

Transcript of a recorded interview with Ms. Marsha Dunn, 27 February 1992

The following is an unrehearsed taped interview with Ms. Marsha Dunn, employed by the city of Richmond. The interview is being conducted at city hall in Richmond, Kentucky, conducted by A.G. Dunston, History Department, Eastern Kentucky University on the 27th of February, 1992.

AG: This is A.G. Dunston. I am going to conduct an interview with Marsha Dunn. We are at city hall in the lobby on the 27th of February, 1992. Okay, Ms. Dunn, Marsha, are you Miss or Mrs.

MD: Miss.

AG: Ms. Marsha . . . Do you have a middle name?

MD: Vera.

AG: Oh, Ms. Marsha Vera Dunn. Okay, how long have you lived in Richmond?

MD: I've lived in Richmond for 30 . . . approximately 32 years.

AG: Can you tell me when you were born? What's your birthday?

MD: I was born in . . . I was born in Fayette County.

AG: Oh, okay.

MD: But we moved here two to three years prior to my . . . after my birth.

AG: Okay.

MD: My mother's hometown is Richmond, Kentucky. My father's hometown is Fayette . . . Lexington, Kentucky.

AG: Okay.

MD: We resided on East Main Street across from the Richmond Junior High when I was a child. I lived across the street from the black Richmond Junior High School.

AG: Okay. Right across the street?

MD: Right across the street.

AG: And that's where the Telford . . . the old Telford is now.

MD: Where Telford is now or the YMCA.

AG: Okay. Okay. Where did you do elementary school?

MD: I went to elementary school first through fifth grade at Richmond Junior High School. When I attended, it was a junior high school not a high school.

AG: Okay.

MD: And I went . . . my sixth grade, in sixth grade, I went to Mayfield. Seventh grade, I went to Madison High School, and in the eighth grade I came back to Richmond Junior High where we had graduation, and I graduated from Richmond Junior High.

AG: Oh. The twelfth grade by that time?

MD: Eighth grade. It was a junior high when I attended.

AG: Okay. First through sixth, then you went to Mayfield. What was Mayfield?

MD: Mayfield was just a school system. It was nothing special. There was no historical significance at all. It was just a new school at the time.

AG: Okay.

MD: We didn't have districting in the city.

AG: Oh, okay.

MD: You could go to whatever school you wanted to. They had districting for the county.

AG: Okay, alright.

MD: And in the seventh grade, I went to Richmond Madison, which was both a junior high and a high school.

AG: Okay.

MD: Then in the eighth grade, I went back to Richmond Junior High where they have an eighth grade graduation ceremony.

AG: Oh, okay, alright. What year was that? (Laughter).

MD: Approximately '82. _____

AG: Where you on time in school? Your birth date was . . . ?

MD: October.

AG: Yeah, so you were . .

MD: I was there when I was 13, 12 or 13.

AG: Okay. Did we get your birth date on this record?

MD: 10/24/55.

AG: (Laughter) After . . after you graduated then the formal process from the old Richmond Junior High was then . .

MD: Then, I had to attend high school which was at Richmond Madison High.

AG: Okay. Okay. You graduated from Richmond Madison High?

MD: Yes, and high school.

AG: Okay.

MD: When I attended school at Richmond Junior High, it was only a junior high. I don't know what year it became only a junior high.

AG: Okay, mmm-hmm.

MD: I don't know when it went from high school to junior high.

AG: To junior high, okay . . . or written record some place.

MD: Written record some place.

AG: Okay.

MD: It may be in the information that you have.

AG: Yeah, because there is a lot in that pamphlet of information from the reunion.

MD: Mmm-hmm.

AG: Okay. Let's talk about that. What . . . what is that all about, the reunion that Richmond graduates or folks who attend?

MD: Okay, those graduates from high school are the ones that formulated that.

AG: Okay.

MD: And I don't have a lot of knowledge of the formulation of the high school reunion because

it was before me.

AG: Okay.

MD: Before my time.

AG: Okay. Do you go . . . do you go to the . . . ?

MD: No, I don't.

AG: You don't.

MD: I have never attended.

AG: Okay. When you went to the old Richmond, when you graduated . .

MD: From junior high school . .

AG: From junior high in eighth grade, it was all black?

MD: Predominantly.

AG: Predominantly. Okay. When you talk about Richmond Madison, is that the integration process.

MD: Mmm-hmm. Yes, it is.

AG: Because you were black and white together? Okay.

MD: Because Richmond Madison was the only, after they closed down Richmond High School.

AG: Yes, okay.

MD: Richmond Madison was the ONLY high school available in the city of Richmond.

AG: Okay.

MD: Now the county school was Madison Central.

AG: Oh, that's where I'm getting confused.

MD: And that was the county school.

AG: Okay. Now, Madison Central was that white?

MD: Predominantly.

AG: Predominantly white? Okay.

MD: Mmm-hmm.

AG: Okay, what was out in the county? Did black . . . in the county have to come. ..?

MD: There was not a lot of blacks that were in the county.

AG: Okay. And those who were, had to come into the . . . ?

MD: And they had to take a bus. They had buses.

AG: Okay. Okay.

MD: Ones that wanted to go to Madison High School in the city had to find their own transportation. There was no bus system for them. At that time, there was districting.

AG: Okay. Okay.

MD: This was before we had the combination. Approximately two years ago, we stopped districting. We put the students combined into county and city school combined and Madison High School was closed.

AG: Okay. Okay. What do you . . what do you do here at city hall?

MD: I am the Community Development Director for the city.

AG: What does that mean?

MD: I do housing grants, special project grants, community development block grant, which is money that was funneled down from the federal government to the state government to localities.

AG: Okay.

MD: You have compete for these funds. These can provide public facilities, housing, rehab, remodeling homes, acquiring property, relocating families.

AG: Okay.

MD: This is as far as housing goes. Special projects, different ICQ's come under special projects. Right now, we have a grant for senior citizens center and that is for the renovation of the senior citizens center and for acquiring the property for senior citizens in which they will lease the property from the city for a dollar a year.

AG: Oh, alright, okay.

MD: Then we have some emergency shelter funds and that is for transit housing and we have a substance abuse center that uses the emergency shelter funds.

AG: Okay.

MD: We have funds known as rental rehab funds, which is used for renovation of rental property for low to moderate income individuals.

AG: Okay.

MD: And this, I might mention, a type of grant for every public dollar you have to put up a public dollar, not to exceed a certain amount based upon the bedrooms used that the people occupy.

AG: Say it . . . do it again, I'm not getting it. Matching a dollar for every dollar?

MD: Yeah. Matching funds. Every federal dollar we have to put up is _____ ,

AG: Okay.

MD: But, it is based upon the size bedroom that we use that you would need to rehabilitate. For instance, if you have a one bedroom unit, we will give you \$6,500, but you have to come up with \$6,500 or more.

AG: Oh, okay.

MD: For a two bedroom, we would give you \$7,500, but you will have to come up with \$7,500.

AG: Okay.

MD: Then, we ask you to rent your units within fair market value. That's for within Section 8 which is another housing subsidy program and they are going to allow us to enable low to moderate income individuals to rent that unit from.

AG: Okay. So, they don't price it out of their range, because they're the ones that need it the most.

MD: Right, right.

AG: Okay.

MD: To profit low to moderate income individuals.

AG: Okay.

MD: The owner of the property has to agree not to convert it into condominiums for a ten-year

period and not to raise the rent for a ten year period.

AG: Really?

MD: Yes.

AG: Oh, alright.

MD: The loan is forgiven 10% per year over the ten-year period.

AG: Oh, okay. Yeah. That sounds exciting. How did you . . . you finished high school, did you go . . . ?

MD: When I finished high school, I attended Morehead State University and I got my degree in social welfare.

AG: Okay.

MD: And I came back to Richmond and became a relocation acquisition officer for the city of Richmond under the old program, Urban Renewal Program.

AG: Okay, yes, alright.

MD: At that time, the money was funneled down from the federal government directly to the city. In approximately 1980-1981, that changed and the funds were funneled down from . . . the cities had to be . . . not the county, but the state had the option of either continuing to deal with the federal government and just localities or to channel the money through the state. The state of Kentucky, they elected to channel the money through the state to the local governments. So, the cities became subgrantees. The actual grantee was the state and the city was subgrantee from the federal government.

AG: Now, okay. That's what you became . . . what year was this. . . what year did you graduate from Morehead?

MD: I graduated from Morehead in 1977.

AG: And then, this was . . . ?

MD: December of 1977.

AG: You came here?

MD: Then, I was unemployed for a short period of time.

AG: (Laughter)

MD: Then, in 1978, I go to work for the City of Richmond.

AG: Okay.

MD: At the relocation acquisition office.

AG: Okay. Alright. The change occurred. . . when you talk about the shift, that occurred when, do you remember?

MD: In approximately 1981- 82, somewhere around there.

AG: Okay.

MD: Between '80 and '82.

AG: Okay.

MD: I can't tell you exactly when.

AG: Okay. Okay.

MD: When that change came about, the City of Richmond still had to compete with money, for the money. Metropolitan areas did not have to compete for the money. We had to compete with other small cities.

AG: Okay.

MD: So, what it was called was a community development block grant for small cities.

AG: Okay.

MD: Metropolitan areas, they automatically got their money. Small cities had to compete for that.

AG: Really? Okay.

MD: So, um. . . .

AG: Are you finding . . . do you find yourself behind in . . . are there so many problems that you can't get, even all that you do, can't keep up with them or are you . . . do you feel comfortable doing . . . that you're doing the best job . . . ?

MD: Yeah.

AG: Okay. Because you don't see a whole lot of problems cropping up _____.

MD: We have problems as everybody has problems in any type of occupation, but especially when you deal with the public.

AG: Yeah, okay.

MD: Coming in contact with a lot of personalities, a lot of misconceptions, a lot of lack of communication between you and the public.

AG: Mmm-hmm.

MD: But we are always able to work it out.

AG: Okay. When you talked about your life here, what did your parents do?

MD: My father was a mechanic. He worked for the Blue Grass Army Depot and then he worked at Eastern Kentucky University. My mother worked for the hospital. She was a cook at the hospital.

AG: Okay.

MD: And, then, she . . .

AG: Pattie A. Clay?

MD: She cooked at the old Pattie A. Clay, and then she cooked for a short period of time at the new Pattie A. Clay.

AG: Okay.

MD: My grandfather's wife died and she quit her job to take care of my grandfather.

AG: Okay. What was your mother's maiden name?

MD: Johnny Rhodes.

AG: R-H.

MD: R-H-O-D-E-S.

AG: O-D-E-S. Was she . . . you say, she was from here?

MD: From Richmond.

AG: Your daddy was from Fayette County?

MD: Fayette County.

AG: Okay. Do you have sisters and brothers?

MD: I have one brother.

AG: And where is he?

MD: Well, actually, I had a brother that was deceased. He died when he was approximately three years old.

AG: Okay.

MD: I have a brother that is 26 years old. He's in the army.

AG: Okay.

MD: I have a half-brother in Richmond, who is about 17 years old.

AG: Seventeen?

MD: Seventeen.

AG: Okay. Alright. The one that's in . . . did he go into Desert Storm this year?

MD: No, no, he was in Germany.

AG: Okay. Okay.

MD: They didn't want him.

AG: They didn't call him?

MD: No, they didn't call him.

AG: Okay. I know you were relieved.

MD: Normally, if they are in a foreign country already, they won't.

AG: Oh, okay.

MD: They won't send him over to another foreign country. Which is a policy which I am glad of.

AG: Yeah, yeah.

MD: We're pleased about that. In August, he will be coming back to the states.

AG: Okay. What about . . . how do you feel about Richmond in terms of the . . . how the two races merge or get along?

MD: Of course, later, I mean, earlier in the 70s, of course there was a lot of racial tension early, in late 60s and early 70s, a lot of racial tension. I think it is sorry that they have to do that.

AG: Okay.

MD: There has been more opportunities because of loss.

AG: Okay. Yeah. Okay. Do you belong to any social organizations?

MD: I belong to the Elks.

AG: Okay. Along with Ms. Harris. Okay. Anything else? No sorority while you were at Morehead?

MD: Well, I started pledging Delta and I waited like my last year of school, me and another friend from Washington D.C., and they didn't want to take us over that semester. They wanted us to come back.

AG: Okay.

MD: There was a lot of controversy and the mind that I was on, they didn't even have that chapter take them over. The alumni chapter from Lexington took them over because they had a lot of problems.

AG: Okay. Okay. Yeah.

MD: They caused a lot of problems. They told me that if I wanted to commute back and forth that next semester from Richmond, I could do that or I could join the alumni chapter.

AG: You could join the alumni chapter.

MD: Yes, I could join the alumni.

AG: Well, you don't have to join the Delta alumni chapter. You could always join AKA (Laughter). Where's your church home?

MD: First Baptist on Francis Street.

AG: Has it always been there?

MD: Yes.

AG: It has? For your parents too?

MD: No, my father is Methodist and my mother is Baptist.

AG: Okay. Which church did he go to?

MD: He goes to St. Paul AME.

AG: Is that here in town?

MD: Yes, here in Richmond. His family belong to Wesley in Lexington.

AG: Is that AME?

MD: AME.

AG: Oh, okay, alright.

MD: My father's family is all Methodist. My mother's family is Baptist.

AG: Okay. Okay. Mmm-hmm. Yeah, I was telling Mrs. Harris that I am Methodist, too. I am AME. Okay. I know about the distinction. You know, when you have one half is Methodist and the other half is Baptist, and you have try to figure out a way to get around all the problems that that can cause.

MD: When I was younger, I attended Sunday school at both. I would go sometimes to the Baptist church and sometimes to the Methodist church.

AG: Oh, okay. Let's see . . .

MD: When I went to visit my father's people, of course, I went to the Methodist church.

AG: That's right. Do you have a Dunn family reunion?

MD: We did not have a Dunn family reunion. We have never had a Dunn family reunion. But, recently, we received correspondence from some of the family members who want to start a reunion and we are going to do that. Now, my mother's family, we've had a reunion every year ever since I can remember. It's the Walker-Blythe reunion.

AG: Oh, okay. I know, let's see . . . Robert Blythe. I've heard that name.

MD: But that's not the same Blythes.

AG: That's not the same. Okay. Lena Blythe. Is that a different group.

MD: Same group, but different.

AG: That's a different group?

MD: A different group.

AG: Okay. Walker-Blythe? You say Walker-Blythe?

MD: Walker-Blythe.

AG: Patriarch. Who would be the patriarch on that family?

MD: Okay. That goes back to Farrises. It channels back to Berea and that area, Farristown, all in that area, and then it comes to Richmond, and then it branches out from there.

AG: Okay. Okay. So, that would be your mother's family?

MD: My mother's family.

AG: Okay. Alright. Okay.

MD: As a matter of fact, the last couple of years, we had a committee working on the family tree.

AG: Okay.

MD: Tracing it all the way back.

AG: Mmm-hmm. How successful have you been?

MD: They've been working on it, and this year, they were supposed to make a presentation to us.

AG: During the reunion? Okay. Any outsiders invited to the reunion?

MD: Yes. Anybody is allowed into our reunion. We're having it in Cincinnati, Ohio.

AG: Okay.

MD: We change . . . Normally, it's never in the same place.

AG: Okay.

MD: Of course, we have our . . . I serve as secretary and every year, someone volunteers to have a reunion.

AG: Okay. Mmm-hmm.

MD: They volunteer before you can ask them to volunteer. Last year was in Ohio and that's where it is again this year. Another family from Ohio has asked for it.

AG: Mmm-hmm.

MD: Actually, we had a family in Kentucky who wanted to have it, but they didn't get it . .

AG: They didn't get it.

MD: Didn't get it in time. They didn't get their bid in time.

AG: Okay. Umm. Let's see, I can't think of anything right now that is earth shattering that I need to talk to you about. Let's see, you know, the old Richmond reunion thing. You're not. . .

MD: No, I'm not active with that.

AG: Okay. Umm. That's about it. What do you know about Telford. Do you know anything about the history of Telford?

MD: Not a lot of history on Telford YMCA. Telford Holloway House used to be, which is located on Hillsdale. That was owned by . . . I can't remember his first name, Holloway, and it was a mansion that had slave quarters in the rear.

AG: Okay.

MD: Slave quarters in the rear of the house.

AG: Are they there? Is it still . . . ?

MD: It's still existing but it has been converted into apartment units.

AG: Okay. Okay.

MD: But it had a gymnasium in the back of it that was constructed in 1987. It has been deleted off and separated from the main building now. Those are apartment units back there. But, all the renovation of the apartment units in the front, and we bid that through our community development block grant. What our intentions was was to sell those units as cooperative housing, but the marketing was bad and they couldn't market it as units. So, we sold the units to a private individual who converted them, but still had to keep them like they were. But, instead of him selling them as cooperative housing, he rented them out. They still have a sign saying historical significance.

AG: Do they? Are they are on the historic register?

MD: They are registered.

AG: They're on the register. Okay. Alright. That's good. Okay. Alright. Let's see. . .

MD: I'll tell you, do you ever talk to Kubiak at Eastern?

AG: I don't know the name.

MD: Kubiak. Lavinia Kubiak.

AG: Spell that, Kubiak.

MD: K-U-B-I-A-K.

AG: Okay. Labinia?

MD: Lavinia.

AG: Okay.

MD: She's got inventory.

AG: She has inventory? Do you need to go?

MD: She's done a study of historical, an inventory of historical businesses in Richmond and in the Downtown area.

AG: Inventory of historical Richmond. Okay. Lavinia Kubiak?

MD: Kubiak.

AG: Okay. I'll find her. So, you've got to go right now. Okay. Let me . . . before I let you go, let me . . . thank you for doing, you know, spending this few minutes with me, and make you understand that now the tape is going to go into the oral history program at ECU, and what we hope is that eventually somebody wants to do some real research on the black community in Richmond. They can take the tape, and if they can't pull it off the tape, they can come to you, and so forth.

MD: Okay.

AG: I need for you to sign a release in a few minutes so that we can use the tape for our research. Is that okay?

MD: Okay.