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## Significant African American Public Figures of Texas

**Interviewee: LISA HEMBRY**

**Interviewer: Jose Angel Gutierrez, Ph.D., J.D.**

**Transcribers: Karen McGee and Jose Angel Gutierrez**

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## LISA HEMBRY

**Dr. Gutierrez:** We are now recording. This is November 17, 2003, interviewing Lisa Hembry, County Treasurer for Dallas County, State of Texas.

**Ms. Hembry:** I'm delighted to be here.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** We've already discussed the format. So where do you want to start? Hard questions? Your genealogy? Your career? Pick one.

**Ms. Hembry:** I guess I'd like to say a little bit about my background.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Your family?

**Ms. Hembry:** My family. Recently my family forwarded to me something about my family on my Dad's side because we are in the 1870 census in Louisville. His dad came here from Kentucky and his mother came here from Missouri. They were former slaves and apparently somewhere in the process they, there was some intermingling with the slave owners because my dad's side of the family have very, very fair skin. And, and then on my mother's side of the family, her dad was from Paris, Texas and his, her mother died in childbirth and so my dad got married to her cousin. And his, her mother, her grandmother was a Cherokee Indian and raised the children that he had by my mother, by my grandmother. So, and... Apparently she was a really traditional Cherokee woman and was mean to the kids; so most of them tried to leave home as soon as they could. My dad died a year ago and he was a dentist in West Dallas. And was in fact the first Black dentist in that

community, which is a fairly, was a fairly impoverished community. And I worked in his dental office from the time I, from about twelve until I graduated from high school. He tried to keep me out of trouble because I was, you know, a busy person at that age. And my mother was a school teacher and I have one sister. And I'm proud of my family because I've done a lot of things and throughout everything I've done, good, bad or indifferent, my family has supported me wholeheartedly. And I think that that has encouraged me to take chances and take risks where ordinarily I probably wouldn't have.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Could we get names here? Is Hembry a maiden name or a married name?

**Ms. Hembry:** I have been married one time and, but I never took my former husband's name. So Hembry is my maiden name.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Could we get names on these other people? The grandmother, grandparents, father, brothers, sisters....

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Ex-husbands.

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. Well...

**Dr. Gutierrez:** ...Children, whatever.

**Ms. Hembry:** My father's name was Dr. Winifred Hembry and my mother's name was Wilma Hembry. My grandparents on my father's side were... My grandfather was John Hembry and his wife was Flora. And . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Is that the cousin or the first one?

**Ms. Hembry:** That's, that's on my dad's side.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Ah.

**Ms. Hembry:** And then on my mother's side, her father's name was Rollerson. And all I knew was Papa. You know, that, that's kind of a shame. I'm trying to think; I don't think I ever knew his real name.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Can you spell it?

**Ms. Hembry:** R-O-L-L-E-R-S-O-N was the last name. And, and I never knew her ... Mother.... My, my grandmother's name, because she was deceased. My mother never really talked about her family very much. She had a lot of brothers and sisters. Most of them, Papa was married five times, so she only had two full, one full brother and all of the rest of her siblings were, you know, had different mothers, but all had the same dad.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What's your mom's name?

**Ms. Hembry:** Wilma Hembry.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** And how, Winifred, how do you spell that?

**Ms. Hembry:** Winifred. W-I-N-I-F-R-E-D.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK.

**Ms. Hembry:** Winifred. And I was married one time. I got married when I was eighteen in Kentucky. I was a college student in Nashville and I met this guy and we got married. We... I couldn't get married in the state of Tennessee without my parent's consent and they wouldn't give me consent, so we went to Kentucky and got married. And as soon as we

got married, I thought, “Oh god, I’ve really messed up this time.” But we did have two beautiful children and in fact my daughter recently got married; got married last, on November 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** This November 1<sup>st</sup>?

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. Two weeks ago. And unfortunately, my son was killed when he was twenty-five. And it was a shooting incident and, you know, you really never know what happened. But it was very tragic and the worst day of, of my life, certainly. But, he had a little girl who is now eight years old. She’ll be nine in December. So, we...

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Could we get these names?

**Ms. Hembry:** His name was Mulele Gardner.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Could you spell that?

**Ms. Hembry:** M-U-L-E-L-E. Mulele Joaquin Gardner.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Joaquin like in Spanish?

**Ms. Hembry:** Yes.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK.

**Ms. Hembry:** And my daughter’s name is Karma, K-A-R-M-A, Gardner. And so she lives in New York and got married to a young man from Zurich, Switzerland. And anyway, I was so glad that they found one another because they are the perfect, beautiful couple. And his family brought nineteen people over from Switzerland for their wedding and they are all going back to Switzerland for Christmas, so. That, that’s my family. I have one sister, Karen Hembry, who lives here in Dallas.

She is very, very talented and works for Dallas Public Schools as a statistician in the Drop Out Prevention Program. But she got her Ph.D. from Berkeley and, and she's also a jewelry designer and has some gorgeous jewelry that they are selling at the MGM Grand Casinos around the country.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** And the grandson or granddaughter?

**Ms. Hembry:** Her name is Gabrielle. Gabrielle Gardner. And we call her Gabby and that's what she does. She is gabby all the time. She talks a lot. So, I graduated from, I went through public and private schools in Dallas. I started out at St. Anthony's Catholic School in South Dallas and went on to attend Joseph J. Rose and, you know, some other public and private schools. But I, I eventually went to Roosevelt High School. And I made the decision when I was in the tenth grade that, you know... I was kind of running with a fast crowd and I could just see myself getting ready to get into trouble. So I transferred to Bishop Dunn High School and I graduated from Bishop Dunn.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Could we get years here beginning with your birth date?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, I was born on March 4, 1950, so I'm fifty-three. And I graduated from high school in 1968, from Bishop Dunn High School, and then went to SMU [Southern Methodist University] right out, right out of high school and finished all my foreign language requirements before I went to college. I had been accepted to a school in Nashville and I was very fortunate when I was at SMU. And I, I had

taken French all the way through high school. And when I was in the eleventh grade at Bishop Dunn I had a, a Catholic nun who was my French teacher and she spoke only French in the class. So, by the time I graduated from high school, I was pretty fluent in French. And I went on to college and that summer I took all my French requirements. And a woman approached me after class one day and said that she was a graduate student and she had failed French twice . And she had to finish this class and she wanted to know if I would share my notes with her. So, I tutored her and she passed the course and got her Master's Degree. And later that summer she called and said that she was working for a talent agency and wanted to know if I wanted to try to do a commercial that they were doing. So, I thought, "Oh well, what the heck?" And I did it. And I got paid seventy-five dollars an hour. You know, in 1968 that was a lot of money. And we worked all day and the ad ran nationally. And what I didn't know was that the agency had me sign away the royalties on the picture. So I made the money that I made for the shoot, which I can't remember exactly what it was, but I, it was a fortune to me, but I later found out that the company made a lot more money on the photograph. And so that was my first lesson in reading the small print. But anyway, I, I went to Fisk University in Nashville and I got married to... I was a freshman. I got married to a man who was a senior and he went on to law school at the University of Tennessee. We moved from Nashville

to Knoxville, and that's where my daughter was born. And we were only married a couple of years. We, we, we had a very terrible marriage. I guess we were both too young. And I don't really want to focus on him very much. We got divorced and I came back to Dallas and graduated from SMU. And my first job out of, out of SMU was working for State Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson who is a Democrat. She was a long time family friend.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Well, wait, wait, wait. Before we get off on, on, on the political career and work and all that, let's go back to your, your childhood.

**Ms. Hembry:** OK.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** You, you did say that your father was a dentist, so I assume that going to college was, was always a given. But somebody had to instill in you some idea of what you wanted, some mentor, some inspiration. What were your best subjects? Tell us about your first dates. Tell us how you realized you were running with the wrong crowd and moved to Bishop Dunn.

**Ms. Hembry:** Well...

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Childhood things.

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, I was always pretty self-motivated to be honest about it. My parents, as I said, were very supportive, but they led a very busy life. I mean, you know, my dad, you know, worked hard all the time. And, and but I, I don't know... My friends were good friends to me and we weren't bad in the sense of the way I perceive kids to be bad today



because you know... We didn't... We weren't into drugs and you know, all that, but we were skipping school, you know. We were, you know, hanging out late. And I was just the type of kid, if my parents told me, "No, I couldn't do it." I would say, "Well, I'm going to do it anyway," and I'll just accept whatever the punishment is. And then I think that by the time I was in the tenth grade I really... You know, people were saying, "Well, you're so smart, you know... And you're hanging out with the wrong crowd. You're going to get in trouble."

**Dr. Gutierrez:** But this is not mom and dad?

**Ms. Hembry:** No. Not my parents.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** So, who were you listening to that made sense?

**Ms. Hembry:** I don't really remember. I think it was, I really believe it was an English teacher that I had, Miss Mayo, who was teaching Honors English. And she was a perfectionist in every sense of the word, and never married. I think she was just totally devoted to what she did. And that was teaching the correct, you know, use of the English language and how to write and all that. And, and she really motivated me a lot. She's one of the only teacher's names I remember when I was in, you know, high school.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** When did you get your first car? When did you first learn how to drive? Did you play any sports? What was your . . .

**Ms. Hembry:** No, I didn't play sports. I, I was a cheerleader, but I never was a good cheerleader because I hated going to practice. And I was on the drill

team for a while and I went to one game, I think. I loved the uniform and all that, but I, I hated going to practice. And so I think I got kicked out of that. But I, as I said, was very fortunate when I was growing up in that my dad gave me a car when I was about fifteen. And it was a Volkswagen hatchback, little red car. And I think that was a mistake because that was when I really got wild. And ultimately Daddy took the car back from me because I was letting my friends drive the car and you know, I was places I shouldn't be and you know, just doing all the wrong things. So, he took the car back. And I was so devastated when he sold the car because I loved the car. I think I had it about a year. And you know, then I went to Catholic school and, and, and you know, just kind of fell in line. I would go to Mass every day. And so I don't know if I had a spiritual revelation or exactly what, but when I... And the other thing was that at Bishop Dunn High School, at that time, it was not a co-ed school, so the boys went to class on one side of the building. There was this hall, you know, and you could see them over there, but you couldn't go to class with them. And the girls were on this side. And I think that, if I'm not mistaken, there may have been maybe, at the very most, seven or eight Black students in the whole school. And so I didn't have a real, you know, busy social life the last two years of, of high school. I didn't really, I was dating somebody that I shouldn't have been dating who was a lot older than me. And you know, my parents didn't really

care for that. So, I kind of did a lot of things behind their back as far as that went. And I couldn't wait to leave home and get out on my own.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** It's amazing because now Bishop Dunn is predominantly African-American and Hispanic.

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. That's exactly right.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** So, are the Hembry's Catholic?

**Ms. Hembry:** No.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Did you become a Catholic?

**Ms. Hembry:** Yes.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** When did that happen?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh, when I was in elementary school. And the main reason, I think, was because the Catholics got a discount on the tuition, so my parents insisted that, that my sister and I be Catholic because there was a big difference in the tuition. And but as part of that, you know, we became very religious, both my sister and I would go to Mass. And then everybody at school went to Mass every day. That was just part of the curriculum. But I'm not a practicing Catholic.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Where did your daddy go to school and your mama go to school? Your mom was a teacher?

**Ms. Hembry:** Uh huh. She went to Bishop College and then had moved to Dallas from Waco. So, she went back to college after I was a teenager or maybe ten or eleven or something like that. And she went back to

school and really enjoyed school a lot. My dad graduated from Prairie View A&M [University] down near Houston, in Prairie View, Texas. And then he got his dental degree from Howard University in Washington.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Now how did they meet? Do you know?

**Ms. Hembry:** I really don't know. But I do know that my mother had been married before, very briefly, and her husband died, and she inherited some money. And so she really put my dad through dental school. So, she was the big boss when he got back because she was the one with the money.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Anything else about the early childhood or your family before we go to Eddie Bernice and your first job?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, I grew up in South Dallas, right near Hatcher Street and Second Avenue and you know, life was so different then because you know, everybody knew everybody. We all, you know, everybody in my neighborhood knew me and I knew them. And then we left there and moved to Oak Cliff where my parents, where my mother still lives. And that was when Oak Cliff was just beginning to be integrated. And in fact, segregationist Colonel Tipps lived a couple of doors down from my parent's house. And he eventually sold... Well he sold that house as soon my parents moved there, maybe even just before we moved into the house. But, but one of my best friends that I went to St. Anthony's with ended up... And she was gorgeous; she was a

pretty girl. She was my best friend from kindergarten until about the eighth grade. And she turned out to be a drug addict and eventually died. She had one brother and both of them died in sort of drug related incidents. And that had a tremendous impact on me, you know, when I was, when, when she... Well, first her brother died and he was a... Had gotten two basketball scholarships, and never made it to college because he was in a one car accident, and was killed. And I think that really had such a tremendous impact on me because it was so sad. And her mother... I used to say to my mother, "Well gosh, how could you live with something like that?" And she'd say, "Well, you know it's God's will. We always have to accept God's will." But, but I think that me, it showed me, at that young age, about mortality and how we have to, you know, live each day as though it, it's our last day. And so I, I think that's why I made my decision to kind of turn and go in another direction.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Now you said kindergarten. You didn't tell us about going to kindergarten. Where did you go? Was this a Black kindergarten?

**Ms. Hembry:** St. Anthony's. It was a Catholic school. At that time St. Anthony's was run by nuns, you know, with the full habit and everything. I mean they were starched and their, everything was covered except, you know, this little part of their face and hands, but total black, you know, outfits on, the habits. And, but I was always of a, the teacher's pet. And so from kindergarten all the way through, you know, I, I was

kind of given, for whatever reason, special treatment in school. But I got a great education, I think, from going to Catholic school. And both my... My son, in fact, went to Bishop Dunn. He had graduated from there. But I chose not to put my children in public school and put them in private schools.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** When you moved to Oak Cliff coming out of South Dallas, is that, or did you realize what it meant to be Black at that time?

**Ms. Hembry:** I really didn't know about segregation and racial discrimination until I graduated from high school. I had an inkling of it in high school, but the Catholics were really trying to be egalitarian, let me put it that way. And then when I graduated from high school, the summer I, or maybe it was... No, it was the summer before I graduated from high school, going into the twelfth grade, and my dad or, or somebody had said, you know, "You really need to get a good basic business education." And so there was a business school in downtown Dallas. I think it was called Rayborn's or Drayhorn's or something like that. And that summer I went, my dad sent the money and everything and I showed up down there. And they kept me sitting out there in the waiting room a long time. So, I was wondering, "Well what's the problem?" And I went up there and I said, you know, "Is there a problem?" And they said, "Well, we don't know if we received your money." So, I called my dad on the phone and they said, "Yeah, we sent the check. The check has been cashed." So, I went back and sat

down. And finally somebody came and got me and took me kind of back to the back and said, "Well, we don't accept Black people. And when we saw this... When we got your application, we didn't know at the time that you were Black. And we're sorry we will have to refund your money." And I just about hit the roof. I, I just couldn't believe it. But you know, the fact that.... And then not long after that... Well, I shouldn't say not long after that, but I would say that within five years they closed. That place closed down rather than accept Black people.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Did they use the word "Black" or "Colored" or "Negro"?

**Ms. Hembry:** You know, I can't remember.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK.

**Ms. Hembry:** I'm sure they probably said Colored.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What do you call yourself now?

**Ms. Hembry:** Black.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK.

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. I mean, I, it depends on the audience. Generally speaking, if I'm speaking before a public group I'll say African-American, but I consider myself Black. I mean, that's the term I use.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** No experiences in the Oak Cliff neighborhood with that Colonel Tipps? Is that two "p's"? T-I-P-P-S?

**Ms. Hembry:** T-I-P-P-S. You know, I used to know about his history, but the only thing I can really remember is that he was a well known

segregationist. My parents bought into a neighborhood right by the golf course.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Hampton and . . .

**Ms. Hembry:** Cedar Crest. Cedar Crest . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Ah.

**Ms. Hembry:** . . . Golf Course. Right there and it was a very stable neighborhood.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Illinois and something....

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. Bonnie View...

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Bonnie...

**Ms. Hembry:** Right in that area. And a lot of the people who... Colonel Tipps sold his house to the African Episcopal Methodist African. A-M, no, C-M-E. Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. So, the diocese actually owns that house. And I think he sold it for way more than any individual, you know, African-American could have paid at the time. Beautiful view of downtown Dallas and all that; and right on a cul de sac. And the, the diocese still owns that house and so whoever is the Bishop lives there. So, it's a stable neighborhood. It's been, you know, safe. My parents have had pretty much the same neighbors for the past thirty-five years.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK. Eddie Bernice Johnson [State Representative]. So you got hired.

**Ms. Hembry:** She hired me right out of SMU. I got a BS [Bachelor's of Science] degree in Political Science. And Eddie hired me as her district manager. So, my job was to run the district office. And right after



she hired me, I was at my parent's house and the phone rang and this guy called and said that he had heard about me and they were looking for somebody to do the newscast on a local radio station. KKDA. And it was kind of funny because I remember driving in the car one day and they, in, in the car, and I was listening to the radio and I thought they sound like they are having so much fun. I think I could do that. And you know, several months later this guy calls me and he says come out and do a, do an audition. So, for awhile I worked at KKDA from 6 AM until 1 PM and then I would leave there and go work for Eddie Bernice from, you know, I'll just say two until nine at night. So, I had those two jobs.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** When did you sleep?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, it was very flexible, you know.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** No, not the 6 AM newscast. The weather cast.

**Ms. Hembry:** No. I had to be there at, at six o'clock in the morning for that.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Where was it broadcasting out of at that time?

**Ms. Hembry:** Grand Prairie. On Mayfield Road.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** So you still had a drive to go?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh, I did. Ultimately I moved to Grand Prairie for awhile. But you know, getting my little kids up and getting them, you know, ready to go to... They were going to a Montessori School at the time. It was a challenge. And I can remember sometimes driving to work in Grand Prairie and I would wake up, you know. I was just kind of asleep.

But I had done it so many times I, you know, I kind of knew exactly where to go. But... So, I did those two jobs for a while. And you know, Eddie taught me a lot about being a Black woman elected official. She was good at it. And I would say she, she actually mentored me. But my job, she was the chairman of the House Committee on Prison Reform, and there had been a major lawsuit. I'm sure you remember that, about the way Texas prisoners were treated. So, we got lots of letters from prisoners all over the state about transfers and you know, this, that and the other. And I would respond to most of that, those communications on her behalf. And there was one case of a guy in West Dallas who wanted, they wanted him to, well, to... I won't get real specific, but anyway, we didn't realize the power of that letter, that signature. We got this guy out on a hardship because his mother was real sick and the family needed him. And of course, he got out and started doing bad things again. And so it was real, it was a learning experience for me. But then I, after about nine months with Eddie, I quit that job and went into the broadcast business full time. From 1975 through 1980.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Well, clarify, if, if you were such a whiz at French, where did you end up with Political Science? How did that happen and how did you decide to go work for Eddie Bernice and this radio station? How did they find you or did you find them?

**Ms. Hembry:** I was, well, I found Eddie, of course, because I was trying to find a job after college and I really didn't find out how the radio station found me until years later. And it was a friend of mine that I went to school with at SMU who recommended me. And he had gone into the sales end of, of radio and just, you know. But I, I found out about it a couple of years after I was in the business.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** And the interest in politics, why weren't you a dentist?

**Ms. Hembry:** I couldn't stand looking into somebody's mouth. I didn't like that at all. But you know, I did it. I mean, I, my dad made me do everything. You know, mopping up blood and all that. I, I didn't like doing that at all, but I did it.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** And Political Science, where did that come out of?

**Ms. Hembry:** Uh, well, I think that I was kind of radicalized by that experience that I had at that business school.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What year was that?

**Ms. Hembry:** That was in 1967, the year before I graduated from high school, and so I, you know, SNCC [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee] was big then. And one of my very good friends who is now... In fact, she's Eddie Bernice's niece. And she is a municipal judge in Austin. Her name is Evelyn [Palfrey] McKee. And she was my best friend, and she was a radical. Just you know.... And she really got me involved in going to meetings and all that. So I would

say that my very first political experience was with SNCC, the local chapter. And of course, . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Who were some of those people?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh, Ernest, Ernie MacMillan who, at that time, was sort of the symbol of Black radicalism here. I knew everybody in his family. Dennis MacMillan and his sister and other people and you know... He was treated very unfairly and ended up, you know [in prison]... My memory of all this stuff is real fuzzy, but it, but it was a big case. And, and then you know, I saw, I saw people being very hypo, hypocritical in the movement. And I was disenchanted by the time I went to college. Although my, my former husband was very much a radical as well. And you know, by the time my marriage to him ended, I just felt that a lot of people were using the "Movement," [she uses her fingers to gesture quotation marks], the Black Power Movement, specifically, to take advantage of people.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Now, is he [husband] local or was he from Kentucky, Nashville?

**Ms. Hembry:** He was from, he was from Detroit.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** He was from Detroit.

**Ms. Hembry:** Uh huh.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK. Now, was Roy Williams and Al [Lipscomb], the super . . .

**Ms. Hembry:** Roy was in there. And oh gosh, I don't remember all of them, but you know, it was...

**Dr. Gutierrez:** But they were not members of SNCC? Were they involved with the Black Panthers?

**Ms. Hembry:** I think so. I think so. I can't really remember, but you know, we were all, there was both organizations. Both SNCC and the Black Panthers locally.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** And your dad and mom, were they part of NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] or CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] or Urban League?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, my dad was, you know... Looked kind of like you, you know. I mean, he, he looked more like an Hispanic man. But he was very, very bitter about the treatment he had gotten, you know, when he was, when he got out of the Army. And came back and went to, to dental school and was ready to start his practice. And you know, he was having to be a chauffer while he waited for his, his license to come. And in fact, he was a chauffer for Stanley Marcus. And Mr. Marcus wanted to help him set up his office, his practice. But my grandfather, my dad's father, worked for the Huffines family, the car dealership, and they helped him get all of the equipment that he needed for his office. You know, they gave him a loan to do it and he was able to do that. But, he had seen his father, who was a janitor, you know, and he, you know, just the way he was treated as a Black man. And so my dad was very, very radical in his outlook. And my mother was more of a conservative and still is.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK. So, you quit Eddie Bernice and you started going full time into broadcasting.

**Ms. Hembry:** I did.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Now that was, this was radio and not TV?

**Ms. Hembry:** Radio.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Radio.

**Ms. Hembry:** Radio.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** All they heard was the voice?

**Ms. Hembry:** No. This was . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** So they hadn't seen your face, yet. All they heard was the voice?

**Ms. Hembry:** That's right. This was Black radio. And at that time, from 1975 through 1980, you know, you had the station and of course Tom Joyner... I was on the air with Tom Joyner who is now, you know, this big guy in the radio business, and he's made a lot of money. Bbut he taught me a lot about the business. And so, a lot of people heard my name that, you know, because I was on the radio with this really popular guy. And then in 1976, I believe, Joe Kirven, who was a South Dallas businessman, very wealthy, ran for City Council and he lost. And he later went to work for Governor Clements. So, Joe knew me, knew my family and said, you know, "We need you to volunteer for Governor Clements' race." And he taught me a lot about conservative philosophies and viewpoints.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** How do you spell his last name?

**Ms. Hembry:** K-I-R-V-E-N.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** African-American?

**Ms. Hembry:** Yes. And anyway, Joe... The main thing Joe said was that we can't have all Black people in one party, the Democrats. We've got to have people in, in all parties. And you need to, you know, be a role model and branch out into that. So, I did. I went to... I was a volunteer for the Clements campaign. And then two years later, I resigned my job in radio and ran for State Representative as a Republican.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** In Dallas?

**Ms. Hembry:** In Dallas. It was an open seat. It was Eddie Bernice's seat. She had resigned to take a job, I believe, as a Regional Director of Health, Education and Welfare, so it was an open seat. And a local attorney, Lanell Cofer whom I knew, Lanell, because her sister had worked for, in my dad's office for years, Jo Evelyn. And, and we all, you know, I just knew her from high school and everything. So she ran and I think there was somebody else in that race. But she won as a Democrat and I was crushed by my defeat. I was so depressed. I had never lost anything in my life, and it was just... I was depressed. And I had gotten a job through basically the Republicans and Jo, working at the Dallas Market Center for Trammel-Crow. You know, the family. And it, it opened a whole new world for me. I mean, I had been in Dallas all my life and had no idea that there were people that rich, you know. And that had that much. And I was dazzled by it. And I think

that I didn't really pay attention to my race. Maybe I could have won. I doubt it because at that time, ninety-five percent of Black people voted for Democrats. I mean, that's just the way it was. They just wouldn't consider voting for any Republican no matter what. Even though my name was a name they recognized and, and my family name, you know, was well known in the community. And so I think I got about either eleven or seventeen percent of the Black vote.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What district number was this?

**Ms. Hembry:** It was . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** And what year?

**Ms. Hembry:** At that time it was, it was in 1980 and the district was 33-0. District 33-0.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What was, how do you spell that lady's name? Lanell Cofer?

**Ms. Hembry:** C-O-F-E-R. Cofer.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Cofer. And Lanell?

**Ms. Hembry:** Lanell. N. I'm sorry. L-A-N-E-L-L.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK.

**Ms. Hembry:** We all called her RG, but she ran under the name of Lanell. And anyway, she had a very, very poor, poor tenure as State Representative, was several times voted the worst in the state by *Texas Monthly*, [magazine] you know. Anyway, and, and so, anyway, the district no longer exists. And I, it was such a terrible experience, I said, "I am never ever, ever, under any circumstances, going to run



for, for public office again.” The worst part was that my children had to listen to her make comments about me that were completely untrue. And the main one was that, that I had writ, that I had been arrested for writing hot checks. And that was just completely not true. I had never been arrested in my life. I’ll take that back. I was arrested for, for having too many traffic tickets. Running back and forth to Grand Prairie and I had about six or seven hundred dollars worth of, you know, traffic tickets.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Speeding?

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. Speeding tickets. So, that was the only time I had ever had an experience like that and to have someone just say that, you know, and it, it, you know, for that to be out in the community and it was so untrue, and it was something that anybody could have checked to see, was devastating to me. And you know, my kids were just hurt by it and all that and so I said I’m never going to do this again. Well, time . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** How old were they by then? Your kids.

**Ms. Hembry:** They were nine and ten. And so anyway, I went back to work in radio. In 1982 I went to work for KRLD, which was a CBS radio affiliate, through 1988. And I really wasn’t making any money at that time. I, you know, had a little money, but I had, I had a lot of fun and it gave me a broader, much broader constituency. KRLD had, had a huge audience. It was all news and, and I was the Public Affairs

Director. So, I did several shows in addition to managing the station's relationship with the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] to make sure we were in compliance with our community service and that kind of thing. So, I knew a lot of people. And then in 1988, I interviewed Roger Staubach, who was a former quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys, for a show I was doing. And he was... He had a very successful commercial real estate company. And I said, you know, "My kids are getting ready to go to college and I'm looking for something else to do." And he said, "Well, come on and work for our company." So, a week later, I went over and interviewed. And I didn't have a real estate license or anything and we were talking about salary and he said, not Roger himself, but the people he had interviewing me, he said, "Well, what would it take for us to get you over here?" I was interviewed by five different people on five different occasions before I went to that company. And finally at the last interview, I said, "Look, I have a job, you know. And if you're going to hire me, hire me. If you're not, you know, I'm, I'm through with this. No more interviews." So, that's when we got down to negotiating and they said, "Well..." We went back and forth on how much would it take for us to get you and all this. And I gave them what I thought was a lot of money, you know. And they said, right away, "OK." So, I knew right away I had come in too low.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What was that?

**Ms. Hembry:** I think it was about forty thousand.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** And at the radio you were making?

**Ms. Hembry:** I was making about the same thing.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Oh.

**Ms. Hembry:** You know. But I wanted to leave. No. I'm sorry. I was making about thirty-two or three, yeah. So, it was an appreciable difference. But the thing about the Staubach Company was they had a bonus structure where you got a salary and then you could make... I knew some people who were, there, who were making two hundred and fifty thousand dollars and you know, in bonuses. But I knew I had come in too low. And I stayed there for five years and I really did very well. I made, what I thought was, you know, a lot of money over time. And then, Eddie, in 1993 was elected the first Black woman from the state of Texas. No, I take that back. Barbara Jordan was the first. But since, what did she tell me? Anyway, . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** The first one in Dallas.

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. Certainly to be elected to Congress and she was having a tough time hiring people and all that. So she hired me to be her district manager here in Dallas, her Chief of Staff. So, I . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Even though you had been a Republican and probably were a Republican?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh, I was still a Republican. And we talked about it. In fact, I, in 19, let me think, in 1992 President, former President Bush gave me an

appointment to the Institute for Museum and Library Services, so I was serving out a presidential appointment. Even though he was defeated and Clinton was in office, I was still serving until I was replaced.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** How did you get that?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, a lady here in Dallas had, was, I guess, impressed with me for whatever reasons, submitted my name and just pushed it through. And she was very close. Her name was Sally MacKenzie. She was very close to the Bush family, Bush 41, first President Bush, and it was a tremendous honor for me. I was the first African-American to serve on that board.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What does it do?

**Ms. Hembry:** It funds private non-profit museums throughout the United States. At that time, it was a small federal agency with a budget of about fifty million dollars and later it merged with the library commission to have a budget of about a hundred and seventy-five million. But I got to go to museums all around the United States and it set me up for a later opportunity that I, I was able to take advantage of.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Well, I'm sure we'll get to that one. So, you are back to Eddie Bernice?

**Ms. Hembry:** So, so she hired me away from the Staubach Company and I went to work for her. I think I was paid about sixty-five thousand dollars, but I, I saw it as an opportunity to go back and forth to Washington. I

love Washington, D. C. My daughter was living in Philadelphia at the time, so I would go to Washington and, and catch the train and you know, go to see her in Philadelphia. And, and you know, I felt like I was in power circles. But when we, when I worked in Washington with Eddie, we worked such long hours. I would go to the office and never leave the building, never leave the office, until night, you know, eight or nine o'clock at night. But mainly my job was here in Dallas, was setting up this office. And we were very successful. She is a very conscientious and hard working person, but very difficult to work for and with. And our friendship, in fact, ended because of that. She fired me and, because I was looking... I wanted to do something else. And you know, we, philosophically, we didn't believe in the same things. So, she fired me. And, and I was very angry about it. And I got a job later as a lobbyist, a couple of months later, as a lobbyist for the Greater Dallas Association of Realtors. So, I was able to use my real estate background and my political background to lobby for private property rights, essentially for... It was an association, you know. So, I was in Austin all of the time working with the Texas Association of Realtors. And did that and I enjoyed that and I think I was there from 1988, I mean 1994 through 1999. Is that right? Yeah. Yeah, that's right. And in the meantime, I started my own company, a company called March Fourth Communications. That's the date I was born. And we did, we had a TV, a little production company and we

made these videos about, called Real Street Blues, and it was aired late at night on TV, but it was fun. And I did that and also lobbied through that company. But anyway, in the meantime, in 1997, my son was killed in January of that year. And I really wasn't able to work for about a year. And I, when I finally went back to work, I just... My heart was not in it. And I resigned work, the Greater Dallas Association of Realtors. And I was serving, at the time, on the board of the Dallas Historical Society which is the oldest historical society in our area. 1922 was when it was founded. And I became the C... I was on that board and the director left. And so they said, "Oh, come on and work here, you know, and help us get going."

**Dr. Gutierrez:** How did you get that appointment?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, I was on the board and . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Well, how did you get that?

**Ms. Hembry:** I, I was on the board at one time of about eleven museums in the area. And every museum wanted me on their board because the . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Funding from the agency?

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. Exactly. So, I was on the Dallas Museum of Art, on the African-American Museum, the Dallas Historical Society. You name it. All of them. And so anyway, I got that job and I stayed there for three years, and really had fun. We did, the most fun project we did was mounting an exhibit about Bonnie and Clyde, that brought in over three hundred thousand viewers. And it was fun. And then, in

December of 2001 I went to India with a friend of mine. Well, we left the day after Thanksgiving and he is a sculptor of major... Texas. A Hispanic artist. And he invited me to go over to, he had this idea of creating sacred spaces around the world. And so he was going to do one in, in India and I had always wanted to go to India. And we were... So I took off three weeks and went over there. And I called back home one day and they said that Bill Melton, who had been County Treasurer in Dallas for twenty-five years, had been trying to reach me. And I said, "Well, you know, tell him that I'll be back on December, I don't know, 17<sup>th</sup>" or whatever it was. "And he can, you know, we'll talk then. But does anybody know what it's about?" "No. He won't tell anybody." So, the next time I called, they said, "Well you know, he said it's really important and he needs to talk to you before then." But where we were was way out in the jungle. I mean, it was six hours from any kind of a city. So, to get to the phone and use the phone was a major ordeal. So, I never called him. Anyway, in the meantime my friend that I went over there with and I had a falling out. And so I left the camp and hired a guide to tour me around India, that part of India, Goa, the western part of India. And then I came home a few days early. And as it turns out, I was glad I did because the day I was supposed to leave was the day that there was a raid on the Indian Parliament and the airport closed down. So, I got back to the U. S. about three or four days before I was supposed to

get back. And I called Bill and he said he was, thought about retiring and he wanted somebody to take over the office who was... He could trust and who he thought would do a good job. Well, I had met Bill when I was a lobbyist. And I was on... He had a Public Advisory Committee, so I was on that Public Advisory Committee for a while and learned about, you know, what the treasurer does. And I really didn't want to do it. I had had two terrible experiences running for public office and it's an expensive process.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** You only told us about one.

**Ms. Hembry:** I ran for Congress in 1996 against... Well, it was an open seat. The [United States] Supreme Court overturned the district lines of District 30, which was Eddie Bernice's old seat. She was currently in the seat, but when they overturned the boundaries they made that an open seat. So, there were, I don't know, I think there were about nine people in the race and of course, I ran as a Republican. And I lost.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Were you running because you really wanted it or you just wanted to run against Eddie Bernice?

**Ms. Hembry:** I was running because I was real angry about what had happened. And I knew I wasn't going to win, you know. But I, I ran anyway, and so I lost.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** How much money did you lose?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh, on that one, oh gosh, I think I probably lost about twenty thousand dollars, maybe.



**Dr. Gutierrez:** And in the first one, State Rep?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, that one was a lot more costly because the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] audited me during that time. And you know, I was, I had some tax problems because they said that the day care that I had paid for my children was actually educational. So, they made me go back and all of the money that I had paid for my kids to go to school, I ended up owing the IRS. I, I think I owed the IRS about twelve thousand dollars. And then my former husband had taken out a student loan when we were in college, and he kind of disappeared. He had gone to Africa. He lived in Africa for eleven years and they couldn't find him, so I had to pay back his student loan. And I can't remember how much that was. It was a lot of money though. So, . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** And no child support?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh, no, no. No child support. So, I was in financial, I was in severe financial trouble.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Well, how much did you spend on the State Rep race?

**Ms. Hembry:** I can't really remember. It was not that much. I was sort of the poster child for, you know, Black Republicans at that time. Sso I had, had people raising money for me. But I can't remember exactly what I put into it personally.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Can you explain that concept you just threw out there about being the, the poster Black girl for whatever you said?

**Ms. Hembry:** The Poster Child for Black Republicans.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK. OK.

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What do you do when are one of those?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well you know, I knew that I was sort of a token. And back then, in 1980, now we're talking twenty-three years ago, that was a long time ago. And there were very, very few. . . To, to be a "Black Republican" was like being a pariah and people that previously, I think, respected me and liked me, ended up saying, "Wow, she's really a sell out. You know, she's a Black Republican. And that means that she, you know, she espouses racism. And you know, all that kind of stuff." So, I took a lot of negativity about that. But there was also, during the Nixon administration, Black Capitalism, so I knew a lot of Black people who were talented and who were business people, who ended up really doing very well in creating jobs for other Black people and partnerships and all that.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Did you ever meet Floyd McKissick?

**Ms. Hembry:** No. I didn't, but, but I knew him. I knew who he was. Let me put it that way. But I, I never did meet him. So, that was the thing that really intrigued me, is that we are in a country where capitalism and where money does mean, I mean, you can do things. It, it affords you freedom to do things. And that was the part of the, the Republican philosophy that I, you know, that, that meant more to me. I consider myself truly a, a fiscal conservative, but a social liberal. I don't care

about what people do in their personal lives, personally. I don't think government really should be involved in, in legislating morality and some people do believe that, but I personally don't. But there were even a lot of white people who, in 1980, said, "Why are you doing this? You know, who, who, who brought you in?" But I never took it personally.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** So, why would Melton, other than knowing you in an advisory committee, decide to make this position now open for African-Americans? He's an old white guy, right?

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. He is sixty-one years old. I had met him previously, when my son was a student at Bishop Dunn. And Bill and his wife were the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] presidents and they got everybody involved. So, I knew him from there as well. I don't know. I was number one on his list and he had two other people who were backing me up. And I never really knew who they were. But I can say this. Had it not been for Bill, I would never have been elected. He took me by the hand; he introduced me to people and he taught me things. He sent me materials. He educated me about the ins and outs of the treasurer. And Dallas County manages three hundred and fifty million dollars in investments for the county. It's a huge job. There's a lot of liability associated with it. We are the banker for Dallas County. We issue every check for Dallas County. My signature is on it, electronically, digitally. And so, I, I couldn't just, it's not the kind of

job where somebody can just go in. But I think his primary motivation was that he knew that I had lobbying experience. And there was a little nut several years ago to do away with County Treasurer positions in the state. And it's an issue that comes up. It came up in this past legislature and we fought it. I mean, it wasn't a strong group, but.... So, he felt that he had built something for twenty-five years and he didn't want somebody to come in and you know, not care about it. My opposition on the Democrat side, a man named Jack Borden, campaigned to eliminate the office. What he didn't know was that had he been successful, he never would have been able to accept a salary at all. When you... Statutorily if you campaign to eliminate the office and you're elected, then you must file an affidavit within a period of time after taking office saying that you will not accept payment for that office. So, when he found that out, I think his motivation, you know... He didn't really care whether he won or lost.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Well, plus Melton kept this very quiet, so you elect a stealth candidate that, that announced that nobody had any clue that he was quitting.

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, that was why he wanted me to come back. When I... Had I come back when I originally intended to, I probably would not have had time enough to make a decision about it and file. And so, I filed about two weeks, right during the Christmas holidays, when nobody cared anything about, you know, politics.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** So, how much money did you raise; how much did you spend; how did you do this?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh, I only raised and spent probably twenty-five thousand dollars, you know. And the, everybody was giving money to [Rick] Perry, you know, the top two ticket, cornering to those people. But Dallas County Republicans, the, the margins are very thin. They are not wide like they were back in the 80's, so Democrats are being more aggressive. They're, at one time, but right now, there are very few countywide positions in Dallas that are not Republican, but there are several. There are a few.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Constables and JPs. [Justice of the Peace]

**Ms. Hembry:** That's exactly right.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** John Wiley Price [County Commissioner] is the highest Democrat, I believe.

**Ms. Hembry:** That's exactly right.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Did you vote straight Republican or did you vote for Ron Kirk?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh, I, no, I definitely voted for [John] Cornyn.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK. Well, now that you're in that office, is it all that it's cracked up to be? You are in there for four years; you're halfway there.

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh, it's much more. It's much more than I thought. I, I work hard every day. We, we are getting a credit card system so that people can pay their property taxes by credit card. The county's been working on that since 1998, and we are very close to getting that done. I had to

renegotiate the depository contract with Bank of America, mid-term. That was a big deal. We've had to, and all this is hard, it's hard work for me. It wouldn't be for you because you are an attorney, but dealing with contracts and with financial processes and procedures, it's all new.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Have you had investment bankers take you to dinner?

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. And now we are getting ready to, of course the treasurer, we issued twenty-one million dollars in tax exempt notes to expand the George Allen Courts Building. And now we are looking at a sports venue for the Dallas Cowboys that will be within Dallas County, so we are working on that.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Do you know who George Allen is?

**Ms. Hembry:** I know him very well.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Would you tell them, the class and the video?

**Ms. Hembry:** George Allen, well, I knew George Allen because . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Did you?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh yeah. In fact, the lady I was talking about earlier whose, her son and daughter died, died and her daughter was my best friend... She ended up being married to George Allen. Her name was Juanita Murphy. And but George Allen was the first Black Justice of the Peace. Was he on the city council, too?

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Yes ma'am.

**Ms. Hembry:** He was on the city council and then was he a JP later? I think he was because I think Juanita worked for him when, when he was a JP. But he was a great man and his granddaughter, Gail, was an associate of mine. She was about my age.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** So, what's happened to your company? March Fourth?

**Ms. Hembry:** It's, it's, it's dormant. I still have it, but . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** And I'm curious. What, what was that ad in Nashville? What did you do; what is it about; were you selling hair spray, toothpaste? Selling cars? What, what, what was that commercial?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, that's, that, oh, it was a, it was facial cream. Yeah. And it was a national, it was a, a, a print ad that, that . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Ah.

**Ms. Hembry:** . . . started out in *Ebony* magazine and it was a full page ad and it ended up in *Parade* magazine once and you know, some other publications. So, life has been very, very good to me. I, I've done a lot of things that I never thought I would have the opportunity to do. Since I've been elected, about a year, well, yeah, a year, I've been to the White House four times.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** How did that happen?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, good question. Last February, of course I had met Governor Bush when he was, you know, Governor. The first time I met . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** This one? The, the, the son of a Bush?

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. Yeah. I met him when he . . . I'll let that go. I met him when he was a, when he and Roger Staubach were baseball partners and he would come out to the company. And then when I was a lobbyist, he did a fund raiser for the Greater Dallas Association of Realtors. And he was considering running for president then. So, I have known him. But I got an invitation to the White House last February and I went. It was, remember when we had those snow days? And so you know, I didn't know if I was going to be able to go because of the weather, but I was able to go. There were thirty people at this luncheon, including Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, Andrew Card, who is the Chief of Staff, Karl Rove whom I had known from Texas politics as well, and some others. But there were four tables and each one of the tables, you know, had these powerful people there. And the President got up and this was two weeks before the start of the war in Iraq, the official start, and the President said that, he gave us a speech that he later gave on prime time TV where he said that he felt that it was his constitutional responsibility to protect Americans. You remember that speech? And I think he just, I don't know how I ended up being invited there.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Is this part of that poster child thing?

**Ms. Hembry:** That's quite possible. That's quite possible. And, but I was privileged to be there. And I did tell the President that I thought that resonated with Americans more than "We are going to go and kick



their butts,” you know. That tone. So, he later gave that speech and I thought it was very effective. And then the second time I was . . . I didn’t go. And I wasn’t able to go, but it was for the signing of the AIDS Bill to Africa. And the third time I was invited was for the celebration of . . . Oh, I got to go on a private tour of the West Wing. Just four of us went. And as you know, you can’t tour the White House anymore because of security measures, so that was very interesting. And then the fourth time was this past June for Black Music Month. And they had a live broadcast of the Harlem Jazz All-Stars and it was, it was wonderful. I enjoyed it.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Well, you alluded to the Democrats being able to close the gap. You may not win reelection. What’s next for, for you in that position or any other position?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, I take life one day at, at a time. I really work hard. When I go to work, I give it a hundred and ten percent and I’m very involved in, in my community. I serve on a lot of boards. I try to give back. I may retire at, at the end of this four year term. I’m thinking about getting married again for the first time in many years. And so if I do that, I probably will retire, and just try to enjoy life and all that.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Can you afford retirement?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, if I get married to the person I’m expecting to get married to, I, I think I can.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What is your salary as the treasurer?

**Ms. Hembry:** A hundred and three thousand dollars.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** And how soon can you vest?

**Ms. Hembry:** I can vest in ten years, so you know, I may do that. Dallas County has a great benefits package.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** They know how to take care of themselves.

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh yeah. Because for every dollar, you, you have to put seven percent of your salary into the retirement program and the County, for every dollar you put in, the County puts in two dollars. And at the end of the year, the retirement system adds seven percent interest, so basically I'm looking at twenty-one thousand dollars, you know, a year. I put in seven thousand, the County puts in seven thousand and then seven percent interest. Something like that.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** The County puts in fourteen thousand.

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh. Exactly. The County puts in fourteen thousand and then there's, and then there's seven percent on top of that.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Well, let me ask you. What is leadership?

**Ms. Hembry:** Leadership, in my opinion, I think about this all of the time. Leadership is being able to inspire and motivate people to achieve and to live up to the high ideals, in my opinion, whatever their, those ideals are. They might not be the same for us, you know, but leaders inspire and motivate in my opinion. Would you agree to that?

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Yes. What's the most effective African-American leader today? Or who is?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh, from, from my point of view, without a doubt it would be probably Condoleezza Rice. I just look at her and she's brilliant; she is about business. You know, I'm sure she has had some personal sacrifices; either she or Colin Powell. I mean, both of them are on the international scale. And they are doing what they feel they need to do to advance the cause of democracy.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Which is the most effective African-American political organization?

**Ms. Hembry:** We, we have a deficit of leadership in our community, in my opinion. Some of the old guys who, I won't call any names, but you know, their, their integrity has been compromised. So, I think everything is being pushed down to the local level so that people are generating, you know, their leaders locally rather than looking up to, you know, somebody like Reverend Jesse Jackson every time they're, you know, doing something. So, I don't know. I, the NAACP has continued to, under the, especially under the leadership of, of [Kweisi] Mfume, is, is making new inroads, I think. But I don't know.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What's the most pressing issue facing African-Americans today?

**Ms. Hembry:** Is to the, to join with other people of color to be effective and to, you know, we've, we've just really had to work hard to overcome stereotypes. And so I think we just need to continue to try to be moved into the economic mainstream so that we can have the same quality of life as others.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** What do you mean by people of color? Who are they?

**Ms. Hembry:** They are the browns, the yellows, the reds.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** OK. What are the underpinnings of tension between the Browns and Blacks?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, it's all manufactured politics, in my opinion. You know, it, it's thinking that the pie is so small that if I get this little bit, then I'm taking away from your little bit and, rather than us all working together and realizing that we are working towards the same goals.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Do you see or have you had any experience with Africans and where the tensions are between the Africans and the African-Americans?

**Ms. Hembry:** I've been to Africa five times. I've been to Ghana three times; I've been to North Africa once and I've been to South Africa once.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** You didn't tell us about any of that.

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** We'll have to bring you back for a second interview here.

**Ms. Hembry:** But I met and had a long conversation with the President, the former President of Ghana [West Africa], Jerry [John] Rawlings, and he felt that the whole slave experience that Black Americans had gave us a different viewpoint towards life and our position in the world. And that although, and you know, I argued that point with him because slavery, while it was an American, is an American institution, colonialism was a different form of slavery in Africa, in parts of Africa. So you know, again I'm one of those people that I guess maybe I've been so blessed to go around the world and you know, be

with different people. I see people as people. And there are people of all races and ages and economic backgrounds that resonate together. And I think we all need to look for the common ground rather than for the differences. That's just the way I look at it.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Any questions from the class? Anything you want to follow up on?

Yes.

**Ms. Hembry:** Yes ma'am.

**Student 1:** I have a question.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Speak up.

**Ms. Hembry:** Yes ma'am.

**Student 1:** You said you graduated from SMU with your Bachelor in Political Science. Did you like get a further degree or like all this is like what you got it, like the job wise focus?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, I did go back to SMU in 19, uh, it was in the early 90's. I want to say '92 maybe. '91. And I got a graduate, it's called a, what is it? Graduate Marketing Certificate. This is a national program that Northwestern University started about marketing and the Staubach Company paid for me to go there. Because I was, ultimately was the Director of Marketing for the Staubach Company. So, I wanted to go to law school, but it came down to me going to law school or my daughter going to the University of Pennsylvania, and she won out. So. I didn't go, but that's OK.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Any other questions? Yes.

- Student 2:** OK. I have three questions actually.
- Dr. Gutierrez:** Well, then before you go, go with all those three, who are you getting married to, if you do at all?
- Ms. Hembry:** Oh, I can't say that right now.
- Dr. Gutierrez:** Really?
- Ms. Hembry:** No.
- Dr. Gutierrez:** We'll have to read about it in the paper. Question number 1.
- Student 2:** Question number 1: I might be wrong, but from what I understood what you just said, you said you became a Republican not quite out of conviction, it was the right thing to do for the movement or the moment at the time and that you, as an African-American, were supposed to branch out. Not all, all of us have to be, all African-Americans have to be, you know, Democratic Party, let's go to the Republican party.
- Dr. Gutierrez:** What's the question?
- Student 2:** My question is, my question is, how hard was it for you to conform to ideology or philosophy that was not exactly pro-minority?
- Ms. Hembry:** It was, it was a tough thing for me, you know. Especially because the... The Republican Party didn't really know what it wanted to do with minorities. Now, that, that's a lot clearer, Nate Crain, who is the Dallas County Republican Chairman today, understands. And by the way, he's Bill Melton's son-in-law. But, but they... He understands very clearly that unless the Republican Party is able to attract

Hispanics and Blacks and other people that they are not going to be able to sustain their winability over time. You know, if you look at the city of Dallas, it's almost, it's like sixty percent minority, if not more. And Dallas County is a different situation, but the Republicans nationally have made a concerted effort to go after, you know, people of color. It wasn't always that way. It was very, very difficult for me. And I was, I would say I was disillusioned back in the 80's when I lost my election. I was, ran into some serious financial problems. Thought I was going to lose my property and you know, had problems paying my children's tuition. And I thought for what? For what? But in retrospect, I think it was well worth that.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Second question.

**Student 2:** Do you think that President Bush handled the Iraq situation wisely?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh gosh, I just, I, I just don't know. I think that he did what he felt he had to do and I am, I am a Bush supporter. I think the man has his heart in the right place. I think that he, he was operating on information that he had at the time. And I think that he did what he felt he had to do and so... All I can do is hope he made the right decision.

**Student 2:** On a lighter note, do, are you still fluent in French?

**Ms. Hembry:** Oh...

**Student 2:** And do you use it in your line of work at all?

**Ms. Hembry:** No, I don't. I, I would say my ear is a little bit better than my speech.  
I mean, I can understand where we're going. *Parle vous francais?*

**Student 2:** No.

**Ms. Hembry:** No? OK.

**Student 3:** OK. I have another question to that. Well, since you didn't go to law school because you were thinking about not going to law school itself, how did you get so much connections because I want to do something like what you are doing? And like, how did you start getting those guys because it looks like you have like a lot of connections? How did you look for them? How did you find them?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, when I, you know, I just don't know. I mean, you know, radio, people, when, when you have something to offer people, they kind of come to you. So, when I initially got in radio, everybody wanted to be on the radio. And I was kind of the doorway. And so, and I've just luckily hooked up with somebody who ended up being a real talent. I mean, Tom Joyner is a really, really talented person. I knew, when we worked together that he was going to go on to make a lot of money and do some other things. But what I always think, in looking back, is that you know, I always got involved. I volunteered a lot. I did a lot of just work that I didn't get paid for. And that it cost me money to get involved with because I wanted to extend myself. And in every opportunity and every, every one of those situations, it ends up paying for itself, maybe not immediately. When I was in the commercial real



estate business and Jose and I were on the [Dallas] symphony board,... He doesn't remember me, but I remember him. I got, I somehow got on that board. I was on the Texas Commission on the Arts, too, from 1989 through 1995, so again, people wanted to, it's a funding organization, so people want to be on their board. And I used that experience, because it was a corporate board. There were a lot of people on that board and you know, I'd sit next to these guys that I would never have an opportunity to meet or talk to in other situations. And I'm sitting in a board meeting with them and I introduce myself and say, "Hello, I'm Lisa Hembry. And I'm in the commercial real estate business. If you have any office needs, you know, I can introduce you to Roger Staubach." And then, of course, they would call me back. So, I think that sometimes we have to step outside our comfort zone and meet people that we wouldn't ordinarily meet and do things we wouldn't ordinarily do, even though the payoff may come way down the road.

**Student 3:** Thank you.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Why didn't Bill Clements offer you a job back then? Or did they?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, no they didn't. When, when he was elected the first time I didn't really... They, they may have offered me a job, you know. I mean, something that I, I, you know, really didn't want to do. And then of course, he was defeated the second time. Is that right?

**Dr. Gutierrez:** He was defeated, but then he came back.

**Ms. Hembry:** Then he came back. Yeah. And I just, you know, I never really wanted a government job, you know. I mean, I, I wanted to be an elected official, but I really didn't think that I wanted to be on the, that staff.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Well, the last quick question is you worked for, for the congresswoman. How, how do you run a congressional office or campaign or . . .

**Ms. Hembry:** It's all about . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** . . . operations?

**Ms. Hembry:** Well, you know, I think if people think about service, it's all about service. In my opinion, public service is about serving. And I, you know, I think about career politicians. I don't know how they do it. It takes so much energy. But one of the things that Eddie really worked hard on was addressing constituency requests. You know, people call, return the call. If people write, answer the letter. If people have a need, try to find out what you can do to help them. And that's the way people stay in office.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Do you know the, the, the foundation to this fight between her and [Congressman Martin] Frost on that redistricting?

**Ms. Hembry:** I do. When she . . .

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Can you tell us a little bit about that?

**Ms. Hembry:** . . . when she was the chairman of the [Texas] Senate Redistricting Committee in, I believe, 1982 or no, it was '92, he needed to have Black people in his district.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** A safe harbor?

**Ms. Hembry:** Yeah. It... Because he knew that Black people were going to vote ninety-eight percent for whoever the Democrat was. She needed to have her district carved out to have enough Black people in there to elect her. And he did some things that she felt were underhanded. And in fact, she told me that she felt... She almost had a nervous breakdown because that whole redistricting was so intense; it was such a horrible experience. And you know, she carved out a district that later was overturned, as you know, in the [U.S.] Supreme Court. They said it was gerrymandered because it was just a snake. It went from way south to way north to pick up pockets of Black people so that she would have a safe district. And she had to do it that way because Martin Frost had to be protected. The interesting thing is that, you know, Martin Frost truly has done a lot for the state of Texas. He is a senior, you know, member of, of Congress and so for the state, on the federal level, when you start losing tenure, you've got a junior, you know, legislator then you can't get the "rapport" that you can get with somebody that's been there a long time. So, I think that, in this particular redistricting fight, I think has been even bloodier, but Eddie and Martin Frost, there is no love lost between them at all. And

it all centers on who's going to get the most Black people in their district. Because the general feeling is that Black people are going to pull in that Democratic leader no matter who is there. You know, Donald Duck could be there and the general feeling is that, you know, Black people will vote for him.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Thank you for taking time to come all the way out here for this interview and spending all this time with us answering these questions.

**Ms. Hembry:** I'm very privileged and very honored. Thank you.

**Dr. Gutierrez:** Thank you again.