty to be sure that our youngsters were prepared. And today I don't know if we are able to take advantage of the kinds of things [unclear]. At the Collegiate Academy [Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy, Dallas] they announced the other day that these kids that enrolled in that academy, they will get two year free tuition to go and finish that program.

Price: It's through the University of North Texas at Dallas?

Gilliam: Yes. And in connection with the Collegiate Academy. That's a real opportunity. We just need to lean on the parents now. Be sure that they understand what's available because we can't just leave everything up to our kids. They're not grown yet. They see us at home and so we need to start to teach them the truth about what the real truth is and try to make it better for them than it was for us.

Price: What they need to do is set up a class out there and have you to instruct it, on how to broker the system.

[Laughter]

Gilliam: Oh, really. [Laughs]

Price: You'd be willing to do that wouldn't you?

Gilliam: Oh yeah. I'm game. I can get along with the devil as long as he stays out of my way. [Laughter]

Price: Are you a member of any of the organizations such as the civil rights organization such as the NAACP, any of them?

Gilliam: Yes. And the NAACP, I guess it's just like all organizations. They'll write you a note and ask for a donation. Then you send them the donation and then the next thing you'll get a note saying, "We received your donation, but that wasn't your membership." [Laughter] I say, "What was that I just got through paying?" But anyway, I guess it's like everything else, you got to have the resources to run an organization. And every piece you drop in the mail costs forty-four cents.

Price: What about some of the other organizations like SCLC?

Gilliam: SCLC. I worked with--tried to work with Peter then a little.

Of course Peter, he was a very young person and [unclear] if I don't think Peter understands. He understands better than what some of the things he was producing. But anyway, I think that's one of the things we need to do with our students now is try to get them online with--you know, I was doing some computer classes down at El Centro [Community College, Dallas] and some mornings I just wanted to cry because you know our young people--they were just struggling so and it just wasn't paying off for them. And I could just point out the ones that wouldn't be there too long. I was talking to the professor one morning and we had a big class when it started, but the longer the class went on the smaller the class got. So I asked him, "What's [unclear]with the students?" He said, "Oh that's the way it happens every year." Said, "You bound find the ones that are serious from one that's not."

Price: Do you think some of these organization-civil rights organizations have had any success here in Dallas?

Gilliam: Well you'd have to say they've had some success. The history of the NAACP--we cannot ignore the fact that they

were really one of the movers and shakers in this whole ordeal. And it was even names in the book that I recognized from where I was working in the community and in the churches. A lot of the folks I identify by name because they were making definite contributions every day.

Price: Did you ever work with Mrs. [Juanita] Craft?

Gilliam: I didn't ever work with Miss Craft in any local efforts to organize the youth, but I do know a lot of youngsters that [she] worked with and she--I think Miss Craft made a definite contribution. And you know when we were--Miss Craft wanted her home to be donated to [unclear] city park. That's where she wanted her house. And I think we wrangled with the Parks Department [for] I don't know maybe years trying to get that at [unclear] city park like she wanted. And it's in her will and testament. We even pulled the will and all that and it's there where she said she wanted it. And before we had made that decision they had moved the house over to Second Avenue and I don't know where all. It was just sort of floating around. But finally the Parks Department [National Park Service] took it over, so it's still there

where she--finally we became very weary and said, "Let's just leave it where it is. What's wrong with leaving it exactly where it is?" So that's where they left it and that's where it stands today.

Price: I'm going to back up a little bit and ask you why did you run for the school board.

Gilliam: I don't know. [Laughter]

Price: Were you encouraged by a group of people?

Gilliam: Well, yes. You know I had worked with the PTA for all those years and that group was really insistent that I do that. And there were other groups in the community. So I decided well I may as well try and see what we can do with this problem and it is definitely a problem. I always wanted to be--I guess I was taking after my mother because I can remember when they used to have their little neighborhood groups and they would have a meeting every month these ladies. And some of those ladies--I don't know why. I liked them. They were my aunties and cousins and all of that, but when I would see them coming down that road something would come over me and I would say, "Oh my god, here they come again." [Laughs] It

looked like they would meet all day long and then they'd have these--of course the best part of it, they'd always have these refreshments. And we [unclear]cakes and cookies and all kinds of things. But it was something to--I never did figure out why I'd be crying when they came down the road because they weren't doing anything to me. But I never had figured that out. I was thinking about it not long ago. One my dear aunts-aunt Sadie, Oh, she could cook some greens. My goodness. And I knew I would learn some of Aunt Sadie's greens and she would be the main one that would come the first. She would be the first one [unclear].

Price: Who were some of the non-African-Americans of goodwill that you may remember? Some that you felt were really attempting to improve education for all students.

Gilliam: Well I think I'd point a person named Harriet Earhart. The other day I was taking a nap on [unclear] and the phone rang. It was a lady. I couldn't hardly hear her. She said, "Is your name Kathlyn Gilliam?" I said, "Yes." She said, "You used to be on the Dallas School Board." [I said], "Mhmm." And she said, "Well

I volunteer at the hospital, out at Methodist. And my name is Mary Ridges [?]."

Price: Mary Ridges [?] At the event the other day, was she there?

Gilliam: No. She was on the phone.

Price: Oh, I see.

Gilliam: And so I said, "Oh yes, Mary." She said, "Yeah, I think about you all the time. And I saw your name. This must be Kathlyn." I said, "Oh yes." And I said, "People can find you if they want to." She said, "Yeah, I volunteer out at the hospital and I saw your name."

Price: There were some other white individuals, non-African-Americans who were involved in the school district. Do you think of some of them as being very helpful towards the integration?

Gilliam: Yes well I think that a lot of people give Jack Lowe Senior a lot of credit for some of the things that happened at desegregation. I don't know if his contributions are what they claim it to be. I know his son was on the board a little while and he definitely didn't carry out the effect the family had made in definite

contributions. In fact, you couldn't hardly believe that was his son.

Price: What about some of the attorneys?

Gilliam: We had some attorneys. They weren't rich, none of them. They didn't have money. None of them had money, whites or blacks or Hispanics. And it's just a hard thing to do anything if you don't have any money. We just had to deal with what we had to deal with. I remember the first school board election I ran in. We sold pickles and I don't know what it was. Every Saturday we sold something down here on [unclear] and that raised money for the stamps and things. But now, you know, we--they price that kind of campaign out of the radar screen now. If that's what you going to raise you'd better go home and sit down and [Laughter] not wear yourself to death. But we went down there just as early as the morning would come to sell all those hot dogs and pickles. The kids would come and buy them, but that was about it.

Price: You were also instrumental in organizing a state-wide black school board organization, the trustees of the different districts in the state. Tell us something about that.

Gilliam: Well we, in the state of Texas, didn't have the two school districts that were predominantly governed by African-Americans. That was the Wilmer-Hutchins district and that Houston district down on [unclear]. I think the name of it was North Boroughs [?] independent school district. So we organized. It was one of things about folks being scared. They come out of those little towns and they wasn't going to make any noise. You talk about a quiet bunch. That was a quiet bunch. But anyway, we organized that and after we organized it then of course the next thing that came on the scene was the Hispanics. They decided they needed a caucus also. Of course we always were so benevolent, "We have to do that. That's the right thing to do." Of course it was the right thing to do because they didn't want breakfast or lunch to the young people. They come out of the country. They didn't need to be paying for the luncheons and breakfasts and things. They were just mean spirited. I didn't know how you could be that mean to young folks.

Price: Dr. Dulaney do you have any questions?

Dulaney: You've asked all my questions like you did last time. I was just curious about why did you get involved in the colored PTA?

Gilliam: Basically that was really the only parent organization that was in operation that had any kind of recognition of the school administration in the state. So I could see that that was one day if we played our card right we could turn that around and make it a very powerful organization. So that's one reason I did that. And then I had a couple of girls in public school at that time, so it was just sort of a natural thing for me to do.

Dulaney: Okay. We've been talking to you for over an hour. How do you feel? It's been an hour and twenty minutes.

Gilliam: Oh I'm alright.

Dulaney: You alright. Okay. I got one last question Mr. Price. Do you have anymore? While you are looking let me ask my last question then. You've worked with, while you were on the colored PTA and on the school board, W.T. White, Nolan Estes, Marvin Edwards, [and] Linus Wright. Out of those school superintendents which one you say did the best job?

Gilliam: Well the best job that was done in this [unclear] was by
Nolan Estes.

Dulaney: Why would you say that?

Gilliam: Well he was more in tune with the times here in Dallas.
He's a politician. He knows where the bodies are
buried and how to dig them up when he has to.

Price: I've just got one more question here. What about the Black
Coalition to Maximize Education in the court case.
How effective do you think they were?

Gilliam: How effective who was?

Price: [Laughs] The Black Coalition.

Gilliam: Oh well I think it served its purpose. It speaks volumes
for that group at that time. It came on the scene
at a time when it was very much needed and I think
they played the part that they needed to play at
that time. I think the court was rather kind to the
Coalition.

Price: We don't want to tire you out too much and I want to thank
you very much for your participation in this
interview. And we thank you very much. We want to
commend you on the work you've done, you're advocacy

for education and the students and especially those of African descent. And we're very happy and pleased that they have a school, Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Collegiate Academy. That sounds good.

Gilliam: Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate it and I appreciate everybody that worked to make that happen. My kids go by there, "Well I passed by your school today." [Laughter] [I say], "That's not my school." [They say], "Well yes it is."

Price: Thanks again Kathlyn.

Gilliam: Thank you. I'd like to take you and show you [unclear]. Can't say you haven't been there. You know I often wonder what would be going on now if all that stuff hadn't happened with Dr. Curry. I think it would be a different place. You know, I think Dr. Curry, they got mad at him like it did Estes because he wouldn't stop building those buildings. They wanted him to quit, even the ones that were so liberal and supposed to be helping the black community they withdrawing that money. But I think it would have been a different ballgame if Dr. Curry had been able to hold on.

Price: Well if the black churches, not just the Baptist churches, but if all of the black churches had gotten together and the people here in Dallas had gotten together that school should still be together and still be operating and in existence.

Gilliam: I think you're right. And it wasn't that the--I know that church forever, go every Sunday. You may as well carry some extra money because you going to have to put some in that bishop bucket. And the black churches, they put what they could in I can say. I saw it happen every Sunday and they would take up that money. It was just like pouring water over a hole in a bucket. It was going in but next week you didn't have money.

Price: Do you remember when we used to meet with parents and some of the attorneys and the court order over there at the People's Baptist Church? And I think it was Revered Bethel and some of the other ministers came in there and told Reverend Wright that this was the black administration building. [Laughter]

Gilliam: They used to have everybody over there typing. All of us on typewriters and everybody.

Price: You remember how Ron White used to type?

Gilliam: [Laughs] "Oh you can't be sitting up here if you can't work."

Price: We left Ron White there one time. We had to go to a meeting at the administration building and we left Ron White to help put some things together, some papers and all, and he was doing the typing.

Mrs. Price: Could he type?

Price: I guess. He was doing this. I don't know. We weren't there. Some letters were mixed up and up and down. And tell us about your typewriter. What was that letter?

Gilliam: Oh yes. I had a little old portable typewriter and it was-- I think it might have been electric. But anyway, we wore that poor little typewriter out. A key fell off of it and so Bob was going down to five [unclear]. I said, "Bob, the key is off the typewriter. We can't send that down to the court." So he said, "Oh?" He hum hawed around. We ended up sending it on down to the court and to this day when I look at something on paper I see that [unclear] falling off. Oh, my goodness.

Price: We were supposed to file this paper with the court and we couldn't find Joan Wynn [?]. She may have been in court on something else and so I took it and filed it myself. [Laughter]

Gilliam: Bob would go down there just like he was an attorney and do something, I don't know what. They would take it.

Price: They took it. Stamped it. What was that--Silvia I think, the judge's clerk or something? Silvia took it and stamped it. Became part of the record. Well, we don't want to tire you out to much.

Dulaney: We're going to stop it right here then. This is October 18, 2011. We are at 3817 Wendlekin [Street], Dallas, Texas. And we just completed an interview with Mrs. Gilliam done by Mr. Robert Price and Mrs. Charmaine [?] Price.

Gilliam: Thank you very much.

[End of interview]