

Oral History Collection

H. Ron White

Interviewer: W. Marvin Dulaney and Robert L. Price

Date: November 4, 2011

Place of Interview: Dallas, TX

Dr. Dulaney: Let's see--okay, we are good to go. We're  
clapping [claps].

Mr. Price: My name is Robert L. Price. The African American  
Education Archives and History Program and the  
African American Museum are documenting the  
Civil Rights Movement in Dallas County, Texas.  
Today, November 4, 2003--I am interviewing  
Attorney H. Ron White, in the African  
American--

Dr. Dulaney: November 4, 2011.

Mr. Price: 2011. What did I say?

Dr. Dulaney: You said 2003.

Mr. Price: Oh, 2011. I knew there was something wrong with  
that there. Interviewing H. Ron White in the

African American Museum located in Fair Park, Dallas, Texas. Attorney White, we appreciate your participation in this project, and I know we're going to have a very good interview. First of all, I want to ask you something about your background--something about your childhood and early education. Where were you born and how long have you lived in Dallas?

White: Where was I born and how long have I lived in Dallas?

Let me first say that I appreciated the time that you, Robert Price and Dr. Dulaney and Donna Curry and Al Roberts for taking--for this particular interview. It's been very difficult getting prepared for it because you said you just wanted a glimpse of my entire history, that's about seventy years, okay. I may not remember a great deal of that, but I'm going to do the best I can to share information that I hope will be important to this process and this interview and those that might see this info. I was born in Richmond, Virginia. In fact, at the time, it was classified as Henrico County. My mother was Mattie White. My father was Ernest White. We

were, at that time, living in some rural area just outside of Richmond. I was birthed by my grandmother, Hattie Stark, a midwife at that time, in a small, very modest home in Richmond, Virginia. That's where I was born. I stayed there in Richmond for at least a couple of years. My father who had been enlisted in the service, was in the United States Navy. Shortly, a year or so after I was born, he was reassigned to California and he asked my mother to bring us out there so that we could be with him. I moved to--by train, we took the train from Richmond to California during that period of time and spent the first couple of years in Riverside, California, that's where he was stationed. He became, by the time he got out of the service, he was a Naval Petty Officer, responsible for all the food and cooking and all that on base. That's the beginning. I came back. I bussed back to Richmond, and I can't give you the exact date. When I arrived back in Richmond, I was about five years old. We moved to a settlement--I called it a settlement, which was where my

father's parents and family lived, which was in what is known today as Westwood. Westwood was a small settlement consisting of about ten families, approximately, not unlike other neighborhood that are surrounded by a White community. In that community there, we all got to know and love each other. That's where we worked and played and stayed for a couple of years. The families that were there--you might be surprised to know, one of them happens to be the Cunninghams, the Allens, the Andersons, the Wardens, we knew all of the families. In fact, most of the families are still there, some part of them is still there. [Unclear] family was there, the Cunningham family. So, that's one of our prides of that little neighborhood, of that little settlement at that time. Everybody that was there--just about everybody that was there went to school, in spite of--and most of the folk that was there got the chance to at least graduate from high school. During that time, it was--the area that we lived in, in Westwood, was surrounded, as I mentioned, by the White

community. We had a school there. It was a two-room school, if I remember. I only got the chance to go there for about a year before-- because of desegregation, they decided to relocate--consolidate schools and move all of the African Americans, Negroes at that time they called us, to another school that was located about fifteen miles away. We were moved although there was another school right up the street, less than a mile, which we could have walked to. It was a very nice school, it was elementary up to--K [Kindergarten] to twelve. In any event, we were required to be bussed about fifteen miles, at least, downtown, my school was going to be George Washington Carver--from this two-room school that we had. What's unique about that two-room school was that you had the junior high and high all on one side of school and you had the elementary, first through sixth grade, in another room. That's the way that school was and that's where some of the students had grown up and had gone to school for a period of time, until the school

district there consolidated the schools and required the African Americans that were going to school there to relocate to the downtown school.

Price: Tell us something about the facility, the textbooks, and the equipment that the African Americans had to use during that time.

White: They were hand-me-downs. They were books that were received from the school, it was the West Hampton School. West Hampton Elementary, West Hampton High School, was up the street. A mile and a half away. Those were the books and those were the amenities that we received as the sources for our education and our two-room school at that time. I was a little fortunate because my mother believed in education and Dad did too. So, when I got back, because I'd gone to--I call it kindergarten and preschool in California before I got back, I was already somewhat advanced compared to the students that were in the school at that time. You weren't supposed to start school until you were six. My mother arranged, through whatever negotiations she was able to effect and ensure

that I got into school even though I was only five. So, I began a year ahead of the other students, primarily because I'd already gone to pre-school in California.

Price: You mentioned that the textbooks were hand-me-downs.

What about the equipment in the high schools? For example, if you wanted to take Chemistry, or Biology, or Physics, what type of equipment did you have?

White: I can't give you information on that, because I didn't stay there long enough in that school. When I got back, I was only there for about a year before they moved all of us down to Carver, which was the predominantly Black school in Richmond at that point, which accommodated the students that were in schools such as the school that I started in, which was Westwood. Does that help you?

Price: Very good. What would--you mentioned your father's occupation was in the Navy, what did your mother do? What was her--?

White: Yes. My mother--first of all, both parents finished high school at that time. They finished at Virginia Randolph High School, which was

located just outside of the Richmond area in Henrico County. That was the predominant school that most of the students that lived in that area attended. Both finished high school, and they--my mother was doing primarily ironing and day's work, wherever she could get the work when we got back. She immediately started to go to nursing school. So, shortly after she was able to obtain her nursing degree, she became a nurse, certified, and that was the kickoff platform for much of what she has been able to do over the years. My dad, he worked for Liggett and Myers Tobacco Factory at that time. It was a big operation in Richmond, Virginia. They had huge tobacco facilities and plants and processing facilities. My dad worked for Liggett and Myers, which was a company that manufactured Chesterfield cigarettes and some others, some of the brands at that point. Oh, he didn't smoke, but that's where he worked. He also was very active in terms of--everyone at that time had a second job. His second job was at waiting parties and working at restaurants,



but his primary job was over at what was known as the Westwood--Westwood Summer Club, which was like a private club that was probably about five miles from where we lived. That's where he worked in the evenings, so he worked the day job and then he worked his evening job. I always said that much of what he did and my mother did was to help me and my brother and sister to get through school. I have a brother and sister. I have a brother by the name of Ernest White. He currently lives in Spartanburg, South Carolina. He has been in the education field. In fact, he has his Doctorate of Divinity. He has been heavily involved in education in terms of the African American Trustee Association that has been formed, and you're probably familiar with that, too, but he's been active in that organization. My sister is--she finished school also, got her Master's degree. She is retired now from Richmond Housing Authority, and so she was responsible for senior housing in Richmond for a number of years. So, that's what she did. So, I guess, what I'm--we're all

kind of proud of the fact that in spite of our humble beginnings, we're all five years apart. My brother's next to me, my mother planned it, I guess. My daughter--I mean my sister is five years younger than my brother, but we were all fortunate enough to get through school and get an advanced degree--

Price: Tell us something about your occupation. What do you do?

White: What do I do?

Price: Yes, what is your occupation?

White: Jesus. Well, I'm a lawyer, and my primary job is the management of the firm known as White & Wiggins. I'm excited about the firm that we have because we believe it's one of the larger minority-owned, primarily African American-owned firms in the North Texas region. To some extent, that's--we're proud of that but we're not proud of where we are, but we should be. If you look comparatively in terms of where our professional organizations and businesses are, we're woefully behind in the market in terms of the ability to get and grow their kinds of businesses that are out here in the

marketplace at this place. So, my job is to manage the lawyers that--we have currently thirteen lawyers on board. It's a full-service firm. We're excited about the kind of clientele that we've been able to establish, at least to date, which consists of both public and private sector clients. Some of our clients consist of the airport board that we took. Of course, we worked for the Dallas County. More recently, we worked for the school board, NTA [National Teachers Association], they're some of the public sector clients. DISD [Dallas Independent School District], we've done some work for them. On the private sector side, we've been able to and have engaged to work for American Airlines, Encore Future Energy Holdings is another company. Parkland. Some of the private sector clients that we have.

Price: Sounds like you're very successful.

White: Well, we still say it's marginal because it takes quite a bit in order to try to support the firm. So, what we say is that we're still in business and we still believe that the space

that we play in, that we participate in at this point is very valuable to the community. It's always a concern in terms of what we think is failing to keep what we are in perspective. What always appears to be is not always what is. Where we appear to be in terms of [unclear] development is not where we probably should be, more importantly. So, for that reason, you know, there's a necessity for us to continue to collaborate plans and pursue those goals that we believe are important to show the disparity within the community, both on the not only education side, but on the business side, especially.

Price: Where did you go to law school?

White: I attended Howard University Law School. Completed Howard University in 1971, graduated at that time. By the time I graduated, I was fortunate because some of the prior experience that I had in the military [helped] to obtain a job in Atlantic Richfield Company. In fact, that's how I got to Dallas. I was recruited and worked for the Federal Power Commission on--I was in Washington for law school in my last

year, so I had some experience and some exposure and was recruited by Atlantic Richfield then to be considered for a position here in Dallas.

Price: Did you--during the period that you were working for these firms, the government and all, did you have any problems with discriminatory action or racism?

White: Let's say that--did I have any problems with--

Price: Racism, discrimination.

White: Best way to probably address that, Mr. Price, is that we know that there--we've seen the evidence of racism, I'll put it that way. At that time, this is since I've been born, I have seen evidence of racism. Even today, I think, although we're often pretty optimistic about where we are and where we think we're going and what we've experienced, we know it's still prevalent. So, the answer is yes. There has been some exposure to it. I think much of it depends upon how you, you know, like to address it and how you deal with it. My deal was always to try to continue to prepare myself so I wouldn't have to--have to

apologize for what we were attempting to do or what was necessary in order to try to improve ourselves. So, the answer's yes, I've seen it. I've experienced it both in, you know, throughout my life. So, I wouldn't want to spend a lot of time talking about specific incidents.

Price: Tell us something about the some of the organizations you belonged to, such as legal organizations-- NAACP, SEOC, some of those organizations. Any type of those organizations that you--

White: Well, the organizations that I have membership in, or have had memberships in, have been fairly plentiful, and that's primarily felt that, you know, where you live in an area you have to get involved. NAACP, obviously, I've been a member of that. Life member of that, very early age, active, involved with that. Then in 1975--1971, shortly after I got here, I became actively involved with the black chamber--it was the Negro chamber at that time. That was one of the initiatives that we took--undertook to get the name changed to [unclear] black at that time was not as active now as it was

years back. Any number of organizations that were here in Dallas that were involved with either civil rights or economic development, I've been an active part of that. More recently, I guess, if you're looking at the economic side--of the business side, then Dallas Fort Worth Minority Development Council, been involved with that, probably twenty-five years, I suppose. Why? Because, to me, that's one of the primary vehicles that's available here in the city that's designed to try and improve business development, not just for African Americans, but for the minorities in the city. So, I'm involved with that. I have some information--give me a minute.

Dulaney: Okay.

[End of Interview]