

Oral History Collection

Diane Ragsdale

Interviewers: W. Marvin Dulaney and Alfred L. Roberts

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Dr. Dulaney: This is Marvin Dulaney and Dr. Alfred Roberts and it is August 19, 2011 and we're interviewing Miss Diane Ragsdale--former [Dallas] City Council person, activist in the community, and so on and so on. This is part of a project of Documenting the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas County, [Texas]. Miss Ragsdale, why don't you tell us where were you born.

Ms. Ragsdale: Well, I'm a native Dallas-ite. Born and bred right here in Dallas, Texas, July 10, 1952. I attended Saint Anthony Elementary School

initially from pre-K to the second grade. Then I transferred to Phyllis Wheatley from third to sixth. Then I went to [James] Madison from seventh through twelfth. They tried their best to keep us separated--the junior high from high school. So I was born on Dunbar Street which is in the neighborhood called Phyllis Wheatley, in honor of Phyllis Wheatley, named after Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Two doors down from Mr. Charles Rice--excuse me, John Rice who was the first president of the Black Chamber of Commerce at that time--Negro Chamber of Commerce. Phyllis Wheatley neighborhood is now a historic district and [unclear] historic districts. That's where I'm living now [?] I continue to live. After graduating from college lived a little bit by myself and got too scared and came back home. [Laughs] And now at the family home.

Dulaney: Tell us about your parents.

Ragsdale: My parents were Mr. [unclear] Ragsdale and Mrs. [unclear] Ragsdale. We were just a wonderful [?] family. My dad died young of a hypertensive stroke and he was fifty-nine

years old at that time. I was seven at the time. I was born in 1952. My daddy died in 1959 and so for the most part we were--we, I'm saying my sister and I--

Dulaney: So just two of you in the family?

Ragsdale: --were reared by my mother. Now, my daddy had paternal sisters. However, there was never such a thing as half. But we had paternal sisters and the nieces and nephews. We're all very close, even with my paternal sisters. I continue to be close with them. I'm an aunt of someone whose sixty years--[laughs] that's how you do with the paternal-when you've got two marriages, etcetera. I was really reared for the most part by my mother. My daddy died young. She was very active herself. She was the precinct chair of the precinct for a long time. She was an active member of--really kind of behind the scene active member of the NAACP with Juanita Craft.

Dulaney: Who was Juanita Craft?

Ragsdale: Juanita Craft was a civil rights leader. Her role was really to organize a lot of youth chapters throughout the state of Texas--youth chapters

of the NAACP. So she was kind of like the community organizer of youth chapters for the NAACP. That institution was there. That was really the beginning of my activism. I was eleven years old.

Dulaney: So you were a member of the NAACP Youth Council?

Ragsdale: Under the leadership of Juanita Craft. My sister and I. My sister being Charlotte Ragsdale who was an activist in her own right. So, I was eleven and she was thirteen and we were both active members of NAACP. Of course like I indicated my mother made sure that took place. We were raised for the most part by three institutions. One was I would say a very strong family and of course the church-church or temple CME [Christian Methodist Episcopal]. I'm a life-long CME. And then, of course, the NAACP Youth Council. You know, along with all this my mother also made sure that we were members of Maria Morgan YWCA which was the Negro chapter, if you will, of the YWCA [of Metropolitan Dallas]. I would walk door to door with my mom collecting memberships and doing a membership drive, etcetera. So all

this activism young contributed significantly to who I am.

Dulaney: I want to back to--what did you do after you graduated from Madison High School? What type of work did you do?

Ragsdale: First of all it's a part of Madison. I mean that's a pretty big jump. If you don't mind. I don't want to direct you. But I do want to say that a part of my history too as a student at James Madison High School--the honorable Al Lipscomb recruited me also to be active in the South Dallas Information Center which was really on Pennsylvania. The house is no longer there now, but he had a house.

Dulaney: Whenever you mention a name, I'm going to have to ask you to tell who this person is. Who was Al Lipscomb?

Ragsdale: Okay, good. The honorable late Al Lipscomb was a strong activist--community activist, community organizer, the mayor pro tem of the City of Dallas, and he was the lead plaintiff to change the city council governance--how we elected city council people.

Dulaney: You said you were involved with him in his
information center in south Dallas.

Ragsdale: As a student of James Madison High School several
of us were recruited by the honorable Al
Lipscomb to participate in the South Dallas
Information Center. So, I was going from the
NAACP Youth Council to the South Dallas
Information Center. And all this contributed
to my activism and contribute to my knowledge
about our struggle. When I got there, at the
South Dallas Information Center, we were
dealing with a number of issues. It might have
been police brutality by all means, somebody's
utilities being turned off, to domestic
violence. It was a range of issues that we
addressed and that I was exposed to. But with
respect to the NAACP Youth Council we were--
and I know I'm going back and forth with this--
-but Juanita Craft actually provided our
exposure to a number of issues as well,
primarily at that time housing discrimination.
And also we went to the conventions on the
bus--the conventions on the bus. We went to
the capitol and that's why I remember seeing

Senator [John] Tower at that time. He was a United States Senator from Texas. We just travelled to D.C. at a very early age and was exposed to the seat of power, if you will. That was wonderful and we in the back yard of Juanita Crafts' house we would make t-shirts in the old way and we would participate in different pickets and marches around different issues. And then I would go to the South Dallas Information Center and participate as well. So it was--and my mother embraced all of that. She wanted to make sure that she felt good about Mrs. Craft which she did as well as felt good about Mr. Lipscomb which she did.

Dulaney: Why did you get involved? Most high school students they're looking to go out and have a good time, not be involved in any political action or activism. So why did you get involved?

Ragsdale: Well, I must admit now it had a lot to do with who my mother was. That's why it's so important, even if it's not our parents to involve us. Children are looking for it. And we were looking for constructive outlets. Now, let me say this. I was not the only one. There were

several of us. I was the vice president of student council as well, but all that was a part of being involved and that activism. Part of it was, a significant part--I became involved student because of my mother. So it was driven by that. And then, to be frank, we had a few teachers who inspired us. I remember Mrs. Virginia Strafford in particular who inspired us to--who was my home teacher who inspired us to get involved.

Dulaney: Going back to the occupation question, what type of work did you do after you left Madison High School?

Ragsdale: Paul B. Ragsdale was over Crossroads [Community Center] before it became Martin Luther King Center. So I was employed there at Crossroads going out to get surveys. In essence developing a base for the center or what I know now, sort of a needs assessment. Then also the Urban League. I worked at the Urban League with Mr. Alexander at that time. Then of course I went to TWU [Texas Woman's University] and then became extremely active there. My mother recognized that I was too

active and not enough in my academics, so she told me to transfer to Dallas Baptist [University] where I graduated in nursing. And I have my BS in nursing and I'm an RN by profession. That's in essence what I did afterwards. I worked in part on college in a work-study program. But immediately after high school I went to college. Really during high school is where I worked for money, not as a volunteer [laughs], but for money at the Urban League and at Crossroads. But after high school I went to college.

Dulaney: You ran for City Council in 1983, 1984?

Ragsdale: Right. That was in 1984. Before then, really in the early years of my college--this is where I met Peter Johnson and others.

Dulaney: Who is Peter Johnson?

Ragsdale: Peter was also someone who came from Atlanta, [Georgia], Louisiana as an activist.

Dulaney: With SCLC, right?

Ragsdale: Right. I was a very active member of SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] and that's where I met Peter and Bill Stoner. Bill Stoner was also an activist, but he was in

Pennsylvania. But, they were all members and during that process--during my activism with SCLC as an early college student, like a freshman and really a lot of part of my senior year with SCLC we--I was an active member of that. We had a lot of pickets like at Safeway [grocery store]--picket Safeway. That was just gross with respect to unfair practices, the food, the service, the typical racist behavior and disrespectful behavior. I know I'm going back and forth. As of junior high and high school it was NAACP and South Dallas Information Center. And also in part the later years was the SCLC involvement. Then in college I continued on with my SCLC involvement. My god brother who was across the street from me, born and bred--in this neighborhood it was very much active.

Dulaney: Who was the god brother?

Ragsdale: I'm sorry. James Skip Shockley. James Skip Shockley was across the street from--an activist. He made the decision to join the [Black] Panther Party and so I would dip in and out of that through him. [Laughs] So, when

I would come home during the weekend from college then I would sell Panther Party papers in front of H.L. Green [department store]—when it [Wilson Building] was H.L. Green at that time.

Dulaney: Downtown [Dallas].

Ragsdale: That's precisely right. I guess the point I'm making there is there were active organizations that created an opportunity for young people to join in order to be involved in the Civil Rights Movement and the human rights movement. So if it was NAACP or it was SCLC, the Black Panther Party, the South Dallas Information Center--all these entities were there which created an opportunity for us. But my activism and desire began through my mother and as a result of my mother. So I was saying that James Skip Shockley, knew him as Skip, he was involved in the Panther Party and therefore I became involved with that somehow too.

Dulaney: Tell us about why you decided to run for City Council in 1984.

Ragsdale: Sure. That was really interesting because that really was not my intent at that time. I was in--well, I ran for Council in 1984. In 1982-- or 1981 I think it was. It was either 1981 or 1982. I was appointed to the City Plan Commission--city planning and zoning commission. And so I was a member of that appointed by the honorable Elsie Faye Heggins who was a council member as well. So I was very involved with her. I was very involved with her and so she appointed me at that time. And really what happened was that she decided to resign to run for County Commissioner. She was, really, along the [unclear] with Mr. J.B. Jackson who was also an activist and a [unclear] board member, extreme activist and [unclear] board member. She was with J.B. and the court [?] were looking around and said, "Well, we want to run for County Commissioner and so we need to determine who runs for Council." Because this is during the interim. This is an off year. She's resigning almost a year ahead of time in order to run for County Commissioner. So I was asked. It was me.

[Laughs] In essence, who had the credibility? Who had the activism? Who had this? Who had that? Who had some name ID? All of that came into play. And thus I ran. But I was more of an activist/organizer type. But I learned well and to be quite frank with you--in essence, why did I choose to run? I was selected to run at that time and I accepted. Of course, there was some development or preparation for such. Not only my activism as it relates to being grounded in the community and having some good history, but also I served on the City Plan Commission. And the Council, one of their major responsibilities is about zoning and land use. That's what the City Plan Commission does. It's about zoning and land use. So therefore what I--I ran and was able to be elected. That's why I ran.

Dulaney: What were some of the issues you thought you needed to address when you were on City Council?

Ragsdale: Well, there was several issues. One of which was about land use--how the land was used. Good god almighty we had--almost anything could be located anywhere in the heart of southern

Dallas and in particular what we know as south Dallas proper. Almost anything could be located anywhere. We knew we had to go through some type of plan to give some direction and guidance to various businesses. So that was one of them, is to address the issue of land use-how land should be used. The proper use of land. Because we were exploited in so many different ways--south Dallas proper was, as it relates to where things would be located, etcetera. Then what we found out, Dr. [Dulaney], is that as a result of that land use study and as a result of that land use activism, what we found out was that we had an oversaturation. We well documented through this study that we had an over saturation of alcohol related businesses within the community. Oversaturation. As a matter of fact, in south Dallas proper there was \$48 million generated in alcohol related sales. I never will forget this. I was just so overwhelmed. \$48 million was generated in alcohol-related sales in south Dallas proper. \$4 million came from people who lived there,

so \$44 million came from people outside the community because south Dallas proper was indeed surrounded by dry communities. That was major issue. What I did was pull together what was known as the Land Use Committee to begin to develop what is now known as the South Dallas/Fair Park [Neighborhood] Preservation and Economic Development Plan. I put upon people like Dr. Roberts to be the chairperson of that committee. And you know Dr. Roberts is one of our leading activists in the community-educators, etcetera. We know that. So we led the way to that. From that plan came a number of wonderful recommendations.

Dr. Roberts: We are going to need to pause at this point.

The kids need to come in and get their lunches. Then we'll start again.

[Video stops]

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Dulaney: Okay, Miss Ragsdale, we want to come back to talking about the land use issues that you said was one of the more important ones that you addressed when you were on the City Council.

Ragsdale: That's correct. As I indicated we had--almost anything could be located anywhere. It didn't matter. Businesses were located in the heart of the neighborhood. Commercial industry located in the heart of the neighborhood. Alcohol related businesses wherever they desired and oversaturation of such. So we began to address that issue. And to be quite frank with you, as a result of that, a number of people came in and joined the movement and gave great credibility, like Commissioner Price. Many people know who is Commissioner, so we just billboard, activity, et cetera. All this elevated the importance of this issue. And it was through the study that we were able to document how exploitative the situation was, how the community was exploited. We addressed the land use issues. We didn't become--we were not looked upon as being friends. The city was sued many times because of what we did and of course they should have been sued. They were just so abusive. But for the most part they were sued by the people who were exploiting the community. We began to

rezone to not only to stop the oversaturation, not only to stop the different commercial industries which were located within the neighborhoods, not only to stop them, but to phase them out. Because you can use zoning and [unclear] to phase out obnoxious businesses. And somehow we had to remedy the situation to the extent that we could. Many times that's what the Civil Rights Movement is all about and the human rights movement is--you know, we got to remedy some of these situations. We didn't start all equal and so we need to somehow remedy. How do we compensate? How do we make up for this past discrimination? It was all about racism that allowed our communities to be used for anything, to allow anything to be located anywhere. So, yes, land use and planning were key issues during my tenure. Key issues. And one of the other issues was fundamental human rights, such as affordable decent housing. That's a fundamental need. That's not something that I just might want. That's a fundamental need. So affordable housing. I was Vice Chair of the

Housing and Neighborhood Services, so housing became extremely important to me. It was important as an activist, but as a council member it was even more important. So we developed a movement to create CDCs-nonprofit community development corporations which could very well develop affordable housing, homeownership opportunities, and to develop businesses. So we developed that movement here in the city.

Dulaney: Were you involved in the development of the South Dallas--

Ragsdale: The Southern Dallas Development Corporation. As a council member I was involved in the creation of that. It was created during my tenure, but I was not the sole person at all. As a matter of fact, that was led by the honorable Annette Strauss.

Dulaney: The former mayor.

Ragsdale: The former mayor. Very good one. One with whom I served. So she was very much so. The Southern Dallas Development Corporation was established. For the most part, that was established as a lending institution to assist

businesses within our communities, in particular southern Dallas or people who want to come and locate in southern Dallas. But the CDCs were more community-based development corporations. Really a process that began in the east of the country and it gradually came to the south. The affordable housing was a critical issue during my tenure. The whole environmental--I mean the environmental racism or some people call it environmental justice because we had a number of obnoxious businesses within our community, such as the Dixie [Metals] lead smelter which caused tremendous lead emissions, et cetera. And of course the rendering plants. So we had to address--I mean, just a number of issues to address, so yes, homeownership opportunities, not just homeownership of the poor, but housing opportunities, environmental racism, and of course human rights, such as police abuse. That was a major issue.

Dulaney: You need to expand on that too. On police abuse and police brutality.

Ragsdale: Okay, sure. In I think it was 1988 and 1989 the City of Dallas was number one in police shootings in the country. And we had the elderly being shot and killed, like Miss Collins on Metropolitan. Like Mr. Horton in the Senior Citizens Center just there protecting. The whole attitude was about, on the council at that time was to support 'the blue' regardless of what they do. That was our whole thing and this was a time when council member Lipscomb and I served on the council together and these were very difficult times. We recognized there are good and bad apples in every profession, every profession, but we could never get at that time the DPD [Dallas Police Department] as well as the DPA [Dallas Police Association] to recognize there were some problem officers. This was not a wholesale indictment. We were not making a wholesale indictment, but there are problem officers and you need to get rid of them because they're really creating a problem for all of you and for the community. So we pulled together [the] community. More and more

activists became involved which was wonderful. Of course Marvin Crenshaw was one of those leading activists to address the police abuse. So we began a movement to get a number of signatures to put this civilian review board on the ballot. And we did get enough signatures to put a civilian review board on the ballot. We lost once it got there, but it moved the electoral process further to help us to get one-a review board that was much stronger than what we had. As a matter of fact, it's still existing and it does have subpoena power and it does have investigative power. We do have a police review board with investigative and subpoena power. Now, the other thing too is that we had a congressional hearing here dealing with the police abuse led by Congressman [John] Conyers. That enhanced the credibility and respectability of the movement. Then we had a wonderful consulting team that was pulled together. So to address this issue we had the congressional hearing, we had the people organize to get enough signatures for a civilian review board, we had

the consulting team consisting of what's called NOBLE which is a National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, and then also we had representatives, sociologists who were--Alpert out of New York. He was a sociologist who was a part of the consulting team. And they came forward with some good recommendations to assist us. Some of those recommendations were put into place. The number one recommendation was that you need a chief that sets the proper tone that certain behavior will not be tolerated, such as abuse of citizens. So many times the chiefs would not set that tone. The other thing which was established [was] the early warning system to identify where there's smoke there's fire. You need to move this person out. They are going to create problems. And often times you do identify the early warning signs before things become explosive with respect to officers. So that was one of the recommendations along with affirmative action--the needing more officers to reflect the complexion of the community. That was one of the recommendations. Things

didn't become perfect, but they were much better than what they were because of the activism by the community, the [unclear] civilian review board, the consultant's report which was followed, the congressional hearing. And all of that became much better. It became much better.

Dulaney: How long did you serve on council?

Ragsdale: Since 1984 to 1991.

Dulaney: Why did you decide to leave?

Ragsdale: Well no, I didn't leave. It was the redistricting.

It was the redistricting.

Dulaney: Under the fourteen-one plan? [Electoral system of 14 single-member districts plus 1 at-large mayor.]

Ragsdale: That's right. I only had one term left anyway, but yes. That was that whole redistricting concept that the realignment--and to be quite frank with you, there were some people in the northern half of the district [who] simply did not want an activist like Diane to represent them. That's what happened. On the southern half of the district it was overwhelmingly

"Support Diane". In the northern part of the district it was not.

Dulaney: Now, your sister served, Charlotte.

Ragsdale: My sister served as a member of the City Plan Commission, not as a member of the City Council. But she was a member of the City Plan Commission, Charlotte [was]. Along with the NAACP. Along with the SCLC. Along with the Dallas County Community Action Committee which was another organization that served poor people. Really, that was war on poverty-the Dallas County Community Action Committee. She served as one of those administrators. For the most part we were hand in hand, hand in hand, like a duet, involved in the movement for justice. And we had the same mother, so that shouldn't be surprising.

Dulaney: What did you do once you left the council?

Ragsdale: Well, that's interesting. I continued to work as a nurse because one thing about [being] a member of the council, which is so overwhelming and which is different now that we finally got it changed, [is] we only made \$50 a week. You talking about gross. [Laughter]

Dulaney: All that work for so little money.

Ragsdale: That's why your commitment had to be internalized.

You just couldn't do it if you didn't love the people, love the community. You just simply could not do it. \$50 a week. But that has changed now. But even that movement began before I left the council. That movement began and was successful. My point I'm making is I worked as an RN as I could as a member of the council [and] that I continue to work as an RN-as a nurse after I left the council. Later thereafter I really became--I was a board member, one of the co-founders of a group called the South Dallas/Fair Park Innercity Community Development Corporation which is a community-based nonprofit. I became one of the board members and one of the co-founders of that organization. Then thereafter I really became the director of it. That's what I do now. That's what I did shortly thereafter.

Dulaney: What is that organization do?

Ragsdale: That organization provides the--it's known as ICDC--Innercity Community Development Corporation. 'I' being Innercity, one word. It

provides homeownership opportunities for low income families. It provides business development. It helps people to start and build their businesses, particularly within south Dallas proper. It does a lot of community education, community organizing. It provides, not just business development, but retail development. At this present time we own--we've been owning the shopping center on Grand [Avenue] for quite a while. The one where the subway is. Family Dollar, we own that. We built an office building over there on Spring Avenue. We built that office building as well as we built an adult daycare center. So we not only provide business, but provide education to help people become business people, we actually create--do what's called retail development ourselves. Our position is that to the extent that we can we have to do the development. It not as if the conventional developers are going to come to our community and do great things. Many times when they do come. There's not an entity to make sure that they are accountable. Because

that's what happens when many of the conventional developers come to southern Dallas or to our communities in particular-- south Dallas proper, it creates mass displacement. Or it creates gentrification which was one of our major issues too while I was on the council. The displacement of poor people to accommodate the [unclear] come. I don't have any kind of problems with any kind of people, but poor folks need a place to live too. [Laughter] So that's a problem. That CDC leveraged other CDCs. We're kind of like the god mother, god father institution with respect to CDCs. So that's what we do. And it's really an extension of what I do. As a member of the Dallas City Council, as an activist, as a nurse there's such a close relationship, such a nexus, a connection between one's health and one's living conditions. And the CDC works to improve people's living conditions. We cannot disconnect or separate, detach one's living conditions from one's health. That's what the

CDCs do. They improve the quality of life for humans. We have a number now in the city.

Dulaney: Reflect a moment. How successful do you think the Civil Rights Movement was here in Dallas?

Ragsdale: Right. I really think that it was successful. I'm not saying it was overwhelmingly successful. It was successful. And often times as a native Dallas-ite I become offended when people say that somehow the movement didn't come here. There are people here who struggled a lot. From Juanita Craft or Ernie McMillan and Al Lipscomb, Kathlyn Gilliam. To suggest that somehow that since we didn't have a riot--a valid riot in here--I've heard, "Oh, you guys--the city didn't burn. You didn't have--." That's really not fair. We don't think that that's necessarily the basis. Somehow that's the measure or the indicator to measure if something was successful--if you had a riot. Yes, we had activism in different places. Yes, it could have been improved. Yes, it could have been better. But, a number of people came to this city--people of color came, in particular African Americans during that era

came to this city because things were better. And we had people who were consistently struggling. Emmett Conrad in his own way from the medical, not just the education, but the medical field. Mrs. Conrad had unsung [unclear] as far as I'm concerned. So yes, I think it had a level of success. We had different movements. Like I indicated, you had Curtis Gaines over there who was the Black Panther. You had the Al Lipscomb who was on the left side, if you will. And you had SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] with Ernie McMillan. Fred Bell, Fahim Minkah. Then you had--people might have had issues with her, but I didn't, you had Juanita Craft. You had different elements within the community to improve things.

Dulaney: Who would you say were people of the other races who aided and supported the movement here in Dallas?

Ragsdale: You had Dr. Farmer [?].

Dulaney: From SMU?

Ragsdale: From SMU, yes. You had Bishop Herbener--Mark Herbener who was from Mount Olive Lutheran

church. You had Mary Greene. In their own way there was a relationship with the Medranos and continue to be in their own way, but particularly with Kathryn and Robert was very strong. And [Francisco] Pancho [Medrano], good god, you know. You had--unfortunately his name escapes me. He was a rabbi.

Dr. Roberts: [Levi] Olan.

Ragsdale: That's right. Olan.

Dulaney: Rabbi Olan, yes.

Ragsdale: Unfortunately you could count on one hand, maybe two hands, but at least you could [unclear]. And they would bring their constituency. Sometimes all you need is five, six strong people and you just bring your constituency with you which could help. In the younger-- someone along my age--because I know they not young anymore. [Laughs] 1952, give me a break. In the younger period you had John Fullinwider, whose still hanging.

Dulaney: Well, we're going to start to sort of wrap this up. And again--I'm sort of thanking you in advance, but I do have one last question. Would you do it all again?

Ragsdale: Yes I would and I think that's a good question.

Yes I would. You know, my life is enriched as a result of this. I feel good about Diane, you know. I might not have this materialistic this and materialistic that and all these great consumer things, but I've feel good as a human being. So yes, I would do it all over again.

Dulaney: Alright. Dr. Roberts, you have any additional questions?

Roberts: What do you see maybe as some of the human rights issues that still need to be addressed? And I guess I [unclear] hear you mention specifically those in the [unclear] developing area, [such as] redlining. Also crime, transportation. And then the whole leadership question. You mentioned the NAACP Youth Council and other efforts to develop the youth leadership. For the future, what do you see as major issues that--I'd especially like to hear you address the development of leadership to do the kinds of things that were done during the peak period of the Civil Rights Movement?

Ragsdale: Right. As I indicated, Dr. Roberts, in part I was able to be developed as a community leader

because of the youth organizations that existed. Because you did have the NAACP Youth Council. You did have Al coming up there at Madison and grabbing and saying, "Let's get involved". So when I look at me much of it-- and I'd also like to say within the SCLC there was a strong youth component. So yes, that's a gap. We don't have the infrastructure as we once had. We don't have that youth base, so yes, that's where our key gap is. I believe we have adult leadership, like who is in this room. I do believe there is adult leadership, but we're going to have to, whatever we do, is to bring along with us the youth even if we attend meetings, et cetera. My point though is that we might not have the organized youth groups right now, but those adults who are involved can very well move forward to engage them in what we are engaged in, if I'm making any sense there. So as we go to the meeting then we need to bring one of the youth with us to be exposed to what we do and start to make a conscious effort of that. It's interesting that you would ask that because I'm involved

in an ongoing discussion with other about how do we involve our youth in the movement because there's really--the youth leadership or the youth leaders are not there right now and much of it has to do with that we have not nurtured them, not developed them or we didn't carry them along. For instance, I involved in Justice for John Movement. It's [unclear] for John Wiley Price, so we actively bringing youth with us at those meetings to make sure that they're involved because we got a pretty organized structure, so that they can be involved in seeing that. It might be an educational movement. I reflect upon that based upon what happened to me. When my mother went to a meeting--she just didn't send me to the NAACP Youth, she was there as well. It's kind of like sending your child to church, but where's the mama? In the bed? [Laughter] I think that's important for--it still in a way will start with adults who are involved in the movement I guess is my answer.

Roberts: And what do you see as some of the issues that are still--

Ragsdale: Yes, right. Unresolved. The economic equity is extremely important. So there are two ways we know to build, in my opinion, wealth. One is homeownership. That's one of the things the CDCs do is try to improve the homeownership rate within our community as well as business ownership. Those two things are very important. These two things to build wealth. So the key issues is how do we improve our income within our community. How do we improve the family income--the income of family members? How do we improve that? Those are two major components to do that. The activist component with respect to holding banks accountable--that was a critical issue in--I'm glad you mentioned it. I didn't touch on it. But ICDC was involved in stopping banks from merging in order to ensure that we went to the table and negotiated a good community reinvestment agreement. That is not happening at this time. But I believe it might not be to deal with redlining, but we certainly in some way have to hold the banks accountable. And that can take place through the existing

organization. In part we have some infrastructure existing, but not necessarily to create the movement, we just have to strengthen it. We would think and hope that in part that the Black Chamber, for example, would deal with some of the redlining issues because of the lending need. So that continues to be a critical issues--the issue of economic development. But when I say economic development I'm talking about trying to increase incomes. So it's not about us creating wealth for a few ourselves. Our goal is not to replicate what is already established, meaning this wide gap between the rich and poor or the affluent and the poor, et cetera, but instead to create a more equitable distribution of the income. I think that can happen. Some CDCs throughout the country have begun to--and it happens to be one of the fastest growing businesses, is employee ownership. It is way of trying to increase the income of various people. So the key here is not--when we deal with economic development--

[Video stops]

[Video restarts. Interview continues]

Ragsdale: --simply to create a few rich black people. I'm not in the business of trying to create black millionaires. I am in the business of trying to improve the income of many families. So if that's through education, if that's through microenterprise development which is what the CDCs deal with, not just small business development, but microenterprise meaning less than five employees. With microenterprise development, if that's how we need to increase the wealth that's how we need to do it. Self-employment, et cetera.

Roberts: One final question. One of the main issues with this entity in this year going forward will be low enrollment schools in this area. Of course, the housing stock impacts that, even though we've had some advances in terms of better housing stock. But in terms of the numbers of individuals to enroll in school is possible will close four to six elementary schools because of low enrollment. Do you see anything on the horizon to maybe have a collaboration between agencies to utilize

those facilities or have a better use in the community?

Ragsdale: Right. I consider education extremely important, but we all recognize that when it comes to the population that the housing stock is directly related to that. We're hoping that the CDCs will help to increase the number of homes and homeownership within this area which would bring some of those schools back on line. Now, I was working with Bernadette Nutall on a committee that was chaired by Juanita Wallace to save some schools. One of which in particular was H.S. Thompson. And trying to move that to some type of charter school--not charter school but move that to some type of magnet school, particularly with reading and literacy, et cetera. There is a movement taking place now to try to save those schools that we can because we're not necessarily just buying into the phasing out of all the schools. We were actively working and holding Bernadette Nutall accountable to work with us to do that. At this present time it's the NAACP under the leadership of Juanita Wallace

working with Bernadette Nutall and other neighborhood groups trying to save some of the schools. Now the truth of the matter is I don't personally believe we're going to save all of them because we don't necessarily have the population, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't create alternative programs within those schools to help us. In some communities they have not completely phased them out--I'm sorry, they have temporarily phased them out and then brought them back on line when the population has increased or when we have created the alternative programs. That's what we're trying to do with some of our schools. Understanding its H.S. Thompson that's low. The neighborhood which I'm born and bred, Phyllis Wheatley, is low. Julia C. Frazier is low. So therefore the [unclear] at Paul Lawrence Dunbar might survive. Pearl C. Anderson is low. There are still a number of schools that low although they don't expect to phase them all out in one year.

Roberts: Okay. Thank you very much.

Dulaney: Thank you very much, Miss Ragsdale.

Ragsdale: My pleasure indeed.

Dulaney: Alright, we'll end this interview on August 19,
2011 in Dallas, Texas at the African American
Museum.

Ragsdale: Thank you all very much.

Roberts: Enjoyed it.

[End of Interview]