

Oral History Collection

Robert Prince Jr.

Interviewer: W. Marvin Dulaney and Alfred L. Roberts

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Dr. Dulaney: Dr. Prince, we're really glad you're here. I'm Marvin Dulaney, as you know, from UT [University of Texas] Arlington. You know Dr. Roberts. We're doing a project called "Documenting the history of the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas County, Texas". Looking at the period from 1950 to 1990. However, having read your book I know you go back much further and we will probably explore some of the issues in the 1930s and 1940s just because of who you are. Anyway,

we're interviewing twenty to twenty-five people. We're going to cut and splice as they do, produce a documentary on DVD, [and] show that DVD here at the museum of November 19, [2014]. We'll also send you a copy of your own interview as well as a copy of the DVD that we're going to produce. So, let me start. Where were you born?

Dr. Prince: Dallas, Texas.

Dulaney: What was it like growing up here in Dallas, Texas?

Prince: I was born July 22, 1930 in the heart of the Great Depression.

Born at Pinkston Clinic on Thomas [Avenue] and Hall [Street], so I am part of old North Dallas. Dallas was--from what I can remember of Dallas, the 1930s, especially the 1930s and 1940s--the African Americans were crowded into a very small space. Of course the history of that space which we later called North Dallas was comprised of really two different neighborhoods. One neighborhood was the original Freedman's Town and later on west of Boll Street or west of Allen [Street] there was a neighborhood that was later called North Dallas. And its western boundary was Pearl Street. The reason for those neighborhoods was--and we have to go back.

We cannot isolate a certain period of time because all of these periods interdigitate. Immediately following the Civil War, to keep us under control even during Reconstruction, one of the first laws that was passed in Dallas, I think it was around 1866, was a vagrancy law. Therefore people like my great-grandparents migrated from Frog Town [former Dallas neighborhood], which was the first place that they lived, to Boll and Juliet Street. Juliet later became Munger [Avenue]. And he set up a business there. Well, the reason for that was that that was out of the city limits. And they were exempt from that law because many African Americans just walking around town would be arrested for vagrancy and placed on farms. I saw the results as a child of the effect that the Convention of 1866 in which Judge Good and that crowd did their best to keep us from achieving first class citizenship. There was a lot of illiteracy even in the 1930s. There were people who didn't know how to use the telephone. The areas were dirty. I don't know what the schedule was to remove trash from the area. Let's say down where Woodall Rogers [Freeway] is now was Cochran Street. My first school which was B.F. Darrell where I

attended elementary school and my grandmother graduated from high school at the same place. That all along the corridor was usually strewn with garbage--trash. Crime was rampant. And when I was growing up there was one high school and that was Booker T. Washington. And they went to school in shifts. Well, I have covered a lot. Is there anything else you want--

Dulaney: Yes. Let me go in and ask you about your parents. Tell us about your parents. What was their education and what were their occupations?

Prince: My father Robert Price Sr.--I'm a Jr.--was a native of Terrell, Texas. While attending Wiley College he came here the summer of 1928 and started working at the Adolphus Hotel. While attending Wiley he was on professor Tolson's debate team from 1928 to 1930. He was in the quartet. This was the way he paid his tuition.

Dulaney: Let me interrupt you. Professor Tolson. I know who he is, but twenty years from now--tell us who Melvin Tolson was.

Prince: Professor Melvin Tolson was a remarkable person. He had quite an impact I know upon my parents because he taught both of them at Wiley College. He established a debate team at Wiley that became nationally known. And most recently a movie was made. Denzel Washington starred in this movie. It was called "The Great Debaters" and it was about Wiley College. In the movie it depicted Wiley having a debate with Harvard. However I remember my father telling me-- and this was some after he left, probably in the 1930s-1937 or 1938--that the debate was between USC [University of Southern California] and Wiley. Anyway, my parents always stressed education. My mother was a graduate of Wiley. She was born in Dallas on Commerce Street near Elm [Street] and Dr. Benjamin Bluit delivered her at the Bluit Sanitarium in 1908. My mother's father moved to Dallas after his first wife died and he met my grandmother who was my--well, my mother's mother and married her and took her back to Marshall, [Texas]. However, my mother did not like small towns. She chose to stay here with her grandparents and attend--the Boll Street church had a school at that time. [Unclear], but my mother's father started out in

insurance. He was hired right after college by M.M. McGoy [?] and George Allen and they worked for Universal Life. My dad had got a promotion and moved to Memphis [Tennessee] when I was in second grade. So we lived in Memphis for about five years. And returned to Dallas 1941. We had moved so many times that my mother put pressure on my dad to remain in Dallas and change jobs. So J.L. Patton offered my dad at Booker T. Washington because most of his male teachers had been drafted. And dad stayed in the teaching profession for the rest of his life. Mrs. A. Maceo Smith, Fannie Smith, offered my mother a job as a medical social worker. As one of the colored medical social workers at Parkland [Hospital] because they were separated. Had colored social workers for colored people and white social workers for the white people. Of course I had a sibling who is Dr. Jeanette Elaine Lockley. Following my father's footsteps in--he was a mathematics instructor. She obtained her PhD from Stanford in Mathematics.

Dulaney: Let's come back and talk about your education. You went to B.F. Darrell. Where did you go from there?

Prince: I went from there to Booker T. Washington.

Dulaney: What year did you graduate?

Prince: I graduated from Booker T. Washington in 1946.

Dulaney: What was your favorite subject?

Prince: Chemistry. And I see on the wall my favorite professor, C.F.

Toles [?] who taught me chemistry and science. He catalyzed my interest in science. From there I attended Wiley College. I graduated from Wiley with a bachelor's of science in chemistry and went directly to the University of California at Berkley to graduate school in biochemistry. I was drafted for the Korean War and I was only allowed to complete one semester. I was sent to Korea--I was drafted in 1952 and early 1953 I was sent to Korea because I--well, I refused a commission because it would have meant another year in the service and I was interested in going to medical school and continuing my education. So as a buck private I was sent to Japan and Korea and was placed on an outpost as a fifty caliber machine gun. [Laughs] I stayed there until the war was over. After the war I applied to a superior officer who transferred me to the Combat

Engineers to water purification. And I finished my Army career there. It was too late--it was late August when I was separated from the United States Army and I could not continue my studies at Berkley. I had gotten an early release from the Army. I had to get in school. So Berkley said that they were filled and my sister who at that time was teaching at Texas Southern [University] talked with the professor of chemistry and they accepted me to finish work on a master's there.

Dulaney: While you were in the Army were you in an integrated unit because I know they were supposed to integrate the armed forces in 1949. So what was that like?

Prince: Well it was interesting. First of all you said 1949 and that did not happen because as long as MacArthur was there--MacArthur did not believe--a Little Rock native. He did not believe in integration and he was his own man. So there was no integration until well after the Korean War. When I came there in early 1953 General Ridgeway had taken over and he ordered the integration. So I was in with Cubans, Anglo Americans. I served with Ethiopians. It was a "United Nations". But being in the 25th division it

was mostly whites. Now while on outpost almost every night we would have to go out on a patrol. And I remember--my mother would send me the Dallas Express often and sometimes the Pittsburg--the Black papers. They would not come to the outpost at maybe three weeks--whenever we would get our mail. We got it periodically. So one time my Sargent Major who was back in the rear brought the mail up and he called my name, Robert Price. I was the only Black in my unit there. And I appeared and he gave me a box of stale cookies that were probably a month old and some papers that had been read and my letters that had piled up. And he said, "Oh yeah, by the way, write the editors of those papers and tell them we're letting you fight." You can remember that the Pittsburg Courier had big banner headline, "Let our Boys Fight". And Sargent Quinones was a Mexican from Houston said, "You be sure to write these people. We're letting you fight. You want to fight some more. Volunteer." [Laughter] So that was what it was like. But I found that out that no matter where I went my color followed me. The Americans although we were in mortal combat and we were supposed to be fighting a common enemy the propaganda was spread

the American way. The propaganda was spread that we were inferior, and the good old American rhetoric. Watch out for the Black man. He wants to rape your women and he will murder you. And I never will forget this incident. I went to Yokohama--I went to Tokyo, Japan for R and R on Christmas while on the line. Flew from Seoul to Tachikawa Air Base, Tokyo. I got to Tokyo and I was a non-commissioned officer at that time and a Caucasian boy-a friend of mine from Seattle went with me--the two of us in the same outfit. We went to a club on the Ginza--very popular, called Rocker 4. When we walked in there--I guess I was twenty-one. I had turned twenty-one at that time. We were young single men. We began to talk with the girls--the Japanese girls and I noticed that the girls were friendly, but reticent to hold a conversation with me. And finally one girl just told me, "If ice cream GIs see me talking to you I no can come here anymore." I told my buddy, "I need to get out of this place." She told me some other things that we won't record. I immediately asked her, "Where do the 'chocolate' GIs go?" And she said, "The best place for you is Yokohama." And I remember that MacArthur--if you will remember--

during V-J Day on the signing on September 2-- because that was my dad's birthday--of 1945 how all the other units were dressed in parade and celebrating the signing of the surrender of Japan. MacArthur assigned the only Black units that came into Japan at that time--he had them working on the docks in Yokohama killing rats. And I've got that documented in my book. That is what MacArthur had. He had a certain place. He had promised the Japanese, apparently, that he would protect them from us. And, I went to Yokohama. That was a Black--I saw more Blacks there. But to show you what the American propaganda--not just southerners mind you, but American propaganda, Hollywood especially--and this is where people gain their perspective of Americans is through American movies. A female Japanese companion of mine--we went to a movie to see "Going My Way" with Clarence Muse [and] Bing Crosby. And it was about racetracks. And at the end of the movie--he was the only Black in there--at the end of the movie yo san [?] Sachiko [?] asks me-- she said, "Pop, you no talk like other chocoleta GI." "Ya, so?" This is the way we are predicted overseas in India, in Hong Kong. They see the movie

or [unclear] and when they see me they expect me to speak that way. I told her--I said, "No baby san, I am educated and my parents--I don't know anybody who speaks like that." She said, "Chocoleta GIs in United States don't talk like that?" She was very--this was an adult. She was very surprised and she said, "Why is it all the time they take care of the horsey?" [Laughter] I never will forget that this is the impression that Hollywood--and you go back to the Turner movies and look at some of--the other night I was watching "Harlem Rides the Range". It was just ridiculous. [Laughter]

Dulaney: That's the movie with Herb Jeffries, right?

Prince: Herb Jeffries. You remember that?

Dulaney: Yes I do.

Price: And our language--and we are being scrutinized. Kids in Japan--and of course the Japanese is under--the written--just underneath there, you know, when you go to foreign movies. I just said, "What kind of program--" I asked a friend of mine who then became from Howard who was in the States Department over in the Far East. I said, "What kind of program can the

State Department--don't send Satchmo over. Send some educated African Americans over, so they can see us and have a different perspective." I'm sorry to get to preaching. But that is one part of my life that I will never forget.

Dulaney: That's alright. This is good. Let's go back to Texas Southern. You went there to get your master's degree. What was it like going there given that fact that this was supposed to have been now a new enhanced campus as a result of the Sweatt Case?

Prince: I felt like a traitor--which I was being a part of this plan. And let's call it what it is. It was a plot to prevent us from going to the University of Texas. And although I had no alternative I knew that I would not be accepted in a program in biochemistry at University of Texas. Texas Southern did not have a department of biochemistry, so I had to change my major to organic chemistry. However, I found my teachers very competent and caring. And if I may digress just for a second. This is what was good, if I can say that, about segregation. Our teachers, [naming people in the photos on the wall] Dr. Darrell, Dr. Washington, Dr. Day, and Dr. Patton,

and my dad who taught me three courses of algebra. That should have been outlawed--to have to take three courses of algebra under your father. But anyway, they cared. Thelma Paige. And they tried to prepare us for that world that we were going to face. They cared about us and went to extremes of violence to encourage us to learn. By the time I became a graduate student I noticed that there were--my professors at Texas Southern were quite capable. Dr. Joe Pierce in calculus. Dr. Woods in chemistry. I could just go on and name--but they were very outstanding teachers and prepared me to compete on an even level with other ethnic groups who had been educated in other places. However, it was obvious that we did not have the equipment to perform the experiments that we should have had. In organic chemistry you need all of those different tubes. [Laughs] And our quarters were cramped. Two of us would have to use what--when I was at the University of California I had a cubicle that was twice as large. I had all of the equipment that I needed. I did not have to go make a requisition and walk across the campus to obtain this or be told, "Well, we can't furnish you that." So to finish my thesis I'd

have to go buy something at the University of Houston. But anyway, we did not have the supplies and I was accustomed to that because in Darrell we used the books that the white kids [laughs] had thrown away. At Booker Washington where I ran track under Raymond Holley [?] our tracks--we would have to change track shoes. One guy would run in the track shoes and then pull them off real quick for the next race. And I would run the hurdles in some shoes that are too short for me. Our football equipment we got from North Dallas--the Bulldogs because we had the same color--crimson and green. That was done purposely. I have always felt that in this respect America has short-changed me and I do believe that the only reason that my freedom or my civil rights were granted to me was because of the threat of communism. Otherwise that never would have happened. I would have happened, but it would have happened in a more violent way. But the threat of communism--when Joseph Stalin moved in and intervened just before Japan capitulated and took over Korea, Mongolia, et cetera, and put his people in there. These were the people that we were fighting. I won't get into that anymore. [Laughs]

Dulaney: Let's go to Meharry [Medical College]. Why did you decide to go to Meharry.

Prince: Because I couldn't get into the University of Texas at Galveston. It was much closer. It wasn't but \$50 a year for me to go. It would have been very good. I made very good grades on the medical aptitude tests that my [unclear] teachers. Now, may I say this? I mentioned that. Another burr in my saddle is that I stayed out of Wiley for six months because I didn't need but a few hours to finish and I wanted to buy me a car. So I worked at Braniff [Airways] my senior year and went back to school in the spring. While at Braniff I decided, 'Well, let me take this medical aptitude test.' And I applied. It was in October. The test was given at SMU [Southern Methodist University]. It was the only place in this area. We called it the medical aptitude test. It's called MCAT [Medical College Admission Test] now. It was given at Fondren Hall. So, I took off from Braniff that day and my good friend Roosevelt Johnson drove me to the gate. They wouldn't let him in. [Laughter] You couldn't--Black men couldn't drive his car on campus. So Roosevelt told me--he

said, "Good luck." [Laughter] I don't know whether you knew Roosevelt.

Dulaney: I did know Roosevelt.

Prince: That was my best friend. But anyway, Roosevelt let me off at the gate on Hillcrest [Avenue]. I got to the gate and a guard--all the people just walking in--and the guard just stopped me, "Hey, you". I said, "Yeah". He said, "Where are you going?" And I just really was incensed. I may be shell shocked. I don't know. But it set something off in me and I said, "I'm going about my business." I said, "Man, leave me alone. I'm here on white folks business." And he looked. He didn't know what I was about. [Laughs] But I was dressed and he didn't say another word. I just kept walking. I said, "I'm here on white folks business." And I walked to Fondren Hall. And I stood out. At one time I was outstanding. I was the only Black face in there, and oh my God, kids from all over north Texas were taking the medical aptitude test then. And of all of those people I must have been outstanding because the proctor came to me and he said, "What are you looking for?" I said, "Is this the medical aptitude test site?" He said,

"Yes". I said, "Well, I'm in the right place." And he looked at me again and he said, "Do you have your credential?" I reached in my pocket and gave him my credentials. And he did not know whether to shit or go blind. [Laughter] He became very nervous. I don't think he'd ever had a Black person take it there. So then he became very nervous and he smiled. And I preceded to go to one of the desk chairs, you know, in the big auditorium. And he said, "Tell you what. I'm going to make you comfortable. You come on up here with me." [Laughter] So to keep me from sitting between two white folk he put my seat up on the stage and for eight hours--we had an hour break for lunch--and I had nowhere to go eat at that time. Those kids went on Hillcrest or the cafeteria, but I had nowhere to eat. And I had not [unclear], so I walked into Skillens [?] over there and bought me a peanut patty and that was all I had. And came back and took my examination while sitting there and it was nerve wrecking because he was always over my shoulder looking at my answers. And I became very paranoid. I finished my exam early and I said, 'You know I'm not going to turn my book in. I'm going to sit here for a while. Wait for the others and put

mine--I don't want them to just have access.' You know, shuffle my book in. The guy came to me and he saw my book and he said, "You finished?" I said, "Yeah". He just took my paper-my booklet. We had booklets. And I left. I was paranoid all that time. I said, 'You know, he may have thrown that in the trash.' I did not know. But I did finally hear from the school. When I got my results I knew that they were alright. My mother was working. You remember when Southwest Medical School was Quonset huts? Well, my mother worked right--that was where there office was. She urged me. I have a lot of her in me. She said, "Go out and make 'em tell you no." I said, "Mom--." She said, "Make 'em tell you no!" And I went out and Deal Gill [?] whose was an invalid--I walked first to the registrar's office and I said, "May I have an application?" And here again white folks didn't know what to do. She starts breathing very heavily. I got all this attention. She went directly to the dean. The dean called me in his office. Was very polite and nice to me. He told me it was no point. I would be wasting my time to fill out an application. He said his board of directors had not given him permission to accept--and we were

Negros then--to accept Negros. This was 1951 in December. This was before I had finished. And I was very disappointed. Not really surprised. He said, "Why don't you apply down to Galveston. They have already accepted one there. And I understand that they will accept Blacks there." Well, I knew how that was. You had to be a super, super Negro to go there. And I had spoken--I had a good friend of mine, William Hatlock [?] who was a very brilliant rival-academic rival of mine. They built a new dormitory and he was the only one in it for about a year and a half. Can you imagine? Bill Lochen [?] will tell you--a graduate of Prairie View--Dr. William Lochen. I'm sure you know him. A very brilliant man also. He finished after me. He was behind me. But then, that's when I went to graduate school and decided when I came back to go ahead and apply to Meharry. Here again, I felt very fortunate in that--to get accepted in Meharry. Meharry had so many applicants because almost all people of color had to go to either Meharry or Howard [University]. My father was not a physician. That was against me. The competition was stupendous. Some of the most brilliant people you have to compete with. And also

I was disappointed with attitudes of the professors. They would tell you the old cliché, "Look to your right and look to your left because both of those people won't be here or you may not be here." And rather than encouraging you, you know--after that orientation I was ready to come right back to Dallas. I taught for--right after my graduation I was fortunate enough to get my master's in one year and Dr. Woods found me a job, before I got my acceptance to Meharry, at Jarvis Christian College. I was a science professor--Head of the Department of Science--although I had not experience teaching. My first week down there--by this time I am twenty-four [and] single. And my first week at Hawkins [Texas] was miserable. There was one store, one signal light. And there was a rule that you should not fraternize with the students. And I didn't want to fraternize with the teachers--the teachers that I saw. So I made a pact with my old friend Roosevelt. I said, "Soon as you can, pick me up afternooon on Fridays." I didn't have a car. So Roosevelt would come down to Hawkins, pick me up on Friday, and I'd [unclear] Fridays and Saturdays. [Laughter] And then go back to Hawkins. I was disappointed again because

Jarvis was [unclear] on Jarvis' property the money wasn't going to Jarvis. It was going to TCU [Texas Christian University]. And do you know, we did not have--I would have to use Coca Cola bottles to demonstrate some of the chemistry to students. I really became frustrated. I sent in a requisition and I really became frustrated. The straw that broke the camel's back was after about two and a half months there the dean called me in--I thought I was doing a good job--and he said, "Yes, The students like you. We understand you have a very good way of demonstrating things and we are pleased. But we do not want suitcase professors." In other words he wanted me to--and I understand all institutions--wanted me to participate in activities at Jarvis on Fridays and Saturdays. And he said, "I'd like to see you in Sunday school." [I thought], 'Oohh. [Laughter] You got the wrong man'. [I said], "Dean, I'm so sorry I took your time, but I will stay here until you can get somebody else." And I just explained to him and he appreciated it, "I'm just not a little town man--this area and I really have plans of going to medical school." So I put my application in. And later on they found a good

friend of mine, Martin Edwards, who had just finished in Atlanta. And Dr. Edward's son--he lived in--he was from Hawkins. So that really made it nice and Martin-Marty took that job. I didn't do well on my first job, but I did well at Meharry. And I was chosen to do an internship there. Well, I was chosen to do an externship and an intern at the end of my third year.

Dulaney: In Nashville?

Prince: In Nashville. Stayed at the hospital there. Here again, our parameters--there were steel parameters set for our generation. You and Dr. Roberts and our--that generation. There were still parameters set for us. I could not obtain a residency in obstetrics and gynecology at Memphis' hospital, at Baylor Hospital, at Parkland [Hospital, Dallas], at home at St. Paul [Hospital, Dallas]. I could not do that no matter what my credentials were. I could not look at a white woman in a clinic. I could not see her naked on an operating table. I could not do a pelvic examination for a woman who's having an ectopic pregnancy and bleeding to death. The Blackness prevented me for some reason from saving that

woman's life. So, I knew that here again I had to make a choice and that was a choice of only three hospitals that provided African Americans with training in obstetrics and gynecology. And the competition, again, was fierce. So Meharry, Howard, Homer G. Philips in St. Louis, and one where Dr. Watkins my future partner--and that was later developed, Kansas City General [Hospital] No. 2. No. 1 was white. [Laughs] So you know No. 2--that was for--everybody else went to No. 1, but Blacks went to No. 2. But anyway, I was fortunate. The Chief was impressed with me and I got my residency then. Became Chief Resident and finished in 1964. Dr. Conrad and Dr. Shelton had approached my mom and dad and told them they were interested in me coming back here. I had promised all of my life Dr. Pinkston that I was going to come back and help him. I think Dr. Pinkston died just before I came here. And then there was one other man and that was my mailman. One of the first Black mailmen. I would always say--I lived on Munger and Boll--that I wanted to be a doctor. And Mr. Galloway. Do you remember Mr. Galloway? He was our insurance. He was my aunt's insurance man. He would say, "Robert, when you get

to be a doctor I'm gonna come to you and let you get me well." So I saw Mr. Galloway down at the city hall one time and I said, "Mr. Galloway, I'm sorry, but you just ain't built right." [Laughter] So he got a big kick. He said, "Robert Jr."--that's how all the people in my neighborhood knew me and at Bethel Church. He said, "Robert Jr., you betrayed me. I looked forward to you getting me well." But it was a pleasure coming--in a way--to come back home. You were familiar with the people and the settings. Yet, a prophet without honor in his own home.

Dulaney: Let me interrupt you. You couldn't come back and do a residency in spite of--and you write about this in your book--"in spite of the so called desegregation that took place at St. Paul [Hospital] in 1954." You're talking about 1960s. So in six years--

Prince: 1964.

Dulaney: Until you came here in 1964. I'm saying though you would have done your residency in what 1960, 1962. So you're saying since 1954 there had not been enough progress still at St. Paul, at Parkland for you to come back and do a residency as a gynecologist?

Prince: Let me clarify that. I could not train there. Now, all of these hospitals by 1964--maybe a little before--in order to receive federal funds they had to have token us--token African Americans. So I was on the staff. Dr. Conrad and myself on the staff at St. Paul when--I was the first Black doctor on the staff at Presbyterian [Hospital, Dallas], at Medical Arts [Hospital, Dallas]. I did the first surgery at Medical Arts. I was also on the staff at Parkland. And when I got my specialty boards years later--you had to be--I became board certified in obstetrics and gynecology. I went several other--let me say this. In order for me to do a minor procedure that a general practitioner or a nurse--say a good scrub nurse could do--say a D&C [Dilation and Curettage], I had to--it make me almost cry when I think about it. I get so emotional. But I had my credential and I would have to ask a white doctor to observe me before I could schedule a case at St. Paul--say like a C-section. I'd done hundreds at Tuskegee and different places where I had trained--done my training. And here some of them were general practitioners that I could out operate. This went on--Dr. Watkins, myself, Dr. Powell. We were under

observation and they--so finally one day I had what was called--I had a patient who had cancer of the vagina. I had done three or four of those operations in training and I scheduled it. Now when you schedule it the head nurse [asks], "Do you have an observer?" She was hostile a lot of times. "Do you have an observer?" So I asked a Dr. Vassala [?] who's an OB/GYN [obstetrics and gynecology]. I said, "Would you observe me?" And he didn't know. He had never done one. And he went to [unclear] at the hospital and--Al Vassala [?] from University Park. He said, "I think this is the silliest thing in the world." He said, "Bob Prince showed me how to [Laughs]--he said, "I've never done one. In fact, I had never seen one." And I never heard directly from the hospital [that] I'm off of observation. They never told me. I just went ahead and started scheduling cases. And all of a sudden nobody asked me. I told Myra [?]. I told Dr. Watkins. In my Thomas and Hall words I said, "Don't fool with that anymore. That's degrading." Now, you asked another question, "Could I come there and train?"

Dulaney: Yes.

Prince: We were on good terms. I taught. I had a position as a clinical professor. I think I may still be listed at Southwest. After I got my boards and credentials I would spend one month a year coming up two or three days a week working with the students. Going in and give them the wealth of my experience. One day there was a new procedure that I had not been trained in nor my partners and we asked the chief of the department Dr. Pritchett who wrote the book for the whole world. That's the reason Dallas was the center of OB/GYN and the world. Jack Pritchett did it. Jack knew Dudley--knew my partner and he was responsible for him coming here because he trained at Cleveland Clinic and knew Dudley was capable. We were asking Jack to let us come to Parkland to learn to give epidural anesthesia. I had not done it. I had done spinals, but that was getting old fashioned. He agreed. Then we asked--the whole department was in there--said, "We training all of these white doctors. They come in and scrub in. We teach them. Why can't you accept some Black doctors in your program at Parkland, so we'll have somebody to replace us?" We're the only doctors in north Texas. You had one in Houston and one in Austin at

that time. But there were no Black students at Southwest until 1973. And they kept telling us, "They just don't qualify. They just don't qualify." Said, "We'll find you some." Anyway, Dr. Johnny Henry--I don't know whether you know Dr. Henry. Dr. John Lee Henry is in practice over at Medical Arts now, but he came to Southwest Medical School and finished. And we kept prodding Jack Pritchett and that group. They were good people. All of them mostly from up north--South Dakota--that area. And Dr. Lewis Loeb [?] at St. Paul who was Chief of OB [Obstetrics] accepted Johnny Lee Henry as the first Black resident in the city in OB/GYN--in the state. He trained and, maybe a couple of years later, Jack Pritchett, Dr. Parnell and Dr. Collis [?]-Are you familiar with them? They got them. They're excellent people. They trained at Parkland and were first Blacks to train. And if I'm not--you had one more to train there.

Dulaney: Why OB/GYNs, given the difficulties? Why OB/GYNs? That's my basic question.

Prince: Okay. Let me do that again in two parts. It has been my nature and probably inherent that I don't like to

take the easy way. It was a challenge. That either surgery or OB/GYN were the hardest to get. During my internship I found that surgery--I had to stand on my feet too long and the cases were too long for surgery. OB/GYN I fell in love with. Almost everybody got well. It was a happy--it fitted my persona. I was pleased to present a newborn to a mother, to a father. And even the bad cases were challenges. The cases of cervical cancer that you saw back in those days. You were going to lose. Before abortions were legal--Nashville as you know is a college town. And girls have abortions. And they come in all time of night dying--bleeding to death and if you stop them from bleeding in the middle of the night then a day later they're going to get infections that's going to kill them. We didn't have anything but penicillin, streptomycin, and Terramycin in those days. I'm old. [Laughter] But it was a challenge and I would sit there at a young beautiful girl's bedside who you knew you were going to lose. Trying to fight the death, "Get away. Let me try and help." And when you've done everything I would sit there and talk with her and say, "Why? You knew how dangerous this was. Why

would you do this?" And this shaped my life forever. The answers that I got were almost identical, "I could not go back to Smyrna, Tennessee" or " My dad is a minister and I'm pregnant. This boy isn't going to marry me. I cannot--I'd rather be dead doctor." How many times have I heard that our Christianity has created this type--that we condemn those--but let me get off of my stand.

Dulaney: I'm actually going to come back to that by the way--this issue of abortions since they've been giving you so much hell here in the city. I'll come back to that. Let's talk about your coming back to Dallas. What was it like coming back to Dallas after being away at Meharry and Nashville and now being a grown-up and practicing professional?

Prince: I was happy to come back to Dallas. Even while in medical school I would come home in the summers. Especially my first and second year. I found it sometime amusing. I worked at the downtown club because I had started off as a bus boy at the Century Room [Adolphus Hotel, Dallas] and my skills at waiting tables. I worked for some of the top places and I bartended when I was sixteen. I'd been out to

Amarillo [Texas] working in a hotel as a bartender when I was eighteen. I worked at the Downtown Club. I don't know if--are you familiar with that? That was where all the big--R.L. Thornton and all of that crowd, H.L. Hunt and Buddy Fogelson--the millionaires belonged to. It was just so interesting to sit behind the bar and listen to their conversation. Not only was I treated well. Nobody ever called me a Nigger. They were too high class for that. But, I would hear their prejudice. Just like I wasn't standing there they would say, "This old boy is here." And I learned about some of the ministers who were being bought off, "Yeah, you give that old boy--give a hundred dollars and he will deliver." I never divulged this and I will not now and I did not in my book--some of that names that were dropped. I was treated very well and I never let them know I had an education until one day I was reading my pediatrics book because there was a lull. And then the banker from the--it was Texas State Bank below--came up. He came up every day at 4:00 PM for his martini. And I was making him a martini. I had left my pediatrics book open and he said, "What is that, Robert, you reading?" I said,

"Pediatrics". He said, "Pedi-what? Why you reading that?" I said, "I'm a student." Well it was almost time for me to go back. I didn't care much. And he passed the word around. And do you know that 'Jodie' Thompson [who] owned 7-Eleven--several prominent people gave me money-money to go back to school. And they'd tell me how proud they were. [They would say], "You a Dallas boy", "Well if you need me", you know, [and] "When you come back we'll help you." And I was helped. The first person that helped me was Judge Lew Sterrett [?]. Judge Lew Sterrett came to my office. My mother--Lew Sterrett was in charge of Parkland. So he had met my mother some way and Fannie Smith. He knew Fannie Smith and Maceo and my daddy's friends. I don't know how, but he came by me and Conrad's office. He know Conrad. He talked to me and he said, "I'm going to make to the first Black man appointed to a county board." He said, "There are several preachers whose names have come up." He said, "But you a Dallas boy and we're proud of you." And Lew Sterrett appointed me to the child welfare board in 1965--the first. But I have--Stemmons-story of Stemmons--and others have. And 'Jodie' Thompson's sons have done things. They made donations to

Meharry when I asked them for it. Coming back home--this is home--and I am proud that my family goes back to antebellum days here in Dallas. My great-grandmother and great-grandparents were alive when I was born. They were born slaves out on the Terry [?] Plantation which is now Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. Bear Creek. Now let's get back to this thing about abortion. My mother and dad and I [unclear]. I just thought this is the worst thing. A doctor--you make an oath and I would never go against that. Why I do abortion. I have seen too many botched abortions. Most of the deaths that I've attended in a city [or] county hospital--because Meharry was the hospital for Black people [and] Nashville-Hubbard Hospital--were the results of botched abortion. I have four children. Only one was planned. And I knew how to do--and I would never perform an abortion for my sake. I was poor on the GI bill with \$160 a month and three children. Birth control pills didn't come on the market until 1962. So, I never would do that, but I decided after I finished, came here, and would have to go out to Parkland--and people knew who the doctors were who were doing them here. But they were not trained to

do them. And I would go there and spend the rest of my night trying to stay up, trying to keep somebody alive. And I'm not going to get paid for that, [Laughs] but I had to do it. These are my people and--so I made a decision. And it almost killed my mother. I always talk to them because I promised I would never do an abortion. They were religious people and I promised my mom and dad. And they were embarrassed. It was unannounced. But once they become legal--I will never do anything illegal to jeopardize my license and what I worked for, but I began to fight through Planned Parenthood. That's how I got so close. I got on the board of Planned Parenthood and we fought to legalize abortion. The American College of OB--now we're called the American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology--we put forth an issue in 1971 where we asked for a legalization of abortion so that trained obstetricians and gynecologists who knew the anatomy, who knew how to operate could do them. And we cut down on the mortality. It was endorsed by the American Congress of OB/GYN. Therefore I said--which is also my nature to help what the so called religious right--They are neither. They are neither

religious nor are they right because these are the same people that caused that girl from Smyrna, Tennessee and all the other girl from small towns and different places to put themselves in the jeopardy by having an illegal abortion. Let her come to me and to the doctors who are trained, who are licensed, and the state knows. And they can sue me. They can't sue the mafia who's doing them out there in the Holiday Inn on Saturdays. They can't sue them because they don't know who they are. They can sue me and the state can take my license if I mess up. So I stuck my neck out and I did not bite my tongue. I believed in it and I'm an advocate of legal abortion. I think that abortion is a failure. It is a failure. The problem is not abortion. The problem is unwanted pregnancy. It's not abortion. So if you don't have an unwanted pregnancy you're not going to have an abortion. But they should be done—they really should be done by experienced people. Now the problem here is that we have been wagged as the whole country is being governed by people who cannot even spell abortion and do not know what it is about or what it entails. And therefore the politicians have taken the funds from the hospital and now you

cannot do it in a hospital where some things need to be done. I don't do those, but there are forms of abortion that are legal that need to be performed in a hospital. But now they are being performed in outpatient. And the other parameters that are against women's rights are all of these things that are punishing women like having to look at--this is your baby's heartbeat. The decision for a woman to have an abortion is a heartbreaking decision and most of them [unclear] because they cannot afford another child. And for Governor Perry to do this to please the tea partyers and his political aspirations, I guess--is just--it is unreligious. One thing if you notice--getting political here. You can edit this off.

Dulaney: Well I'm going to let you relax in a minute here.

Prince: Okay, but let me say this and I hope you show it. [Laughter]

Did you know that Perry pulled all of the conservative religious people in the Reliant stadium and they had a big prayer? All of those people know about God because God tell them that they don't want people to have abortions. God tells them things all the time. And God tells them that Black people

should not be integrated. God told them back in my day. Well, they prayed for rain. What happened? They got fire. Lord moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. Rosanna [unclear] told me that at [unclear]. [Laughter] I guess I've talked so much.

Dulaney: I'm going to ask you about your family. Where did you get married? You mentioned that you had three children and then you had a fourth. So when did you get married?

Prince: I got married my second year in medical school. I wanted to make sure that I was going to make it. [Laughter] I met my wife while at Texas Southern in Houston and we dated. I did not want to get married until I really thought that I was on my way. In the middle of my second year I got married.

Dulaney: Another question. You dedicated your book to Allen Brooks and Sam [unclear] and Patrick. Why?

Prince: Those were the first people to die in the name of civil rights and like most of our people that suffered they had a vicious ending because of false prophets. They were accused of something that they did not do. That was Dallas' first sin. The second was the

murder of President Kennedy. And those are things that we as a city should consider. And let me say this. You wrote a wonderful article. Didn't you?

Dulaney: I guess so. [Laughs]

Prince: Did you write about the progressive voter?

Dulaney: Yes I did.

Prince: The progressive vote--the Progressive Voters League and the way you presented it I remember. While I lived in Memphis--Maceo Smith came to Memphis. He was with housing.

Dulaney: He's a Fisk [University] graduate too isn't he?

Prince: Yes, he's a Fisk graduate. Well, we were in Memphis. Fisk was in Nashville. But he came to Memphis--and in those days the hotels were like they were here, [unclear] hotel and nobody wanted to stay [Laughter] in those "hot sheet" [?] places. So Maceo--I was seven or eight years old and I remember Maceo talking--maybe a little older, but I was living in Memphis at that time. Maceo was my daddy's frat [fraternity] brother and they were friends around here. He stayed with us on Mississippi Street in Memphis when I was a kid. He spent the night. Was

there for some kind of business. I guess I was, like I said, maybe about eight. I was just impressed at that age about the man. He and my daddy both smoked cigars and they would drink whisky and talk loud. [Laughter] But they were intelligent and I enjoyed listening as a kid. Then I had to go to bed, but he and Maceo--. And you did a wonderful job on that and the people that you brought in there I knew them all. Maynard--I used to take his paper. And his son--

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Dulaney: For the record that's Maynard Jackson.

Prince: Yes, Reverend Maynard Jackson. They lived over not far from Black [?] and Clark [Street]. His son who was a little chubby at the time--and I never will forget 1945, maybe--I was taking the Express by and I used to tease his son Maynard Jr. Called him "little fat white boy". [Laughter] So a good friend of mine Andrew Young--he and are I very close friends. He's related to George Allen. That's George Allen--they married two sisters--. So Andrew came to Dallas and he was with Maynard and the chief of police and we were all down town. I walked in and quite naturally Maynard didn't remember me, but I was talking to

Andrew and I said, "Oh, there's that little fat white boy." He said, "You're the one!" [Laughter] So yeah, I knew those people. And that day was at thirty-six when Amon Wells--

Dulaney: Thirty-five.

Prince: Thirty-five. Amon Wells lived on the corner of Clark [Street] and Thomas, right across from Wards. And the Klan [or] a group of rednecks drove right through north Dallas. Drove down Allen Street and trying to intimidate the Blacks. I was a little boy. Mama wanted us--everybody got the children off the streets down there on Boll and Munger. They drove by the Pride of Dallas and all that way there.

Dulaney: Tell me, how involved were you with the Civil Rights issues and movement here in Dallas?

Prince: I think that--I would like to think that I was right in them--in the heart--right with them. I worked with Al [Albert Louis] Lipscomb. I'd known his brother who was at Bishop [College] when I was at Wylie. Al and Arthur Jeffries and I were good friends and they were related. Lovie, his wife, was in Booker T. Washington with my sister. And she worked at St.

Paul in OB and GYN. So Al and I became friends. We met because the Black Panthers at the time were protesting giving birth control pills and I'm on the board of Planned Parenthood. So it created a problem. I'm sitting on the board. The only Black man and Julia Schepps [?] and Ruth [unclear] and they said, "What are we going to do out in south Dallas?" And they're saying that its genocide. So I said, "Well, let me meet with them." You know I grew up with a lot of these guys. So I called Al and asked for a meeting. At that time they had a house across from that little telephone building on Harwood [Street] and Grand [Avenue]. There was a house right there were [unclear]. And that night I drove my little Mustang and I walked into the lion's den [laughter] and told them, I said, "Now, I tell you what we're going to do." I asked them and they were bitching about it, so I said, "I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to tell the board now with your permission to give all these white girls free birth control pills, but don't give no Black girls none. And this is what you want, is that right?" [They said], "Well, not like--". I said, "Wait a minute. Let's be crystal clear. You do not

want Black women to have family planning." Back then we were using IUDs [Intrauterine Devices] and all of that. And then I gave my spiel on why we should have limited family and so forth. And I got involved--well I gained their trust. Many of them present their wives and significant others to me. Then when Roosevelt got with the Urban League I met with Maceo. We met and went on over to Maceo's house on Fairmount [Street] and Thomas then. That's when he offered--I was there with him when he offered Roosevelt that job. So we worked pretty closely. And then I was on the Twelve-Man Committee. You know what that was. Maceo had put me there. George Allen also put me on the Council of Government for North Texas. As a Black there I was able to see how health services were being allocated and whether we were being isolated.

Dulaney: Do you think the Civil Rights Movement was successful here in Dallas?

Prince: I think this is one of the places that was most successful when I look back. I was in Nashville and I saw the violence there. I was put in jail in Nashville as a senior medical student. And my dean called me into

his office. Called me and my friends [unclear] and asked me, did I want to be a Martin Luther King or a physician. [Laughter] I told him I really wanted to be a physician. [He said], "Well okay, you can't be a physician going to jail because nobody saw your patients that day you were in jail. So you let somebody else do the marching and you do the doctoring." So I could not march anymore. That was [unclear] from that. And I was in Alabama. I drove through Birmingham. I was assigned six months of training down at Tuskegee-the hospital in Tuskegee for women. It would be my job to go on the plantations. It was just like slavery. The women who worked in the fields on the plantations had to get permission from the boss to come into the hospital and they would be seven and eight months pregnant out there in the field. What we would do is take-- we had a state grant. We would take, in a station wagon, our equipment and go into the cotton field. Take the blood pressure and try to see--do what we could to help pregnant women. White women--the white social workers would come to me. I was in charge for six months down there. Had an overseer, Dr. Dibble [?]. But they would bring girls in nineteen and

twenty years old who had two or three babies and they would had a list of people they wanted me to sterilize that morning. And I refused. I said, "This girl's too young." And she said, "This is the state. We want--." This is what happened. But, to get back to your major question. When the things that happened in Birmingham and the rest of the south, we had relatively little violence here and it was because of the things that you wrote about. You elucidated those things. Although you're talking about the 1950s and the 1960s, in 19--we're going back. When we go back to the centennial--when right about here was a Negro provision, somewhere over there I was six. [Laughs] I remember Duke Ellington was out here. I was six years old and the Cotton Bowl was new. Wylie [vs.] Prairie View game was there. I remember some of those things. You know, that's when Maceo became my hero. Because my daddy wouldn't speak up to W.T. White. I think he was scared of him and he had a family to look after. Now I understand that, but Maceo stood up to R.L. Thornton--the most powerful man in this area. He and Maynard--you wrote about it. You know what I'm talking about. So that was the beginning. Well, the

beginning was when Voters League and Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance combined and they put in--what was that?

Dulaney: The Forward Dallas Association.

Prince: Forward Dallas. That gave us some talk [?]. That is when Lincoln and [unclear] park. We got a chance to move out of south Dallas. They let us move a little bit. There's [?] was the beginning of our civil rights long before the others. So those people did that through paying the pole tax. And then [unclear]. The man that really liberated me--Lincoln freed the slaves, but Lyndon Johnson made me a man. [Laughs] Lyndon Johnson gave me the right--I remember working downtown and here again me a Roosevelt worked and [would] meet when we were in school. We'd meet at W.A. Green. Was it W.A. Green?

Dulaney: H.L. Green.

Prince: H.L. Green. And we had to go down there and stand at the end to get a hamburger and that would be our lunch. We both worked downtown. Roosevelt worked for a pawn shop and I was cleaning up a little dress shop up there by the Federal Building. We both [?] and we

would meet at noon, you know, lunch time and shoot the breeze. But, when I got back from here I walked--Conrad took me out to the hospital and coming back I told him--I said, [?] "Stop down at Sanger [?] Brothers." He said, "You got to but something?" [I said], "No I want to go and drink out of the white fountain." It meant that much to me that I did all of those things that had become icons of denial. The old public toilets that you couldn't use on Ervay [Street]. You remember those? Coming to the Fair Park was so cruel to young kids and they would close up. You couldn't go to ride on some rides because they would close them up on Juneteenth and you could only come twice a year. That was cruel. The cruelty that I never got--suppose I wanted to go to into auto mechanic. I used to take Mr. Wilkerson who printed the--journalism. I would take the paper--we did not have a publishing thing at Booker T. I would take the paper to be--our school paper--Mr. Wilkerson would give it to me and walk those few blocks from Booker T. to Crozier [Technical High School]. What was it called then?

Dulaney: Crozier Tech.

Prince: Crozier Tech and they had print--I'd walk through that hall and look at how fine that high school was compared to Booker T. And I would ask myself at fourteen and fifteen, "Why can't I do this?" Well, it's been good talking to you.

Dulaney: Okay. Dr. Roberts, any questions?

Dr. Roberts: No.

Dulaney: Okay. This had been great. You know you patted me on the back. Let me pat you on the back for giving us somewhere to start in terms of getting this history together. Dr. Prince, I really appreciate all your effort. I read all of the articles in the newspaper where they're quoting you. I saw all the work you did up at the Freedman's Cemetery. So it's just great. So you gave me stuff to build on and I appreciate.

Prince: Well, first of all let me offer an apology for that book. [?] would not publish it because in the book I have Chris Well [?] quote and they would not do that. I said, "Chris Well was the devil and a damn fool." [Laughter] He was ungodly and even though he tried to have [unclear] and they printed it in Nashville,

Tennessee and the Black--in the white paper in 1956--my first year at Meharry. I know this man is from Dallas when he said the Lord didn't intend for Blacks and white to be together. And they got Blackbird [unclear] negotiate with certain other bird. That's when I put that analogy that they don't put the Black chickens in a different part of the barn from the white chicken. But, they would not--most places that I tried to get this published. So I had two guys from SMU to proofread it. And there are so many grammatical and punctuation errors in there that I was chagrin over the final product. The publisher swore to me and promised me that he would have it edited for me. I was very chagrin. No index. They did not put an index in there and it broke my heart to see how it came. I printed that on a disc--on a floppy disc [and] took it to Austin to the publisher and I used a PC [Personal Computer] and they had a Mac [Macintosh computer]. So my punctuations were different in there. When I meant to italicize something it came out different. So I've always said I'm going to redo it, but I don't have the heart now. I'm eighty-one. [Laughs]

Dulaney: Alright. Thank you very much. This is Monday September 12,
2011 in Dallas, Texas at the Africa-American Museum
and we just completed an interview with Dr. Robert
Prince. Thank you again.

Prince: Thank you.

[End of Interview]