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Significant African American Public Figures of Texas

POLITICS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

Interviewee: Dr. NADINE JENKINS

Alpine, Texas

Interviewers: Danielle Ayers, Brad Rollins, Camile D. White

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Dr. NADINE JENKINS

Danielle Ayers:

Dr. Jenkins on the behalf of Professor Gutierrez, we want to welcome you to the University of Texas at Arlington and we definitely want thank you for taking that long haul to be with us on today which is November 23, 2002. We're in room 103 at University Hall. This is Political Science class 4318, African American Politics. And today's interview will consist of three interviewers: myself, Danielle Ayers; to my immediate left is Camile White; and, to my far left is Brad Rollins. The interview will consist of three phases: phase one will be biographical; phase two, your career; and, phase three will be your opinion of contemporary politics.

So I will begin with phase one.

Mrs. [Dr.] Jenkins were you born in Texas?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

Yes, I was born in Port Arthur, Texas, which is located southeast Texas, grew up there attended Elementary High School and my mother and brother still reside in Port Arthur.

Danielle Ayers:

OK, what was it like being raised in Port Arthur, Texas?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

It was very difficult... The time that I grew up in Port Arthur, segregation was still the law. So I grew up seeing... I grew up and I attended a segregated elementary school, segregated High School, a segregated side of town. In many ways life was difficult because of the segregation

and the, the things that it symbolized. You could not do... You couldn't go into certain restaurants. You could not eat. You could not do this and you could not do that, so it was difficult, but on the other hand it had some very good attributes. I believe that because I lived in an all African American community. There was a high level of support for African Americans. There was a high level of bonding. There was a high level of village concept. We lived with one another; we supported one another. We were a family to one another. It was not unusual for members of the community to call my mother and say that I was doing something. And for those individuals either to feel like it was encumbered up on them to discipline me or feel like they could tell my mother. And my mother would discipline me. So it had a mixed blessing. On one hand you had the attributes that you were separate, you were segregated, you were different; but on the other hand there were many benefits of living in a segregated community, because we supported one another and we lived for one another.

Danielle Ayers:

Were you ever involved in any civil rights protest?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

Yes, not in protest per se, but I was involved... When I first went to college... Of voter register... And that was the time when blacks didn't realize they could register to vote and we, you know... And I was just a young person and didn't... I don't even think... And I was registered to vote but I was asked to go out and help individuals to register in the black community. And it was ironic to hear people... The response I received in the sense that they

were still believing that there was a poll tax, that they were in danger, that they couldn't do it, they didn't believe that they should, that there was any benefit to it. So, I was involved in the voter registration for Martin Luther King, and for Al Price and... another gentleman that I can't remember his name right now, who became very prominent in the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), and politically. And I think that was my first beginning, not realizing that it had any impact on me but I think that was my first involvement in anything political.

Danielle Ayers:

Did you have any confrontation when you tried to register people to...vote?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

No, it was not confronted because I was on a segregated part of town. So I was only in, going into the black homes. So there was no opposition from others, really and truly, there was more resistance from people internally from saying, "I don't want be bothered," "I don't believe in it," "I don't think it makes a difference." So, it was really convincing African Americans that it was ok to vote. That we really... It was a right that they had and they really should capitalize on it. So really, unfortunately it was not from the outside, it was more internal among the black community.

Danielle Ayers:

And, what is your date of birth?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

Do I have to tell you the year? Really, really, really?

Brad Rollins:

We won't tell anyone.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: It's on video. Is this going to be edited out? It's November 7th, 1945.

Danielle Ayers: And can you tell us a little bit about who your parents are, their names?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: My mother name is Willie Mae Dixon, still resides in Port Arthur, she has a high school education. And ironically when she went to High School, which again was in Port Arthur, the segregated side of town, there was only the eleventh grade. And she was going to a Catholic School which was run by nuns and priest and she switched to the public school because they were going to put a twelfth grade. And by the time she got to public school they put a twelfth grade there. You could say that my mother was never married to my biological father. My biological father is now deceased. He's from Louisiana which is where a lot of my roots come from: my father, my grandmother, and a stepbrother live in Louisiana. The father that my.. [that] I recognize lives with my mother. And really married her after I was born. And he still resides in Port Arthur Texas. His name is Lloyd Dixon which is the name that you will hear on most of my legal records. It's not the name that I was born with, but it is the... that I assumed, because he was the father that I knew.

Danielle Ayers: Do you have any siblings?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: One brother in Port Arthur...

Danielle Ayers: And his name?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: ...and his name is Felton Dixon, he is a school teacher. And then I have a half brother that lives in Louisiana, Carl Lewis, and I am the oldest.

Danielle Ayers: Were any of your family members ever involved in politics?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: No, at all.

Danielle Ayers: And are you married?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Yes, I am.

Danielle Ayers: Ok, and your husband's name?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: My husband's name is, Odest, O-d-e-s-t Charles Jenkins. We've been married since 1968, August 17th, 1968. My husband's career was he was a warden for federal prisons. Retired about four years ago, five years ago. So even though... He's from Beaumont Texas. And even though we got married in Texas, Port Arthur we started our career in Texas once he became a part of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. We moved for over twenty-two years of our life on the average of every two years. So I've lived rather extensively through out the United States, and returned to Texas nine years ago when my husband was going into retirement.

Danielle Ayers: And do you have any children?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Three.

Danielle Ayers: Ok.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: My oldest is, Odest Chadwick Jenkins, he's completing his doctorate at the University of Southern California in Computer Science Engineering. Middle son is Oren Cedric, he is completing his masters in... at Sul Ross, in Psychology. And my youngest is a daughter, who is a first year law student at Southern Methodist University.

Danielle Ayers: And her name?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Nadalynn; Nadalynn Jenkins.

Danielle Ayers: And do you mind giving me the ages, I didn't get the ages?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Let me tell you the year that they were born and you can calculate the age. Chad the oldest was born in 1974. Oren was born in September 1977. And Nadalynn birthday is November 1980.

Danielle Ayers: Ok, this concludes the biographical information part of your interview.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Thank you.

Camile D. White: Good morning Mrs. [Dr.] Jenkins. You were Arlington's Independent School District first African American woman that was elected to the board, is that correct?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: That is correct?

Camile D. White: How many terms did you serve?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: I did not serve a complete term because I moved away. So after I was elected a few months later I resigned because I became employed in Alpine as Vice President [Sul Ross University]. And I currently serve on the board there in Alpine as the first African American female, and I was elected to it two years ago. So I've served two years. Several months with Arlington and now I'm going into my second year in Alpine.

Camile D. White: The school that you're currently with in Alpine, that school name is...?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Alpine Independent School District.

Camile D. White: Ok, but do you work for a University?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Where I work, I am currently Vice President at Sul Ross State University, located in Alpine.

Camile D. White: While you were with, I.S.D. [A.I.S.D] school district how was your experience? I know it was brief but...?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: It was brief but it was very memorable; not only the election, and the campaigning itself, but the service. And it somewhat signaled the change, the opportunity to involve different perspectives or another perspective to be heard. It also allowed me to bring some perspectives... and I don't think that was there, when I, before I joined the board. I

remember it because it was new for me. I think it was new for the school board. I think that it provided an opportunity for us both to learn [from] each other. And to become a team too, for me to respect the other members appreciate them, and their perspectives. And also I think it was a time that they had to open up and allow some one different, from the outside, to have a voice, to bring a different perspective. And to be respected and be appreciated and valued for that perspective. So it was one that I think was a learning time for both; in opening up in valuing and allowing for... I think a single voice to come forth that represented more diversity than ever had been before.

Camile D. White:

What was the make up of the board at that time? How many males were there, how many females? How many people of color?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

No females. I was the only female, the rest were white males with the exclusion [exception] of one African American male.

Camile D. White:

I can't imagine you growing up dreaming to be on the Arlington Independent School Board. So, what inspired you to run for the board?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

When I came to Arlington I really thought that I was here to stay that I would never move. This is where I thought I was going to reside. So, I decided to become involved in the community, and not only did I seek to go for... I didn't seek to go for school board, I became involved in the

community first serving on a lot of boards even having a board appointment by the mayor and the city council. Served on the board of the NAACP as an educator. Served on the board of the Arlington Theater. Served on the board for the League of Women, League of Women Voters. So I served on a multiplicity of civic and community boards. And then, as I became involved in the community... And through the League of Women Voters, became, I think aware of some of the political issues and opportunities, some of the boards that were in this community. My horizons began to open just by my exposure, my involvement. Then, I had two children in the Arlington Independent School District. One of which I'm going to say that was not a good experience for her in the beginning. So my first involvement with Arlington Independent school district was not a pleasurable one because of the difficulties that my daughter encountered. Then I began to go to the school board, I began to get involved in issues like the fact that one thing I went before the board was the presentation of African Americans in their history books; became involved with a group of African Americans here in the community that we were not comfortable with some of the curriculum issue; and then, more and more I became aware of the school district and the community. It became naturally, a natural evolution. I served on the New Visions Commission for the School Board, of strategic planning. So I began to have exposure, knowledge, and involvement. Then because of the difficulties that my daughter encountered, I began to ask questions, to attend meetings, and then, eventually I began to realize that this is something that maybe I would like to do. And I did some

soul searching and said, "Is this for me?" And then I said, "Yes." I believe it is then I started campaigning, started making my interest known. Then I appeared on the front page of the *Arlington Morning News*, in essence, I'm coming out of the closet. In a sense that... And I think that the term is not the most appropriate one but I think it represented the fact that... I had always been in the back ground in the shadows, not understanding the political nuances and the dynamics... And kind of afraid of it, you know, it's not for me, it's not something that I, I can do. Then, I decided to step up. And I made a public statement on the front page, that I am going to come forth. I am going to get involved. I want to pursue political opportunities that would represent my views and the people that I feel like I have a voice for. So, I started becoming more and more known even to the point that I had my own television show named, "Another Perspective", that I was not only the producer of, as well as, the on camera host for. And I started talking about public issues and bringing in guests. Now you need to realize that my program was focused and aimed at the African American community. So a lot of what I did was talk about issues that were of importance, of significance, of influence in the African American community. And the more and more as I did this, the more and more I became known. And people started approaching me, "What are you going to do?" "How are you going to make a difference in this community?" So I think it was a natural evolution. It was me wanting to be more involved. And then, me having a background in education; me believing in the youth and their opportunities; and, believing that education is a conduit for

that, plus what I had experienced personally for my daughter. It naturally evolved that I'm running to the school board.

Camile D. White: So this was your first political...

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: First

Camile D. White: First

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: The first, the very first.

Camile D. White: While you were on the school board were you instrumental in writing any of the new policies that were enacted at that time?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: No, I can't say that did anything new. I can't say at that time that there was anything new or significant that emerged. I really think it was more than new, it brought another perspective to the things that they were dealing with. The school calendar, the school curriculum, the school budget, they were not new issues they were on-going issues, but I think I was able to bring a different voice a different perspective to the issues that were already on-going.

Camile D. White: How did your board function? Did you function as a strong board that actually ran the school district and let the superintendent actually direct certain things or I'm not even sure if your even familiar with how D.I.S.D's [Dallas Independent School District] district is currently being ran?

Was yours more like how D.I.S.D's board is being currently ran or were your board members more in control like you should be?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

No, it does not run like D.I.S.D at all, it's a different kind of... And I can't tell you about D.I.S.D. right now, but I can speak about D.I.S.D. when I was here four years ago. D.I.S.D. was very controversial. It was very controversial not only from a political standpoint but a racial standpoint. The Black Panthers were very effective. And there was the Brown Party, of the brown constituency, so there was a racial pull on the school board there. I can say that when I began to run because of my involvement in the community I think there was a lot of concern that I would be bringing a lot of the D.I.S.D. style to Arlington. So there was a lot of fear, a lot of concern about me. And I think I was a wild card. As a matter of fact, I was kind of told that, that's, the way I was characterized... was a wild card because I wasn't from this community. I'd only lived here two years before I emerged to that level within two or three... I was only here five years. So, I had emerged within two or three years to the status where I was... wasn't a long time constituent. I wasn't a known commodity. I was only known for a short amount of time. So I think when I got on the board there was a lot of concern. Who is she? What is she all about? Is she going to bring some conflicts, some confusion, some chaos to our operations? And I cannot say that at one time one of the reasons I did run was because I felt like the school board was stamping the approval of what a superintendent was doing, here a superintendent did it and the board just kind of stamped it. I didn't believe in

that. So, I believe there was a concern about what was I going to do. When I joined the board I didn't feel a need to do that. I felt that I was informed. I felt that I was respected. I felt that I was valued. I don't feel like my opinion was not considered, respected, and that I was even though a newcomer a second-class person. I was allowed to be open direct, questioning, challenging without the fact that I was a maverick, a wild card, but someone who had the right. And was representing constituency in a voice here that should have a voice, and an opportunity to win out some things. So I felt that the board functioned very cohesive as a team, but it allowed the different perspectives to be voiced and brought forth.

Camile D. White:

Currently Arlington I.S.D has 9 high schools, 13 middle schools and 51 elementary schools, do you remember how many were in existence at that time? And it seems that they are doing a great job planning for future growth. Do you remember how many were in existence at that time? If you were instrumental because a lot of times things don't transpire, you work on them years in arrears before they transpire into the physical realm of being completed?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

Your absolutely correct. The newest high school was in process when I was here, was a part of the land purchase, the land negotiation that was going to bring about the last high school. I can also say that when I came on the Board I was on the Vision Commission and strategic planning in which a lot of the things that are now coming to pass were taking place. And this board or commission was appointed by the school board and it was presented to the school

board once I became a member. So it's very ironic that many of the committees that I helped with planning the future was presented when... once I became a school board member. So I think that I not only had a part of the planning, the back ground, the preparation, the visioning, the futuristic intent of where the school district was going but then I had the opportunity to hear it when I was a school board member and to ratify and to support it. So I do think that you're right in the fact that many things are currently in place I had a part of.

Camile D. White: Did you make specific request that any of the new schools that were going to be built in the towns that were heavily populated by people of color be named after them also?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: No, did not. And I don't think that there are any currently named by people of color... If I do... You'll need to help me. Think about this. Is there one?

Camile D. White: Not to my knowledge.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: I'm not really sure.

Camile D. White: I know there are some that are named after a lot of Hispanic leaders, but I didn't, I don't recall there being any people of color.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: People of color. I don't remember any, and no there was a push. Ironically there seems to be more of a push for I think Lynn Hale, that was a name of a school because she was a former superintendent here. The board does take

request for the naming of the schools. And no, I didn't hear any that I can recall. My memory is a little fuzzy. I can say that if I would have stayed, I can assure you that there would have been an about change. And it bothers me some what that your telling me that it hasn't, hasn't come to promise.

Camile D. White:

Don't take it for pro...verbatim because I haven't double-checked.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

I don't know. And I don't recall so I can say maybe I am not correct that maybe there is none. I do know that there is an Elzie Odom Center named after the mayor, who is an African American. I'm not aware of one. I would hope that there will be one. There seems to have been when I lived here, not an identified segment of African Americans in this community, they do not live in a geographical area. So therefore they're blended throughout the community. I'm also not aware when I lived here of many, many, of many prominent African Americans that were known in this community. I think Elzie Odom emerged and that's good. And he became mayor. But there didn't seem to be a person, or persons of color that were emerging or known for their legacy of what they had done or there was a need to give tribute to them for anything.

Camile D. White:

How do you feel about [school]vouchers?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

Do not support them. And that was a big issue that was asked of me when I ran for the school board. It is something I have spoke to at the state level before the

African American Congress. We kind of get together before legislative years and kind of look at and brainstorm what are some of the issues we should support. When I was in Arlington there was many people that approached me to support vouchers and charter school. And felt like I should be more supportive of them than any body else because it would help minorities. And the fact that those individuals who are minorities that are not doing well in public school they could take their voucher from the state system and go to a private school that would be more supportive and perhaps could bring about the results academically that were more guaranteed of than a state school. I have never...And I did extensive research. I have never found that to be true. And I do not believe where I need to take resources from the state schools, public schools, and give them to a private educational system. If any thing I am more of an advocate of putting in more resources into the state education, which I would believe in, helping all children be successful regardless of their background, their race or their color.

Camile D. White:

Ok, Looking at the current state of public education, of the public education system, what do you feel needs to be done in order to improve the quality of education that American children are receiving?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

I think their needs to be more resources in commitment to public education, follow what I just said. We know that there is a lot of... There is legislation. There is a slogan there, and there is an emphasis on, "No Child Left Behind", at the federal level, and at the state level where we are

trying to push reading and math. I believe literacy is a need for all children, not only should they have access to go to school but I think that they need to be given the opportunity. Sometimes kids are overlooked for different reasons, either it's their color, their behavior or their background. Their parents are not educated. And some how or the other we put labels on children and we don't give all children the full advantage of opportunity.

Camile D. White:

What would you specifically say to parents of color about being involved in the process of the education of their children?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

I would say be involved. I would say question. I would say know where your kids are. I would say get involved in the schools, don't be afraid to ask. Also don't be afraid to challenge. Don't be afraid to, more importantly, to demand that your son or daughter should be educated to their, his or her, fullest potential. The reason why I say that the reason why I believe in education so strongly and why education is my passion. As I first started off telling you about my background, I went to a segregated school. I was not... and my parents are not college educated. We had no money, came from a very poor background. I was not expected to go to college. No one told me to go to college. I was not geared that way. There was no one supporting me, advocating or encouraging me. I didn't even have money to go. The college I was slated to go to was Wiley... I'm United Methodist. And that was the black, the college that blacks went to. My parents could not afford for me to go, so I had to go to Lamar State College of Technology which

at the time was still segregated. But I remember I went to school in 1963; civil rights did not come about until '65. But it was on it's way, so they let a few token black students into Lamar State College University. It was a struggle for me. There was no support system for me. There was no financial aid, and financially I had a very, very difficult time. I also had a difficult time that I don't think that I was expected to succeed at Lamar by the professors there. But that it was only through the grace of God and through a lot of hard work that I did succeed. Now, why do I tell you this story? And why do I support so strongly education like... And programs like Upward Bound, Talent Search, Equal Opportunity Programs that go and work out, go and work? And reach out to underserved and under represented minorities students? And say you have a right to go to school? You are just as good as every body else. That has become my passion. And my goal in life is to make sure that every child understands no matter who you are, you have the potential and the right to get an education. And every child can master educational goals. All they need to know is.... You need to be dedicated. You need to have determination. Where I am today, that put me in this chair is not because I am the brightest in the world, not because I had the back ground, not because I had parents that were pushing me. No. No one pushed me. I had something inside of me that said, "I want to succeed." "I want to be better than what I am." And with my determination and my perseverance, I made it. I believe every body else can do the same. And I don't want any one to think that they can't. And if anyone should tell them they can't, that's why I push so strongly for education.

Camile D. White: So you feel young people nowadays should definitely step up to the challenge and dream, and have that vision, and know that it can be obtained?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: You have said it very elegantly for me. Yes, I do believe in that.

Camile D. White: What skills did you learn from being a board member that you feel will benefit the younger generation of today inspiring to go into public service?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: I just did a program prior to coming here where they were asking the same question to prospective people who want to be leaders politically and in the community. And I think it's the same story that I tell about my success in Arlington. When I ran for the school board here I was not expected to win. I mean, you know, I'm not... This is a community in which the establishment picks the candidate and supports them and that's who wins. So I was not expected to win at all; didn't have money; didn't have support; was not known by the establishment at all. But I think I campaigned and I appealed to people on my passion, my integrity and my beliefs that people bought into that. And I think they also wanted a change. And I think they heard a voice that was of a different perspective that they thought could make a difference for education here. Now, what did I learn that I could tell to everyone else? First of all, believe in yourself, don't be afraid to take a risk. So many people are afraid to run for an office because they don't want.... They have the fear of failure. I don't want, and I can't say that, you know,

the first time I ran for school board I didn't win. I ran against an incumbent and really in truly I was so afraid of... that the defeat was going to be so large that when they announced the election results that night nobody could find me, I mean, I was like... (crunch sound made by Dr. Jenkins). I don't want anybody to see the fear, you know, of the failure on my face, you know. So I was like eeeeya! Then go home and hide. I didn't do too bad; actually did pretty well running against an incumbent. So, first of all, you've got to get over the fear of failure. You need to let people know that you want to serve, and that you're willing to do it. Just as a result of me running the first time and people knowing that I wanted to get involved a lot of agencies and organizations, nonprofits, city organizations contacted me and said, "We know you want to serve," And, "We've heard you." And, "We would like to ask if you will be on our board, on our committee." So first of all believe in yourself, know what your passion is. My passion is education and youth. I don't want the City Council, those are not my issues, zoning and that, you know, that's not me. I like education. I like youth. So I ran for that. I know my passion. I wasn't afraid of failure. And I knew I wanted to serve. And I wanted to serve with integrity and dignity and with commitment. And those are the things why I chose to do it. And I don't serve out of an obligation, I serve out of a love and willingness. And I do it with...humbly and with gratitude. I want to make a difference. And I want people to know that I want to help them. So I think you have to find a passion, and once you do it, do it with conviction and dignity.

Camile D. White:

One last question. Being in certain positions such as on the school board and other things will allow you to get contracts for certain people. Did you work hard as far as... Because I know on the school board there are contracts for every thing from tissue paper, spices, books, the whole nine.... Snd it's very lucrative. And I was wanting to know did you happen to advocate for people of color to get some of that handed into the minority neighborhoods?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

Yes, I did. And I will not... When I was here... And I think it's still the truth, but I'm not real sure, Arlington was the number one, Arlington School district was the number one employer in Arlington. And it had more employees, and more of a budget than anybody else. So I was sitting on a school board that was one the largest in the state. And it was one of the most powerful entities in the city of Arlington. And I think before I answer your question one of the things I think I learned in running for the school board was.... Remember I ran... I didn't know what I was doing first of all. I had never been in politics before, and I ran because I wanted to make a difference in education in... Truthfully, when I ran I thought it was: You run because you want to make a difference, and you want to be a servant, and you want to work in education. That is not true! It is a political race. It is a political race. And people will run for different reasons. I ran for my reason because I was an educator and I wanted to help youth. Some people run because of the political leverages and the benefits that they get. I was naïve, ok? And I didn't realize the power that I had when I became... on the school board, didn't know. Other people knew, and that's why they ran perhaps.

But I didn't when I got there. I didn't do any thing in regards to answer your question about soliciting people of color to get contracts. But I can assure you that when contracts came forth, those were my questions. What did we do to ensure that people of color had an opportunity to know about this, to bid on this? And what is our percentage of awards of contracts for minorities? And those were questions that I always asked. And I do believe that there was a conscious effort and a sensitivity because of the questions to ensure that we were doing the right thing, to provide people of color an opportunity to get those contracts.

Camile D. White: Very good glad to hear that. Now we're going to allow Mr. Rollins to get his questions in.

Brad Rollins: What...? When did you come to UTA, began your employment here?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: I stated my employment at UTA in...I think it was August or September of 1998. No, no, no, no, no, 1993.

Brad Rollins: All right.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: I was here for five years. I left in 1998.

Brad Rollins: Ok. And what capacity did you began as...?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: I began as an executive assistance to a newly employed provost.

Brad Rollins: Ok. His name?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Dalmas Taylor, D-a-l-m-a-s T-a-y-l-o-r. When I left... In 1995, no, I came in 1993. I left in 1998. I then had the title of Vice Provost for Administration.

Brad Rollins: Was that still under Dr. Taylor?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: No it was not, at that time it was under George Wright.

Brad Rollins: And you also served as professor of education.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Associate professor of education, yes.

Brad Rollins: I guess... Doctor makes... I'm not sure what was the doctor? Dr. Dalmas...? I didn't get the rest of it....?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Taylor.

Brad Rollins: Taylor

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: T-a-y-l-o-r

Brad Rollins: Ok, T-a -

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: y-l-o-r.

Brad Rollins: OK. Dr. Taylor, I guess was the one who brought you... Hired...?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: No, he hired me. He didn't bring me here. I moved here with my husband who was employed in the regional office for the Bureau of Prisons of Dallas. So we moved here from Leavenworth, Kansas where he was warden.

Brad Rollins: And what was the process of going from being executive assistant to vice provost?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: When I came to UT Arlington remember there was no jobs. I walked in. In August I came over to meet with the president of the University, several of the vice presidents and human resources, and I left my credentials. And then, when the provost arrived he also had a copy of my credentials, and he invited me in for an interview. At that particular time I had more than one opportunity at UT Arlington. I chose the one to be the executive assistant to Dalmas Taylor because he was the first African American Provost in the UT system.

Brad Rollins: Ok. And at what point did you ascend to become, becoming an associate professor?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Associate professor? I'm not really sure maybe two years after I had been here. I applied to the department here to teach because I do have faculty status most places that I go and it was granted. So, I taught. I also... When I came as executive assistant to the provost that was a temporary appointment. I came and I supported him, helped with the establishment of his office. And then he put in place his executive positions and I applied for Associate Provost for

Administration with other people, and that was the one that I was granted.

Brad Rollins: Ok. What were the circumstance under which Dr. Taylor left the University and when was it?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Dr. Taylor left three years I believe after... I'm not real sure. Maybe two years after he was here. I'm not remembering the dates correctly, I think... I was employed... I continued to be employed at the University three years beyond his termination. Dr. Taylor went through an opportunity...and the president went through a circumstance here in which there was a lot of racial unrest. He finally was released from the position because there was a faculty vote of no confidence for the president and for the provost. I remember was not... I was not in a line position. I was underneath him so I was not preventable about people beneath the president...The provost were a part of the actual vote. It was only against the president and the provost, but the faculty voted no confidence.

Brad Rollins: And who was the president at that time?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Ryan Amacher Dr. Ryan Amacher, A-m-a-c-h-e-r. And he was the one that hired Dalmas Taylor. I believe he had been here a year before Dalmas Taylor arrived.

Brad Rollins: Was he a person of color?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: No, he was not.

Brad Rollins: Ok, and was there an interim president installed after his termination?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Yes.

Brad Rollins: And what was his name?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Bob Witt, [Robert E. Witt]

Brad Rollins: Who is now the...

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: President

Brad Rollins: ...permanent president.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Yes.

Brad Rollins: What, what happened after Doctor Wright was installed as provost in relation to your employment?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Before when it was under Dr. Taylor I had an very active and a very integral part in the provost office. Because I... He was the first provost. We did a lot of establishing that office, setting the structure in place, the organization et cetera. So I had a very direct involvement. When Dr. Wright came the whole organization structure changed. I was not as actively involved, as directly involved. And there were more there was a removal or resignation. I'm not real sure of some of the people that were in place as associate provost. And then there were new people placed there. I was the only one that was not changed. The new

people came in, Mary Ridgeway, and some others came in. So that whole office took a different organizational structure.

Brad Rollins: Why, why do you believe that Doctor Wright did not want you to take as active a role as you had, in the previous administration?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: I ca... Don't really know that. I can surmise that it was because of my attachment with previous administration.

Brad Rollins: Thought, thought maybe there wasn't a degree of loyalty?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Could have been loyalty, even though I indicated that who ever I work for I'm going to be loyal for. I'm not real sure. I can't tell you for sure what it was, but I don't think loyalty was the issue. I think it was more of identification because I, you know, I don't want to be... I was a part of the previous administration. I was the only one that was held over from the previous administration. And there was a part of strife there, a lot of campus turmoil and unrest. A lot of the African American students were not happy about a lot of things that were going on. And there were a lot of allegations of racism. There was a lot of allegation that the reason why the provost was not being successful is because he was an African American. And he was not allowed to have the authority that he was given because the previous president his... He was hired with the indication that, he would be an external president. He was here for fund raising and for public relations externally. This was the very first provost in the UT system, maybe the first provost

African American. I think there may have been another provost, maybe at UT Austin. I'm not real sure. But a provost is considered in many places the internal president, the one who runs the University. It's the first among equals. They are above all the other vice presidents. So this was the first African American who had a lot of clout, a lot of authority, controlled a lot of things inside of the University. And you also had a new president, Ryan Amacher, who was the first president, from a guy who had been here seventeen, twenty years as president. So you're bringing a lot of changes. A new, new agenda, new opportunities. So when the new President was given this charge and he hired a new provost there was a lot of resistance. And I really think that because I worked so closely with the previous individuals maybe there was an... A feeling that I was too closely associated with it that I would maybe, be a reflection of that from the new administration.

Brad Rollins: Ok. What... And was it your decreased role in the university that led you to lea, leave...

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Yes.

Brad Rollins: You just finally threw up your hands and said I've had enough?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: No, I did not want to leave. As I told in the very beginning I came to Arlington to live the rest of my life. My husband had retired. We returned to Texas. And I was here, two children graduated from high school, so I didn't have a

desire to leave. And I had invested in this community a great deal. And... But it was really me feeling like I was not making a difference or was sufficient or had the opportunities that I need here to feel like that I was a viable administrator. That when another opportunity came along, yes, I did leave.

Brad Rollins: Ok. And that was also why you had to resign from the school board?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Yes.

Brad Rollins: That was at the point when you leave.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: And, you know, I'm not going to say, you know, that there was not... I don't know this, but I'm not going to say that there was a great deal of support for my visibility in this community. I did have my own TV show. And I was on the front page quite often. I was very well known in this community. And, and I do believe... and I believe it in my heart that when the community did a vote for me, to elect me to the board, there was a vote of my confidence of saying: We know that you're a good person. We know that you did the best you could. We know that you should be what you should be. And this is how we'll vote to let you know that.

Brad Rollins: Ok. I'm just gonna go pickup a few cleanup things, and then, turn it over to you for the political questions.

Danielle Ayers: Okay.

Brad Rollins; You, you discussed problems that your that your daughter had ...

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Yes.

Brad Rollins: ...in the school district?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Yes.

Brad Rollins: What were the circumstances there?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: My daughter came here with from Leavenworth, Kansas. And prior to that we had been in... I think in Louisiana. But my daughter had been diagnosed gifted. It's a psychological assessment and a determination on intellectual battery [test]. When I came to Arlington there was no Gifted and Talented program. My daughter was then... A black female who they said you can't be Gifted and Talented. And they didn't they didn't give her the benefit of her intellectual capabilities. My daughter was given some... I think treated like a substandard student. She was not valued nor respected for her capabilities. My daughter's self-concept and self-esteem went down. And my daughter failed her first year here that I had to pay for her to go to summer school. And that really hurt me that the people were trying to put her in a situation that was demoralizing, that was not indicative of her capability. But I think they saw a black female who shouldn't be gifted. And they had their little token few who were and she didn't fit that mold. And, and I think that they hurt her significantly. And my first year I had to go and meet with

teachers quite often, with the principals quite often, about my daughter's accomplishments. And they were unrelenting and they were not responding to me. And what they did more than anything else is they hurt her.

Brad Rollins:

Right.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

And I felt like I needed to say, have a voice about that because I wasn't being heard. I felt like even though I could go in there and talk to the teacher about, you know, her grading and her treatment of Nadalynn and what they were doing to her, that I felt was unfair. I feel that they turned a deaf ear to me. And even though I spoke to a question earlier, what should parents do? And I talked about getting involved, demanding. I felt like here I was a woman with an education degree, and could...and was teaching many of the people that were in those in those classrooms, they were not listening to me. They were not respecting me. And I felt like that was not right.

Brad Rollins:

And the first time you ran was unsuccessfully?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

Yes.

Brad Rollins:

Who was your opponent then?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

He was an incumbent. I don't remember his name. But it will be in all of the records, that I'm the materials that I'm going to Ben Rhodes, R-H-O-D-E-S. Yes he had been there a long, long time. An insurance gentleman, and he was up. I think, I think he was up for re-election and I ran against him. And I did not win but I did not lose significant. I mean it was not a big margin. The second year when I ran, one of the gentleman was on the school board chose not to re-run

so it was an open position. And I declared my candidacy. And everybody knows that once you run the first time more than likely you're going to run again. And I did run again. And I ran against several individuals.

Brad Rollins: And that was the time that you were successful.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: That was the time that I was successful.

Brad Rollins: All right well that concluded the occupational aspect and Danielle has... Will finish this up.

Danielle Ayers: Ok. Dr. Jenkins what is leadership?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: That's a good, good question. That's a great question. You know what, I'm not real sure I have a great answer for that. I think leadership personally... And I've studied leadership extensively. And I don't why I can sit here and say I don't know. Went to Harvard two years ago and to a leadership conference and was trained to be a leader in education. You'll be disappointed to know that I'm sitting here groping with this answer and just returned from Harvard two years, two weeks ago where I went back for a reaffirmation and refreshing in my leadership role in higher education. So I've been trained significantly in education. Know all the buzzwords, but when you ask me the question, "What is leadership?" I really don't know. I think leader to me something that I aspire to be. Is someone

who has earned the respect of others, by my actions, by my deeds, by my commitment. I have earned their respect in such that I can take a role that will influence others and they will listen to what I have to say because I have integrity, credibility and respectability.

Danielle Ayers: Ok. And who would you say is the most effective African American politician today?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Gosh. Where'd y'all get these questions from? Well I would say I know you guys are going to interview him. I would say the person that I have the greatest respect for right now, as an African American, is Ron Kirk.

Danielle Ayers: Okay.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: I think that he stepped out there as a leader. I think he was very successful even though maybe the victory was not in the vote. But I think in his message and in his leadership and his willingness to say, "I want to be elected." Those are all admirable traits. And one that comes to mind very vividly for me right now. Now, I know that you'll probably say that there are African Americans at the national scene but ironically there are not ones that I would say are leaders for me.

Danielle Ayers: Ok. And what do you... Which is the most effective African American organization today, nationally or locally?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: I have... I was on the board here for the NAACP and very active with the NAACP. I'm not where I am now because

there are no African Americans where I am. I do still support and have belief in the NAACP. And even though I don't, I do think they have strong leadership there. I've been very much impressed with their reorganization, their restructure and their revitalization. I think that there.... They've done a lot to come around. And I do think that they have still have an influence with African Americans. And I do think they still have credibility.

Danielle Ayers:

Okay and what do you think is the most pressing issue facing the African American community today?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

I believe that one of the most, one of the most pressing issues is us having belief in ourselves and knowing that we can make a difference. And knowing that we need to assume leadership roles, that we need to believe that we can be leaders and being willing to take the risks, to step out there and to be embraced as a leader. Now, you need to know that when I was elected here as an African American I didn't win by African American votes. And ironically the thing that was and when you read all of my materials you will see that the leading African American church that supported my first campaign did not support my second. They supported someone else. So I won without African American support. I had a lot of it but it was not an organized endorsement of me. So I won because I was able to cross all lines. I was able to appeal to people of color, not only African Americans, but I had a large Hispanic support behind me. But I was also able to reach out to others and say, "Even though I'm not one of you racially, I represent integrity and dignity. I will bring my voice and

my perspective, but I will also represent people.” And I believe we need to know that people do embrace us and they will receive us. And even though I am a person of color I think you can rise above just the fact that you have to represent your own and get elected by your own. You can reach out to everyone but never forget where you come from, and who you need to be there for. I never forget that. But at the same time... And I don’t think the people that elected me want me to forget that either. But they want me to represent that but also represent the greater good of all mankind and I do that.

Danielle Ayers: Ok. And African American churches did not support you the second time. Were the candidates they did support, were they African American?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: No.

Danielle Ayers: Ok. What was their racial makeup?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Hispanic.

Danielle Ayers: Ok. And the last question: What do you feel is the underpinning of tension between African Americans and Hispanics?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Ooh! That’s an excellent question. I am at a Hispanic serving institution right now. I... There are like 50 percent of the students at the school where I work are Hispanic. I live in a Hispanic community. Ironically there are very few Hispanics that work at the school. They’re not employed

for some reason. You know we always say they're none qualified, Blacks or Hispanics. I think the number one underpinning conflict between Hispanics is jockeying for power. I think my African Americans have had it for a long time in numbers and in leadership. And now Hispanics are coming up in numbers and they are stepping up more in leadership roles. And I think that in many ways they're thinking that they have to compete with one another. And that, you know, Hispanics... African Americans are probably saying, "Oh you're trying to take over our role as being the number one minority group." And the Hispanics are probably saying, "You're in our way because your sitting in the place that we want." That might be an issue, but I don't think it should be an issue at all. I think the issue should be how do we come together as people of color and unite because what problem, I have, the Hispanics are going to have. What I have been through, they are going to go through. I can help them by knowing some of the issues and problems that I've encountered and give my experience and my knowledge to them and help them to be successful. And I think that we should come together because we do share similar problems, similar issues. And I think that what we can do for one another will be for the good of us all.

Camile D. White:

I just wanted to ask you briefly. You mentioned that your husband did a great deal of traveling, that he worked for the federal prison system. Am I correct to assume that your husband is a person of color?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

Yes he is.

Camile D. White: I am I also correct to assume that he may have been lonely there in the position that he held as far as the only person of color in those positions?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: Yes, yes.

Camile D. White: So what were some of the things that he faced, that he shared with you, of the problems that he encountered because it doesn't sound like it was a great deal of us on that level?

Dr. Nadine Jenkins: He was one of a few. And my husband is not political. My husband does not... was in the background of my campaign. I don't think anyone ever saw him. My daughter was really, who's now a law student.... I don't think she was influenced by me but she supported me. And she wanted to help me because I didn't have a lot of people out there with my name, establishment. So in the middle of the night it was my daughter and I running around putting out my campaign signs. It was not him. He helped some, but that's not his thing. He's not a limelight person. But my husband went through the bureau prison and he emerged as one of the first, one of the first few African Americans to become a warden. And it was different for him. And he did a lot to reach out to people of color, African Americans and Hispanics, to bring them up along with him. He was one of those who I can probably say that as he rose, he reached back and in every one of his administrators or associate wardens with him was usually a person of color. Okay, now what problems did he have? He had a lot of people that

resented that, a lot of resentment. You know in the sense that how could you do that? You know you're not supposed to do that. And he said, "But you did it so why can't I?" So he used to be admired for what he did, but I can tell you that he received, from what I can remember, a great deal of difficulty, and a great deal of obstacles and resentment for that. And I hope that if he ever sees this tape that he doesn't have a problem with me saying that.

Camile D. White:

Oh, I'm quite sure that he won't. I'm quite sure that he'll be very pleased.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

He was very supportive of people of color. And I can say that he used to be admired in the fact that when he got there he reached back and he tried to help a lot of people of color to come along. And he is still called today by those individuals that appreciate what he did. They have become wardens or associate wardens and the only problem that I'll say is sometimes when we get there, we arrive, we forget who helped us. But we have to remember to help one another.

Danielle Ayers:

That's true.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

Now, I'm not gonna in my career... There were no blacks in front of me. I was helped by many Anglos or whites. They were very good to me and very gracious to me and very supportive of me. But they were able to see that I deserved what I got. I have never been given anything. I have never not deserved anything that I've gotten. If anything I've always had to be ten times better than

anybody else. And then I've had to work ten times harder than anybody else. And I work hard now because I'm only gonna get one mistake, and ironically when I make that one mistake, not only will I go down but more than likely because I'm the only African American where I am right now they will never hire another one because I messed up. And they'll say, "Everybody's just like her." So I carry a lot of times, proudly and humbly and gratefully, the weight of the African American, because I've been a trailblazer all of my life; all of the places that I have been, from the University of Maryland to... in Kansas where I directed public television, and I can go on. All of the places I have been, I have been the first African American.

Camile D. White

Well this concludes our interview. We have thoroughly enjoyed it. We have learned a great deal from you and we wish you luck and success in anything that you do from this point on. And once again we do thank you for your time and coming and sharing with us.

Dr. Nadine Jenkins:

I want to thank you. Before you turn it off I do want to say thank you. And this has been an honor and a privilege to be here with you today.