UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Interview with: Algenita Scott Davis
Interviewed by: J.R. Wilson
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Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

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JRW: This is J.R. Wilson, here for the University of Houston Oral History Project and this morning, I have the pleasure of being with Algenita Scott Davis. Today is Wednesday, July 19, 2006, and roughly about 9:30 in the morning. And, in fact, we are here at the William A. Lawson Institute for Peace at Algenita's current preoccupation. What I wanted to do with my discussions with you and if I am not mistaken, you are a native Houstonian?

ASD: Yes, I am.

JRW: I want our conversations to cover life in Houston and what it is like to grow up in Houston and specifically, also to include our discussion of the law, your involvement in the law, the law firm founded by you and 4 other sisters, the Sisters-in-Law law firm up on the north side, and other involvement that you have in the community. So, we will let

this discussion just simply flow but in particular, I am curious about what it is like to be a Houstonian and if I may ask, when were you born, what is your age, if I am not being too presumptuous, or if you could give me a general frame . . . I will take about!

ASD: No, I am very proud of my age. I was born October 1, 1950, in St. Elizabeth's Hospital which is a Catholic hospital founded by the Sisters of Charity for Blacks on the north side. There were only a few places where Blacks could be born with hospital care – the Houston Negro Hospital on the southeast side . . .

JRW: Known as Riverside now.

ASD: Known as Riverside. On my husband's birth certificate, it says Houston Negro Hospital – and St. Elizabeth's Hospital on the north side. The charity hospital, of course, Jefferson Davis, which was a part of the old Fourth Ward, Freedmantown area. And so, those were places, if you were a native Houstonian, you were born in those places. I grew up in Houston that was extremely segregated. The first street that I lived on was Greg Street and Greg Street was the location of the official fire station and police station for Fifth Ward. My house was next door to the remnants of the police station which our family had more than a passing acquaintance. The building next door to the police station was a fire station that had been called fire station number 19. Immediately across from that block was the location of a school that faced initially Lyons Avenue. It was called McGowan Elementary School but in 1927, the Houston Independent School District converted McGowan Elementary School to what was then a high school for the 7th or 11th grades because they did not go any further than 11th grade, and named that high

school Phyllis Wheatley High School which was the high school where my grandmother attended. She never graduated but one of her claims to fame was that she voted on the selection of purple and white. They argued about the colors.

JRW: What was your grandmother's name?

ASD: Her name was Emma Cornelia Breeler Lewis. She was a Breeler who had been raised on Brewster Street in Fifth Ward. So, it was ironic that I would hear a lot of Wheatley stories from her. My mother was born in Houston in second ward on a McCue Street off of Ann Street, one block off of Navigation because African Americans lived in second ward a lot. During that time, the bridge had been put in by 1927, the year my mother was born, so they could cross over into Fifth Ward but Blacks had just been in Fifth Ward for about maybe 10 or 15 years in 1927. So, the older churches like the Mount Vernon Church and a lot of churches that were founded at the turn of the century during that time as Blacks moved from the Fourth Ward to the second ward and into the Fifth Ward, and they moved into the existing houses that were framed in the Fifth Ward. I grew up in a house ultimately that was located in the bottom. We moved from Gregg Street to Booker T Street and Gregg Street was a very . . . it is like one of the main streets. It crossed Lyons Avenue at the location of the original site for Phyllis Wheatley High School. They ultimately built a bigger building for Phyllis Wheatley that is now called E.O. Smith Junior High School at the corner of Gregg. The original E.O. Smith building faces Gregg Street. It is now known as the H.P. Carter Center for high school students with kids. The new E.O. Smith was constructed facing Ringhurst which was 2

blocks behind Gregg, still bordered by Lyons Avenue 1 block from the original location where I lived. The problem with the expansion of E.O. Smith, and when I attended E.O. Smith Junior High School from 1961 to 1964, it was one of the largest junior high schools in the state of Texas. There were over 3,000 students on that campus.

JRW: I can't imagine.

ASD: It was bursting at the seams. They came in there, tried to build a new science building, but ultimately, what HISD did was use their right of eminent domain to acquire the next block and the acquisition of the next block meant that we were eminent domain out. My father lost his business, we lost our house, everything. Well, when Houston Independent School District, using its right of eminent domain, acquired eminent domain, acquired the old fire station location, the old police station location, the Fifth Ward Missionary Baptist Church which was the church where we attended and my father's house and business which put him out of business and that whole bit, and that was my first lesson in eminent domain acquisition because it was a . . . they offered him $5,000 for the house and the shop, and he resisted it and went to court, hired a lawyer. Ultimately, they gave him $8,000 but the lawyer took one-third and that was my first legal exposure to the right of eminent domain and the political subdivisions right to acquire and what the person's remedy was which was to turn around and sue.

JRW: What was your dad's business? What was his name?

ASD: He was an auto mechanic. His name was C.B. Scott. He had moved to Houston, operated a cab line out of that location because he was one block from the Club Matinee.

Club Matinee was at the corner of Lyons and Gregg. So, when Ray Charles refers to the Club Matinee, I am definitely familiar with the Club Matinee, and Mr. Crystal White who operated that, a very enterprising location, I had hosted a lot of people including Ray Charles and all of that and next to it was Caldwell Tailors which was a tailor shop . . .

JRW: Kirby John's dad.

ASD: Right. And I knew them because my mother had attended... was in the same class of 1942. They still keep up with each other, they know each other, but the class of 1942 – my mother should have been in 1943 but she went through some schooling so she could come out in 1942, and I will tell you how this ultimately ends. Basically, Houston was very, very segregated. It was Black and it was white. There was the Deluxe Show around the corner from the house which was the first picture show, movie show I went to. I never got a chance to, until I was told by a civil rights lawyer in Houston when I was about in the 12th grade that . . .

JRW: The late 1960s.

ASD: Yes, it would have been 1966. I came out of high school in 1967 . . . that the white movie theaters had integrated. And that was the only way I found out because Aloysius Wickliff Sr. a lawyer knew and found out because of his involvement in the desegregation efforts of Houston that the white movie theaters had integrated and we were allowed to go to the white movie theaters, however, we could not go to the Loew's and the Metropolitan downtown. Even all the way through the 1960s, 1966, 1967, by the time we graduated, we had one person in our entire class at Wheatley High School who

could pass for white. She would go and she could go and then come back and then tell us about what the Loew's looked like, what the Metropolitan looked like because we could see in these theaters and they were these big red carpeted pieces as opposed to what the Deluxe looked like. I never went to the one downtown for Blacks that was owned by a Black person. Never got a chance to do that. Never had much experience with the Black downtown on Prairie Street.

JRW: Yes, that was a generation before.

ASD: I learned about that much later, but it was still happening in the 1950s. It was still going on because my husband's dental office was at 712-1/2 Prairie. It was upstairs. I have pictures from that, of that office, pictures of that location. But this entire block that Blacks operated a hat shop owned by Ann, it is all mentioned in the....

JRW: And the fraternal organizations and all of that?

ASD: Basically. My first exposure to those were because my grandparents were very active in the Court of Calanthe and the Masons, so I knew their locations, I knew that there were different chapters, different chapters of Court of Calanthe. Then, there was a large hall constructed on Lyons Avenue at Waco. There is a house on Dowling on the same block with Wesley Chapel AME. And we would have to drive over here to pay our dues if she missed one of the meetings. So, my mother was more active in the social and then had joined the sorority because she went to Houston College.

JRW: What was your mother's parents names and what was your father's parents names?

ASD: My father's parents were Cornelius **and Lou Scott, _____ was her maiden** name. Those were his parents. My mother's parents were Martha Shepherd Lewis because her mom died and then the grandmother that died who raised me, Emma, who was from Houston. My mother's father was Elijah Lewis who came to Houston and I think he married here in Houston. They married here in Houston but they were originally from Louisiana, the Ville Platt Franklin part of Louisiana and then the Shepherds moved to Houston and ultimately moved to Booker T Street. The one block street. It was one block long. It was named Booker T Street. It was back in the Fifth Ward, 4 blocks from where the Kelly Courts is now. But that was my second experience with the right of eminent domain. For years, we kept hearing, "the freeway is coming through, the freeway is coming through." You could not get any building permits, you could not improve your property and this is just how the government is. Once they decide there is going to be a taking, they don't want to have to pay more for exercising the right of eminent domain. So, when I-10 finally did come through, by then, I was in junior high school and it came through and just destroyed Fifth Ward . . . it wiped it out.

JRW: Decimated it.

ASD: Destroyed Fifth Ward. We didn't get any cute little bridges like 59 with the Montrose area where Hazard and those streets, Dunlavy and all that, we just got a complete wipeout. No ramps from Lyons Avenue which killed Lyons Avenue. No ramps on the freeway from Gregg Street, one of the main streets. Nothing until you got to Waco which was a very kind of quiet, residential street at that time because we didn't

realize that the city and its capital improvement plan had ultimately planned to expand Scott Street. Waco is Scott Street. As it crosses the bayou, it crosses the bridge, becomes Sampson, becomes York and ultimately becomes Waco and becomes Hirsch Road and it keeps going. And that is something that...we didn't even know that. There was no cross street. We could not cross the bridge at that time on Waco. **Swackheart** was another main street and there were a lot of businesses . . .

JRW: African American businesses?

ASD: This is going by Lyons Avenue. A lot of African American businesses. Not so much was going on at Booker. But more at Solo which was where the house was and Pleasant Grove Church as you turned down Solo to Hershey. And then, in between Solo and Lockwood, what was where the Barbara Jordan office was, that was my first experience seeing Barbara Jordan, was during her campaign for the Senate. She ran a couple of times before she won and I do remember seeing her like in a Rambler. It is like it was yesterday. Driving down the street. We saw this woman who was running for a political office and that had not happened with the exception of Mrs. Charles E. White. And everybody was very happy about Mrs. Charles E. White. She was not referred to . . . she campaigned as Hattie White. She was referred to in her campaign for the School Board as Mrs. Charles E. White. There was a real big deal about the fact that Mrs. Frank Dye, they all used their husband's . . .

JRW: Yes. My mother was Mrs. Tillman Wilson.

ASD: Yes, they had to use their husband's name and that was the thing for them to do

during the 1950s and the 1960s. But at least by the 1960s, I could sort of see a lot of things that were happening.

JRW: Let me ask you about this sense of community in which you grew up and what, here in 2006, we would define as or characterize as Jim Crow America and that the community, and I guess the question is was the community that you grew up in, was it, in fact, isolated, and not in a negative sense really but sort of a cocoon in which you went to church, in which you went to school, in which you knew all of your neighbors and in which the sense of the outside world and all that is fraught with being in dealing with white supremacy in the outside world, growing up, did you have a sense of that oppression that did exist but did you have a sense of that growing up in the world that you grew up in?

ASD: The world that I grew up in was extremely segregated. The year that I started school, first grade, was the year that the Houston Independent School District was ordered to desegregate on a year by year basis, which meant that technically, each year, I could have started going to a white school. That was out of the question.

JRW: Why?

ASD: My world was very Black, very African American, very Negro and it was a protective world. The relationships and the sense of community was very, very strong. We knew that there was a civil rights initiative going on, we could see stuff on television but we did not see it in Houston because, well, for years and years, Houston did not tolerate civil rights movements. They tarred and feathered dentists in the 1920s, they

lynched somebody as recently in Texas as 1955. So, the whole Texas thing was not very tolerant of the civil rights movement and there was not a big push by the ministers in Houston in the 1950s, people in Houston for civil rights. It took people coming from the outside that were ministers who pushed for some desegregation but they caught it at the end of the students push. The students that year, the Mickey Leland kind of age, and my cousin was in that class, so they would go out and take us to Playland Park on Main Street so that we could be denied access to document the denial. So, we would do that. That was a part of our role in the 1950s. And they were documenting it. But it was the students, because my cousin was like a big brother in high school, they were the ones who would then go to the lunch counters and go to the stuff. The students were doing it but it was not led by our religious community, I think, like it would have been as opposed to what was happening in Alabama, Mississippi wherever they were. Situations were a lot more harsh. We did not have the bombings, we did not have that because the guys in 8F in Houston, at the Lamar Hotel, had decided they would not tolerate that.

JRW: White power structure.

ASD: Right. Brunie Sterns book documents completely what that role was, that once there was this rising up that was happening in that 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965 kind of era coming from the students because they saw what was happening in other places, then there was the, O.K., we will open it quietly and no paper because we had 3 papers then: the Houston Chronicle, the Houston Post and the Houston Press – we had 3 dailies – and no daily paper would report what was happening. And that way, they would keep the

whites quiet. The only time I really saw the bigotry and the evilness of the white Houston community was in downtown. As long as we functioned in our own Fifth Ward area or, heaven forbid, go to Third Ward which is what Fifth Ward people didn't do . . . but I did not see it. I remember being pushed during a parade and my grandmother literally going after somebody, some low life cracker – these young boys because they would get drunk during the rodeo time . . . I remembered going to the rodeo on the days that they allowed the kids to go and we had to sit in the Coliseum in the top, around the poles. And I remember there was one day when we could to go sit at the Music Hall to see an opera or something like that and they would let the Black schools then go and all the buses were going to have you dress up and you could go on Black day. So, there was a Black day at the rodeo, there was a Black day for the opera at the Music Hall. There was a Black day . . . well, the zoo – it was a long time before we went to the zoo. No, that is not true. We did, we went to the zoo. We did go to the zoo. I remember going with my father. My father would always take us to the zoo. That was one of his favorite places.

JRW: That is interesting because in talking to Beneva Williams, that was also for her father one of the places that he liked to go and liked to take children and I wondered perhaps if that was one place where there was a bit more liberty in the general public, you know, for African American families.

ASD: Yes, right, and probably because that was not the closeness. I remember as a child, probably being 9 or 10 years old. You could not use any restroom downtown

except for the basement of Foley's and I don't know if there was a place at McCrory's or on Capital but the buses that went to the Black community, north side, it was a Pioneer bus line. There were 2 bus lines. There was the Houston Area Rapid Transit HRT which was a yellow and white bus. But the blue and white bus was Pioneer which went on the north side. And you could catch the Pioneer bus on Capital but you could not catch it any closer than Jensen Drive. So, the Pioneer bus, you could take the yellow and white bus to Jensen and then you could pick up the Pioneer bus at Jensen Drive because other than that, Houston Area Rapid Transit had a monopoly on transportation in the central city but the Black communities had the Pioneer buses and then they would come with the blue and white bus and you could take those.

JRW: In riding that bus, did you find that you were required to stay in a certain section of that bus in the late 1950s as you recollect the late 1950s?

ASD: In the late 1950s, no. In the late 1950s, the lines were still there, the white line on the bus floor was still there but we could, because, I guess, where the bus was going, it was, like, a lot of Blacks on the bus. It was like really you were insulated. You were insulated. And my mother would talk about it. My mother would talk about the street car and how they would move the street car sign when the street cars ran to Houston and you had to sit in the back of the street car and as the white people got on, they would move the sign to the back on the street cars.

JRW: It is one of the incidents that precipitated the Camp Logan incident and is, in fact, that sign that was, in fact, thrown away by some of the soldiers and all at that time.

ASD: That was really like a big deal, but we were pretty insulated. Anyway, my mother was at Foley's and we were shopping on the fifth floor or so and there was a ladies room on the fifth floor and it said white ladies. That is why I don't use the term "white ladies" and "Colored women." Well, there is a white ladies sign on the restroom and I needed to go to the restroom. My mother said, "Go in here." I was coming out of the restroom and this old, as my mother explained to her, moldy woman came up to me and said, "Little girl, let me show you the sign." So, she marched me to the front door and I followed her and she was pointing to the sign. Well, my mother saw her. My mother explained to her, in no uncertain terms, that first of all, I would not want to be in any restroom with somebody of that moldy, decrepit . . . she went on and on. So, I remember that incident. But you definitely could not use the restroom.

JRW: So, your mother was no sissy!

ASD: No, not when it came to her children. That is why she has written hundreds and hundreds of poems. Well, one of the poems that I remember was when she took us to Weingartens, which was the big store.

JRW: It was a grocery store.

ASD: It was a grocery store, and it was in Denver Harbor because it was east of the track. Blacks could not live east of the track at Denver Harbor. You could not cross. If you crossed the track, you were going to be driving into Pleasantville because you were not supposed to be east of it because that was a poor white community of Denver Harbor. But you could go to the grocery store. And we went to the grocery store and there was a

sign that said "white" and "Colored." So, my mother noticed my brother kept turning on the water and he would go to a white one, turn it on; he would go to Colored one, he'd turn it on. He kept going back and forth. And he kept telling my mother, "I don't see the difference in the water." If one water is supposed to be white and one water was supposed to be colored, I don't see it. So, she wrote this poem about white water, colored water, and talked about that in a lot of experiences. So, she has a lot of that documented in her poetry and I want her to publish that because she definitely talks about that.

I remember there were Black employees at Orlando's Supermarket which was on the corner of Lyons and Gregg. They were striking and the Blacks were honoring that strike. And I remember my mother going, they were picketing. And she went to get food for the people who were picketing to try to support them. She was afraid to put her name on the roll of the NAACP because she was a teacher and they felt, you know, very strongly about that.

JRW: Where did she teach?

ASD: She was an HISD teacher for 37 years.

JRW: Where was she in the 1950s?

ASD: She was at Crawford on Jensen which is why we went to Crawford. And it was nearby, but she knew better. But I also remember all of her teachers directories were white teachers and Colored teachers. The directory itself was always divided. The schools were always listed separately. I don't know whether she still has some of those directories but that always stuck with me. You could tell who all the Colored teachers

were, so there was an insulation that you had because your teachers knew you and your folks knew you. They got their cars fixed at my dad's shop and new me.

JRW: I just missed that in Illinois – the schools were desegregated. I am the first in my family . . . 1955, 1956 was kindergarten, and I am the first one to go Horace Mann which was a new school and that all my 4 older brothers and sisters, all of them went to segregated elementary and junior high and everything. And I remember seeing the signs myself, actually not there in Illinois but as we crossed the river into St. Louis – we are 20 miles northeast of St. Louis as we cross into St. Louis on the Dairy Queen where it said, "No Colored allowed." Of course, it is all African American now, you know, but seeing that sign, "No Colored Allowed," every time we went past there on our way in to St. Louis.

ASD: It is like the irony of Denver Harbor. Do you know what I mean? For them to think that their neighborhood is too good. For them, it is like the Lyondell area. For them to think that their neighborhood was too good . . . My grandmother did domestic work so she got jobs in places like Glenn Brook Valley which is now off Broadway as you go to Hobby. And, you know .... flood prone and all that. But that was a big deal. But because my grandfather had a car, we always let her off at the bus stop because we could not let the white people that she worked for know that she had a car because we would get fired for having a car. You could not . . . they figured you had too much.

JRW: What did your grandfather do?

ASD: My grandfather worked for Lindy Air Products and he drove a truck for a while.

He was there for 40 years and then it became . . . it is like Lyondell products. It was petroleum related and they handled the different kinds of spin-offs and products from that, air products, and he was at the same place, my father's brother, at the same place, for 41 years, worked at this place called . . . it was some kind of screw company. And when he left, he had missed like one week or whatever it is in sick time in these 40 years. And so, they gave him a plaque which I still have. It is General Store Company and it has this huge screw that is as big as your hand. And that was the plaque. And so, Jack and me and Scott got this . . . because that was a big deal. They always were in these jobs for these long periods of time so they raised us to think that you were going to go to school, get a job and stay there.

JRW: I guess actually, that gave your family a great deal of stability in every sense: economic, psychological, I mean, just all kinds of stability given that your family was gainfully employed for extended periods of time.

ASD: As long as we were in our own little world, O.K. My grandfather, in 1952, moved to Kashmere Garden. He was one of the first to integrate on his street. They burned crosses in his yard, they attacked them, they called them names. I mean, it was really, really rough on what is now Lavender Street off of Collinsworth. I mean, you can imagine Collinsworth . . . the man across the street from him had a long piece of property and he actually grew corn on and had a mule and stuff. I mean, it was like a farm across the street from him right there at Lavender.

JRW: You were saying that also through eminent domain, that your dad lost his

business.

ASD: Right. He lost his business. He moved the business over to Kashmere Company but it was never the same. He was older by then. Getting started at 50, that is really hard on you. So, I mean, he still operated on the business and made a little bit of money but it broke him and broke his spirit. But the thing that . . . he was a fighter. He knew to fight and he knew how to fight legally. So, because of that, I think I was aware of the law and because I went to Third Ward Baptist Church, I had actually seen a Black lawyer as a kid in the 1950s. Well, by then, it was 1960. This guy got his law license and his name was Carl Walker and he belonged to Fifth Ward Baptist. I remember everybody saying, "He is a lawyer. He is a lawyer. This guy is a lawyer." This was like 1960. So, I actually saw somebody . . . and every time I would see Carl Walker, for as long as he lived, I would say, "But for you, I would think that all lawyers looked like Perry Mason." Other than that, I would not have known, because the only lawyer I saw was Perry Mason on TV. And then I saw this Black guy who was a lawyer, didn't know what he did, didn't really know the family very well but knew he was a lawyer and that was a big deal. So, I saw him and then I knew about Barbara Jordan, her effort, and I had seen her in passing, knew her Wheatley connection. She spoke to our graduating class event in 1967 when we graduated from high school at the church because the church had an event for the graduates. That was a big deal at my church in the bottom, because we had moved to Greater Mount Olive. And so, she was a speaker in the little cafeteria part of the church. She came for that because she . . .

JRW: Is that being now called fellowship halls?

ASD: Yes. This was a really little fellowship hall. This is really.... this church is still in the bottom. And so, she spoke there and what is ironic about that is that she was also the speaker for my graduation from law school in 1974 and I was reminded of that because there was an article in the Chronicle this week - maybe Thursday, Friday, Saturday, one of those days -- on Barbara Jordan's 1974 address to the Howard University graduating class. And I clipped it and in the process of getting . . . I got it copied yesterday because I want to present it to the Barbara Jordan archives along with my graduation program which I still have.

JRW: Yes. What was your favorite subject in high school at Phyllis Wheatley.

ASD: Math. Definitely math. I was active in the math club. I loved the Spanish language. I was president of the Spanish club. So, I think I might have been president of the math club and the Spanish club but I was also very active in the drill units because, of course, football was everything and performing on the field – I performed at every game for all the 3 years was at Wheatley. So, that was a big . . .

JRW: What is a drill unit?

ASD: The drill unit is the marching unit that is on the field with the band. You perform the formation, you do the stuff.

JRW: The batons and stuff?

ASD: Yes.

JRW: Or rifles? I understand that today, what we see as drill units, we see ROTC at the high school . . .

ASD: We had an ROTC high school drill unit that did the rifles but they did not perform with the band. The people who performed with the band were the majorettes and the marching units and we had a drum and bugle corp. So, we had a Wheatley drum and bugle corps, we had a marching, what is called the purple and white squadron and I was the first captain of that so I led that, and my mother was in this squad. And the same person who was on the squadron when my mother was in it, Dicey Green Cleveland, was over the squadron when I got there in the 1960s, Dicey Green Cleveland – the same person. And so, there was really a major . . . like I say, we were functioning in our own world. Wheatley had 2,300 students. Right now, it might have 700. Because the community was killed.

JRW: Isn't Wheatley now predominantly Latino?

ASD: Probably yes because of the change . . .

JRW: Demographic issue.

ASD: Right. And then, the new school being constructed and all that. And I just think that because you have a Wheatley graduate who's a county commissioner, he sort of forces the issue with Wheatley and it's name is still Wheatley. Other than that, there would be a lot of folks who were still, especially those people who came in the 40s and some 50s. They are a lot more active and vigilant about . . .

JRW: Who is principal then?

ASD: A guy named William Moore. But the vice-principal, more importantly, was Felix Cook. That was a person who everybody looked to because Mr. Moore was a little older, and everybody looked to Mr. Cook because Mr. Cook saw that he was one of the academic persons and ...

JRW: Good, better, best?

ASD: ...and the person who set the stage and extremely articulate. That was the other thing, as opposed to the older ones. Extremely articulate and demanding. And so, he commanded a tremendous amount of respect, aside of what your teachers did and your coaches. Plus, we had discipline. That was another thing that happened. There were 6 high schools in Houston and we had discipline on our campus. There was no back talking. They would beat you, they would hit you. If there was noise in the classroom. I've been beat, the whole class, they took us all outside and beat us all. And we were all like, yes, just don't let this get out to our parents. We didn't have rights. Our concern was we didn't want our parents to know because if it got back, you catch another one. That is the thing that they really contributed to the demise of the minority community schools.

JRW: Desegregation and the loss of that . . .

ASD: The loss of the discipline and the loss of . . .

JRW: That comes with community.

ASD: That affiliation and frankly, that insulation, that protectiveness. The kids in today's schools do not know their relationships. My children never went to their teachers

houses. They never had anybody to look up to. They never went to a Miss Bastine's house as could see this. A great house on Parkwood. They never had a counselor named Leticia Plummer who had moved into this house on MacGregor that you could say, "O.K., this is what I want to grow up to be."

JRW: Or living next door to you, or across the street from you.

ASD: Right. Ultimately, what happened . . . because I ultimately moved 2 doors from my high school counselor, but you didn't have that . . . they won't have that to aspire to. They will never have that. They will never know that. And so, that, I think ... desegregation had such a negative impact on it . . . and the facilities did not come with a desegregation. That was the big issue, was the facilities and the books. All of our books had been used by the white schools before we got them. I never got a brand new book the entire time I was in Houston Independent School District. If I got a book, it had 5 or 6 names in it. And by the time I got it, it was in a really rough kind of situation.

JRW: Yes. Well worn.

ASD: Well worn. But, you know, the teachers ... told you you were special, you could do anything you wanted to do and they pushed you beyond your wildest imagination.

JRW: I think that that is one of the great differences between . . .

[Reverend Bill Lawson comes in]

ASD: The law suit that was filed in the attempt to integrate the Betsy Ross Elementary School by the barber who took the young women to Betsy Ross. I can't remember his

name. But he was the barber, there was a barber who initiated the litigation here in Houston for the desegregation of Houston schools, the lawsuit. That comment, he took over the schools in 1955, that was my first grade year. We didn't have kindergarten in the Black schools so that person would have been . . . her name was Ross.

JRW: Delores Ross, I think it is and Beneva Williams was the junior high kid and Delores was elementary.

ASD: Right. Delores was assigned to Crawford and she lived nearer to Ross which was still along that Jensen Drive corridor. And so, that was the reason that she was used and that lawsuit was used. For that. So, I feel, you know, a lot of awareness about that sort of kinship to that suit after I got grown because after I became a lawyer, that suit was still in existence. My niece came to Houston in about 1985, to work under Federal Judge Gabrielle McDonald. And because she lived with me, the people working on closing that lawsuit in 1986 or so, the came to the house to work on closing the lawsuit. She was one of the volunteers that worked with some of the older lawyers to try to culminate that lawsuit.

JRW: Wickliff and others.

ASD: And that lawsuit, which meant if it started in, say, 1956 or so, after the 1955 denial, then it went on for 30 years, which meant that Bracewell and Patterson had been paid to defend HISD from integration for 30 years.

JRW: With our tax money.

ASD: Republic dollars. And that is the key – talking about that. Nobody really thinks

about HISD and its role and how actively it fought the integration process and delayed it, the integration process and what it was doing with public dollars. And how the other people were scrambling trying to just get some kind of payment.

JRW: And while African American students were using second, third, fourth, fifth-hand books and all that money was being pumped into . . .

ASD: . . . maintaining a segregated Houston Independent School District for all those years.

JRW: That is deep.

ASD: And ultimately, when the law suit was over, I think they gave him some piddling kind of fear or something because, you know, she had gotten involved in it in addition to what she was doing because she worked for Mayor Day after she had done the internship with the federal judge? And once they finished the lawsuit and all that happened and then she went . . . her reaction was how have all these public hours been spent that could have gone into making the school district better. But instead, it was gone into the 30 years fighting integration to protect the Houston Independent School District from integration. And that really left a . . . you know, because I am here functionally benefiting from this, not knowing what the lawyers had gone through and how they were doing this just as a part of their legal defense funds and all that kind of stuff. Not really aware of it which heightened my concern about what role can I play, how do I make sure that I made the public group step up. And that helped me as far as when I got ready to let the legal defense fund convince the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to come to Houston to

help us sue the Attorney General for the State of Texas to change the way judges were elected. And so, we filed that litigation by about 1990 because if we lost the election, all African Americans and Hispanics running for office lost in 1988, including the Sheila Jackson Lee's, Bonnie Fitch's, the Francis Williams, all those folk and all the Hispanics. And so, we asked MABA – the Mexican American Bar Association to also consider it. They filed a lawsuit and Houston Lawyer's Association filed a lawsuit.

Tape #2

ASD: The election in 1988 was a devastating blow to the African American and Hispanic legal communities. We had finally convinced a lot of people experienced lawyers to run for judgeships and put them in the primaries to run. And they ran. And for some reason, about 10 o'clock, the computers went down. And at 11:30 when they came back up, all African Americans and Hispanics lost by 1-1/2%, all by the same percent across the board with minute differences. That made us a little suspicious.

JRW: A little?

ASD: Mickey Leland, they said to recount the votes they would charge us $65,000. Mickey Leland got $65,000 from somewhere and paid to recount the votes. Well of course, when you recount it, it was going to come out the same thing. But there were a lot of discrepancies and the mere fact that we were looking into . . . but we had also contacted Julius Chambers who was then headed up the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in Baltimore, or maybe it was New York, and convinced Julius that he needed to help us

out. He's from Texas. And so, he said, "O.K., ya'll Texas folks, I will step in." And he assigned a phenomenal lawyer, Sherilynn Ifill, to this case who came here and began to gather all the information, document stuff and we would meet at my house and accumulate stuff from all the votes of the people who ran as to what was happening.

JRW: Was she related to Gwen Ifil that we see . . .

ASD: I think so.

JRW: With that last name and by looking at her. Not too many African Americans named Ifill, I am sure, that resemble one another on top of it.

ASD: She was just fabulous. In fact, Zinetta and I talked to her recently, maybe about 6 months ago. So she just had a call. We had a lot of cooperation from the lawyers and we filed that litigation with Houston Lawyers Association versus the Attorney General of the State of Texas and the Mexican American Bar Association, MABA, versus the Attorney General. And that litigation went to the Supreme Court twice. It was sent back the first time, remanded, of course its federal so we're getting dumped on by the Fifth Circuit and the courts here.

JRW: What year was this roughly?

ASD: The lawsuit was filed probably by about 1989 or 1990.

JRW: So, we are in the first Bush Administration?

ASD: Yes, in other words, Clarence Thomas came aboard in 1991. By the time it went there the second time, it did not get enough votes to be good. Now, at the time he is on

the Court and he went on the Court in 1991, because I was president of the Bar Association at that time.

JRW: The National Bar?

ASD: The National Bar. And we met with him in June of 1991.

JRW: Which him?

ASD: Clarence Thomas.

JRW: Oh, is that right?

ASD: The president before me and the president after me. All 3 of us went in to meet with him, talk to him because he was soliciting the support of the Bar Association.

JRW: What was that like?

ASD: It was very interesting. It was like meeting your second cousin. "I'm a real good guy. I am very down-to-earth." He was a very close friend of a lawyer who had been on the board, his roommate, who had been on the board of the Bar Association, who had gotten the Bar Association support for him 2 years earlier, 3 years earlier for the Appellate, the Circuit Court of Appeals in D.C. And by this time, the guy who was a friend of ours had died. He died in 1989, so by 1991, when were coming here to meet with him because I am getting ready to come out of office and I am about to preside over my convention.

JRW: Who is this that died? Clarence Thomas' former roommate?

ASD: Yes. It will come to me what his name is. I can see his face. This is really bad.

But anyway, so we went over to the D.C. Court of Appeals in June to talk with him. And it was like talking to your first cousin. Just great. Friendly. Affable. The issue had been what happened with the ... because the Anita Hill stuff had not broken. What happened with the Social Security people. How did he mistreat the elderly; why were the elderly angry at him. And he said, "I just don't know. I did this for them. I did that. This is what I did." He had a list of African Americans that he had put in very powerful positions within the organization - whatever organization he was over at the time because he had done some stuff outside of the agency that he was with. And he said, "You know, I lost 20 pounds" ... I'll never forget this...., he said "I lost 20 pounds worried about that them or trying to do this." He was that kind of person. He was like, brother man ... you know, here I am, I am a good guy, being nice. I don't know why these people say these things about me. I don't know why." But to the credit of my judiciary community, it was headed by Elaine Jones who was then with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and it had people on their whole . . . it is going to come to me . . . anyway, it had a lot of different folks on there who really knew and they were scholars, legal scholars. And they read his opinions and they reviewed it and that committee . . .

JRW: That National Bar committee?

ASD: That National Bar judiciary committee had recommended that we do not support him and that came to the floor of the permanent session and this was the longest permanent session in the history of the Bar Association. We debated this for about 7 hours. We had a woman who died last week, Cora Walker, who said I want him on the

Supreme Court because you could see him. You would know he was there. She said, "I want my grandchildren to see that there's a Black person on the Supreme Court and he's real Black." That was the kind of . . .

JRW: . . . logic . . .

ASD: And there were a lot of people who said, you know, we need to give a brother a chance. Gil Hardy was his roommate's name. Gil had told us before that if you just let him in, just let him get in, he will do better, he will show better than what he has shown before. And that went a long ways because Moyers really believed that you can be an advocate without being up front with it. And they really wanted to hope that the things that they had heard about him were not true.

JRW: And there is historic precedent for that also. There is a precedent, even if we look at Booker T. Washington and his accommodationist reputation that we can find instances where back up under the table, that he is cutting checks for legal cases and stuff back there in the early part of the century and all through the century as, got this public face, you know, but back behind the scenes, you've got this activism going on and I think even as you mentioned, for instance, your own mother and perhaps some of the limitations that she had in order to preserve your job and your income and your situation that you had to operate surreptitiously in some instances, there is precedent for that expectation that, hey, maybe we'll give the brother a chance kind of situation and all.

ASD: But it was the scholars of the Bar Association, the people actually who would read his opinions, they would read his writings, they would read that, and because of

what they read, quoted and distributed, the Bar Association refused to support him. It was a very narrow vote, and that was one of the things they asked. They asked me during that session, "How is he, really?" It was just very . . . you know . . . and I would not tell them. What I told you, I would not tell the Bar Association. I could not tell them that. I could tell them what he would say and the fact that he had been supportive of different issues but to let on that there may be a possibility that there was some salvation in his heart, I refused to do that as the president of the National Bar, and I would not do that.

JRW: Right, because it was not personal.

ASD: And so, it went down in defeat. In the meantime, of course, he had a lot out there, a lot of Republicans at the Bar, a lot of people who supported him and there was a cadre of some, I want to say, 5 or 6 lawyers sent with his big binders into these negotiations from the White House who would make the presentations and they were very, very demanding. I would get calls from the White House during that time. They were very supportive. Different kind of Bush than this Bush. They were dramatically supportive of Clarence Thomas. If I was on the phone or no matter what I was doing, they would interrupt the hotel staff, there would be people banging on my door White House is calling, because whatever they wanted to get through, whatever they heard, they wanted the support of the Black Lawyer's Association. And when we refused to do that, came out in a news conference and said, you know, the Bar Association has voted not to support him and that is our position. We will be drafting the president who will follow me, will make that presentation and she did during his hearing. By then, of course, the

health thing had broken so there was a much larger issue between July and September that really, really broke and came out very quickly. But, the head of the Bar Association was very active. Gil Hardy had to introduce Anita Hill to Clarence Thomas and, you know, he wasn't around there to defend him and to protect him when he got into that scuba diving accident. And so, I think that was the reason that the Bar Association took that position.

JRW: Based on the evidence.

ASD: Based on the evidence.

JRW: On the legal evidence.

ASD: On the written documents. Ultimately, in 1998, he did come to the Bar Association to speak at the Bar. It was the most divisive thing that ever happened at the Association. Totally disrupted the convention and destroyed the coordination of our events because they had to bring in a private entity. The people who were supporting him brought in a private entity to run that particular event and usurped the power of the Association. It was extremely disruptive. Now, there would probably not be as much of a to-do about it. In 1998, it was a little bit harder because now, everybody has really sort of given up this legal battle for equal rights and I see that amongst lawyers, amongst the lawyers for civil rights because you are fighting to much with the elections having been rigged and what has happened this last time . . .

JRW: Gerrymandering.

ASD: It is so much. And this last decision in Texas with the changing of the districts at

a time that was totally inappropriate, unprecedented with the courts appointing it, it is really a lot harder for lawyers to stand up for those rights. It is my belief, and I said this in 1990, that the 1990s of today were like the 1890s then; that we were entering into a very regressive period for the rights of our people and that regression will continue well into the 40s and 50s. And I am convinced 2020s, 2030s, we will still suffer from the impact of packing of the courts and the aggressive façade. Well, it is a regression of the law but the façade has been conservatism and family values. You can only fight so much and I think that it has sort of ruined the fervor and the zeal.

JRW: As well as when you bring in the religious element to that regression and as this conservatism where religion is brought into it so that even the unknowing fall for the propaganda, you know, and I know for me, it is always, well, O.K., let's see - Jesus starting wars. Now, where does it say . . . which Jesus are they talking about? Which Testament are they in? And that I think also for our young African American lawyers who grow up in Sugarland, who go to Lamar, who don't have the experiences of a struggle, you know, so that their paradigm, their whole cosmology, epistemology, all them things, their whole view in terms of them seeing things in terms of struggle and in terms of needing to change, their need for change isn't as great as it was when you and I came out of school and so that inner drive to attack the problems isn't nearly as great. It is almost theoretical for them, you know, they can go work downtown.

ASD: Right. Because they are in the firms and that is what is amazing to me. And I do try to go to meet with these 200 or so Black young lawyers who are working in firms

whose names I cannot pronounce. I remember Sherman Stimley Beard desperately trying to get me out of Shell Oil Company and into a law firm so I could be a real lawyer. And I interviewed with one firm - Chamberlin, Halicot and Waters. It was a tax firm, it was a big tax firm, its still a Chamberlin now it has a different name and Waters is no longer with him but one of the things that the partner told me was that "We will not have a Black. My partners will never go for any Black working in this law firm." Period. To my face, straight up. And here I am, a lawyer with the tax courses of the masters tax program because Howard allowed you the privilege of majoring in a designated area. So, I brought the law degree . . .

JRW: Along with the accounting . . .

ASD: Yes, the background in accounting, all that, and he just told me straight up, "That's the way it is. They will never go for that." And so, when I go to these events and some little bright young lawyer stands up and says, "I'm from Chamberlin," and it was just that . . . I had to say to myself, good, you know, after 30 years, good. And it is good for her and for her family, they will have those opportunities. I know that that is an opportunity that I didn't have but that was not the timing.

JRW: See, there was a consciousness that went with your access to opportunity that you had that came out of your life experience, that this next generation, again, as a drive, you know, and seeing a need, you know . . . like you said, they are already in Chamberlin or in Jaworski or wherever. And I've got my car and I've got everything that I aspire.

ASD: But it was also the time . . .

JRW: Even if they don't promote me, that's O.K., I don't care.

ASD: They are making big money and I am making money. The big firms had made an agreement. That is one thing that is consistent about Houston and its legal issues. There has been a camaraderie by industry as long as Houston has ever existed . . .

JRW: Yes, it is founded on that camaraderie or driven by it.

ASD: And apparently, in 1972, 1973 and 1974, somebody said, "We will all have to go get one." And so, the lawyers that came out in 1973, the big firms, they got one or they got two. Baker Botts had two. Vinson Elkins got one in 1974. Fulbright got one, I know, in 1975 - Shirley Fox went to Wheatley in 1975 and when she left, then they replaced that one with Sheila Jackson Lee and so they got one hired in about maybe 1977 or so - whatever year that was - but it was during that time that . . . and you could just see the pattern across the board where the big ones had one. Ultimately, the medium-sized ones got one. So, maybe by the 1980s, you had them in some medium-sized and some big ones. And they had that one. I think, within the legal industry if you could describe it that way, an agreement that they would all go out and get one because they hadn't had one before and they didn't have too many more, even by the 1980s - they didn't pull in a lot more . . .

JRW: I think your point about it being this broad, general agreement amongst the leaders of the legal industry in town and about going back to the origins of the city - a city being driven by commerce and industry, not politics - this city's politics has always been driven by industry and commerce and that if we look at the 8F crowd at the

Shamrock Hilton, you know, in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and all, and if we go back even like to Camp Logan, and you spoke earlier about the 8F crowd keeping a lid on things during the 1950s and 1960s when there was civil rights unrest all around the nation, and if we go back to Camp Logan . . . the Camp Logan incident, and I don't call it a riot because it was an incident because these guys were retaliating against injustice. So, this Camp Logan incident in which, after that incident in which a whole bunch of white folks were killed by African Americans in uniform with guns, that these city fathers, these leaders of commerce here in Houston put a check on the white community and said, "There will be no retaliation to threaten our commerce, to threaten the reputation of our city here in 1917" . . .

ASD: Yes, but they continued to retaliate in their own little way.

JRW: Well, they do but not that . . . and my point just simply being this being commerce driven and their attempt to always keep this southwestern, southern city . . .

ASD: Separated from the others . . .

JRW: That deep, deep south pain . . .

ASD: Yes, that was no Rosewood. There was no Rosewood. They just said, 'O.K., these are a bunch of outsiders,' so it is not really the people in Houston. Our people are good people.

JRW: Yes, and even in the newspaper, in the Chronicle and so on where the mayor and the governor were supposed to come out and they tell the white folks, O.K., that if there is any . . . that retaliation by the white community would be considered treasonous.

Those are the words that they used in the front page of the Chronicle and stuff, you know, so it is interesting how that is part of the character.

ASD: Because they can blame it on the outside stuff. They could say our Blacks are O.K. It is really them. And we have hung them up and strung them up and said that we killed . . . the biggest murder trial in the history of this country is Camp Logan. And that, I mean, it was conducted by the military in three days, and bam! So we have dealt with them and we have dealt with them harshly. And its not our Negroes. Its theirs.... And that is what was really so fascinating about the women on this tape because they remembered those men, they remembered them coming to the church before the riots. And remember them affiliated with some people in Houston beforehand. And to have lived through that as Mrs. Bryant says, "Well, we remained in our places, it was just those other people that did that," so they made that distinction.

JRW: Let's back up. I want to go back to coming out of high school, what led you into the law, and certainly, you spoke with Carl Walker in your church and just, for you, what was just this amazing . . . oh, that is what a lawyer is, oh, that is a lawyer . . .

ASD: It's Black and it's green.

JRW: Yes, and it does wonderful things.

ASD: And it functions and it goes to church and it does.... its this Barbara Jordan kind of person. But then by the 1960s when I was in high school, then I met people like Marty Wickliff. I was in high school with Marty Wickliff and his father was a lawyer. I had met Mr. Plummer Sr. His daughter was in my high school class, Diane, and her father

was a lawyer. So, I knew lawyers had families and they were Black and they were like regular people. Marty Wickliff lived in Pleasantville. Oh! They like live in a house. And so, there was a regularness when you were aware of them and what I know now that I didn't know them was that there was a reason that the Wickliffs as well as he was, as well as he did, they lived in Pleasantville because he wasn't going to make a whole bunch of money in private practice. And he sure, being involved in the civil rights stuff, was not going to make a whole bunch of money. But he was on all these committees, he was on all this stuff and as I read about him, I know now that that was the price that he paid being a lawyer in private practice and having to be on the Colored docket. I know that now. I know now . . .

JRW: The Colored docket?

ASD: The Colored docket was a docket that happened at the end of the regular roll call. If your lawyer was Black or even if your client was Black, you had to wait until time for Coloreds events to be called which would be after the regular call of the docket which is the white folk's docket. They could do that. And there was a Colored docket. That was a standard Harris County practice well into the 1960s. So, it was something that was there with all of the restrictions and I know now, the Plummers when I went to their house, and I did go to their house before they moved to MacGregor because the father would drive Diane and I to Girl Scout camp, so I know now why they lived where they lived. It wasn't a big mansion. They were just like regular people because he was in private practice and he had been . . . at that time, he had been through filing of the

litigation to try to change the chair or the desk, where they had just one desk in the library for Coloreds, the Colored Desk in the law library. That he had been slapped at the time of the integration of the Harris County cafeteria.

JRW: Plummer had.

ASD: Yes, Plummer had. And, I didn't know that about him. I knew he was Diane's dad. I didn't know him as being an activist but I could see that, in other words, that you could be a lawyer basically is what I am trying to say.

JRW: Why did you go to Howard?

ASD: It was very, very simple. Back then, Howard made an affirmative step to recruit people from Houston. There was a test given at Yates High School to students who had been sent from the 6 high schools . . .

JRW: Better students?

ASD: . . . Howard . . . and I don't know how they were selected.

JRW: Were they necessarily the better students?

ASD:They may have been the better students from the different high schools but it was just this test on this competitive exam. There were 2 people selected from Wheatley, 2 people selected from Yates. One person was Debbie Allen and the other person was Darrell McWilliams, Dr. McWilliams.

JRW: Debbie Allen was . . . my wife who passed, was my wife's roommate at Howard.

ASD: Yes, back in the Howard days. Then, there were 2 people from Worthy - Greg

Stuart and I have got to think of the other person's name. And there were 2 people from Kashmere.

JRW: I would like to pursue this line of . . .

ASD: Doreen Wright and Janet Walker.

JRW: Who?

ASD: Doreen Wright. She was a pharmacy major. And we came there as this little group of 8 straight from the schools. I had never been to D.C. Shirley Fox was the second person from Wheatley because our valedictorian had never been to D.C. And our parents, of course, had never been to D.C. Our parents - you know, Louisiana and Texas - that was as far as they went. Maybe they would go to California to see somebody once in a while. But there were two women at my high school on the staff who went to Howard: Jill Phillips and Hazel Haynesworth Young. Hazel Haynesworth Young was the Dean of Women. Jill Phillips had been over the cheerleading squad when my mother was there in the 1940s which meant with Hazel Young and Jill Phillips in, you wanted to go to Howard. That is where you went. That was the end of it. They told our parents. They got in. They had the money to go. You need to send them. They put us on the plane. There was no say-so.

JRW: O.K. Period!

ASD: Right. And what did we hear about Howard? We knew a little bit about it. My mother's principal had attended Howard. We knew there was some school in D.C. as my mother said, "up there."

JRW: It really wasn't your decision. You just did what you were supposed to do - go to Howard.

ASD: Right. The alternative for me was UT because I wanted to be a math major. I had gotten my acceptance at UT but I said, do I want to go to UT or do I want to go away to school? Do I want to go someplace where famous people had attended. And off I went.

JRW: How did you feel when you first hit Howard's yard, with the recollection that Ralph Bunche, that all of these people . . . Thurgood Marshall . . . had trodden across that yard, walked in that library, been in that chapel? Were you conscious of where you were?

ASD: I learned more about Howard once I got there. I knew about it, had heard about it. But I learned about it because Howard teaches you about itself and Howard's philosophy is that you are now in the land where great people are made and you will come out of it and you will be great people and do things. And they tell you that ... so you expect that you are going to come out and be the next Thurgood Marshall.

JRW: Two of my brothers went to Howard. 1951 and 1961.

ASD: Right, so they were taught that. They were taught you were special.

JRW: And I think you couldn't help but be special though. I mean, again, it is similar to what we were talking about earlier in terms of this isolated community where you had educators who were intent on not just teaching you but educating you and enlightening you and preparing you, as you said, for great and wondrous things, and that that was very much Howard also, so it would be very hard for anyone to come out of Howard and not

be cultivated with this culture of changing the world.

ASD: And then you'd get there and the world changes.

JRW: How do you mean?

ASD: And that was, I think, the advantage that our generation had. And it was an amount that no other generation has ever had. Because when we got there, the world changed. We got there in the middle of the Vietnam war. We got there protesting compulsory ROTC and filing the complaints and laying out in the street against the Vietnam war.

JRW: Yes, eating tear gas.

ASD: Yes, getting tear gas and complaining on the campus. And then, when some students took over the Charter Day Exercise and then took over the Administration building, the world changed. And what I saw then was that students, again, had taken a leadership role in this movement called Black Power and then this movement to recognize the rights of African Americans as opposed to the requisite rights. Here we were, a federally chartered institution - all federal money - complaining about what was going on, and we were headed up by a civil rights lawyer named James Nabrit. And the mere fact that you have a civil rights lawyer there and here, it only had maybe two Black presidents in power. Dr. Johnson, then James Nabrit, it was like a big deal to have a Black as president. We just gave this to you and you are out here protesting and taking over a building and putting the people out of power because they were not aware of the training and the education that the students were given. The world changed.

Then, I saw in D.C., as soon as the schools opened again, because Dr. Kenneth Clark intervened as a member of the board and kept them from shooting us or whatever, you know, at Kent State, demanding that either the matter be resolved with the 12 or 11 demands, what it was. Then, as soon as we went back to school for less than one week, Dr. King was assassinated. And from D.C., I watched NBC, A City Burn and I walked from the campus towards the White House because I wanted to actually get a feel for the riots, what was going on in the street and walking. And, of course, in the Black neighborhoods, I could see the people breaking into the stores and all that but once I hit K Street, I saw the National Guard and those tanks and those trucks, that made it very clear to me that there are two Washington, D.C.s -- there is a Washington, D.C. operated by the federal government and there is a Washington, D.C. that the federal government allows Blacks operate. But it also showed me that they protect what they want to protect and if folks want to riot and mess up so they burned down U Street. The world as you saw it really changed. And you also saw this strong sense of compassion between what was then the quote, unquote Black Power Movement and Dr. King because the people's march was there in D.C. on the mall. It was muddy and nasty. They still tried to have it after his death but the enthusiasm was gone as was these poor people's march. And I saw the death of leadership that happens when there is no plan to convey leadership. But I also saw that they protected that part of D.C. where they just let the Black part just pretty much burn. It also showed me, because I was from Houston, that African Americans can run the city. I went to a city - I had never seen a Black person on the first floor of a department store in my life. So, here I am going to D.C. and there were Black people

with hats on the first floor. I had never seen it because I had only been to Foley's and Black people didn't work on the first floor, like maybe behind the scenes or something if you could pass . . . I had **another classmate Clarence _____ who** could pass, so he could work in the shoe department because they didn't know he was Black. But I had never seen that. There were Black people running the city. The water still was coming on. The lights were still on. Everything was still functioning.

JRW: The policemen were Black?

ASD: Yes, the policemen were Black. Oh my goodness. This can really happen with our people. It was a tremendous sense of empowerment.

JRW: I had a similar experience. The place I am from, 10% African American in the north, but going to Memphis, Tennessee and being in an "all Black" environment, I had this all Black environment and it was just so invigorating. And, as a . . . I guess how ever old I was in my . . . when did they ship me about? Around 20s, early 20s or whatever. But for me to see . . . every place I looked, there were African Americans. If I go back home now, it is like being in Scandinavia. Literally. Especially from Houston as ethnic . . . when I go back to Illinois, my small town in Illinois, and go to the Lubys or whatever, it is like everybody is blonde. So, for me to go to Memphis and to have these African American females just all over, it is really neat. It was really neat.

ASD: The empowerment from the lessons that you can do this, that was one of the reasons that I felt so strongly about the law firm and starting the law firm; that, you know, I was in an environment working for a company that had brought me back to my

home city.

JRW: Well, you get through Howard.

ASD: I get through Howard.

JRW: Howard undergrad and?

ASD: Law school and stayed there for . . .

JRW: And law. O.K. So, you lived in Washington, D.C. for . . .

ASD: 7 years.

JRW: 7 years. That was home for 7 years?

ASD: Right, and I had promised my mother that I would just go away . . . I was 16 when I went to . . . and she thought that was too young to be going away. Of course, I thought I was grown. And I promised her that I would just to go school for 1 year. I would just go one year and I would come back. And I came back and like, I need to go another year and 7 years later, to ultimately come back. But her thing was, you will come back. I was so amazed by what Howard teaches other than what is in the books. You are learning what is in the books but you are also learning a tremendous sense of empowerment and can-do and independence.

JRW: Are you thinking specifically in terms of, most specifically, your law school experience in terms of this . . .

ASD: At lot at the law school because the law school was more historical pieces of law. You're busy doing law-law and book law. But I was taught by Mr. Wayne who was in

the class with Thurgood Marshall. I was taught by people who had . . . the first Blacks to do this, that and the other . . .

JRW: And they talked about Charles Houston himself.

ASD: Right. I was taught by these people who knew the whole civil rights movement. So, they made you feel that there were things for you to do, left undone, that you had to go do outside of getting a job done, pass the Bar and all that. You got very focused on the substantive part of it and drilled that.

JRW: That is interesting that that continued to your education at Howard Law in that that, you know, Thurgood Marshall's mentors and teachers and Charles Houston and those who came in there to develop a law school for attacking Jim Crow and in order to do that, having to instill in students a sense of responsibility . . .

ASD: And that really came from . . . Houston was hired by Mordecai Johnson. [Howard University's first African American president] So Mordecai Johnson was a minister. So, he deliberately got Houston to focus on the whole civil rights issue and to train these lawyers to go out and change this nation.

JRW: And so, when you got there, there was still that . . .

ASD: There was still ... Wayne was still there. That was the other part of it. By being in the 70s and that sort of crossover era, you were made aware of the people and you heard about the Olive Browns and the other people in this other jurisdictions had done all this stuff. And that was where I first heard of Sweatt, was outside of Houston because Houston had not taught Sweatt. TSU does not teach . . . the law school now teaches it

but...

JRW: That is Herman Sweatt who desegregated UT Law?

ASD: Right. And who, as a result of his lawsuit, the State of Texas adopted an existing institution. I want to make it clear to people. The Higher Extension classes started in 1927.

JRW: I am glad you say that because people think TSU started in 1947.

ASD: That is right. I was furious with Douglas about that. And now, the description is written up in there. To Pricilla's credit she has changed... made the reports and the staff at TSU to always refer to the fact that it was predecessor institution and once the state put that name on it, they allowed my mother to then request a state degree. So, one of them says Houston College for Negroes which is an institute that HISD took up as a result of the Houston Junior College for Negroes. But the second one says Texas State College for Negroes because they weren't allowed to get that . . . because she came out at the time then the state then put its brand on it. And so, I am real sensitive about that one and I talk about that ad nauseam but it was that empowerment with the law school and the background in law school and they pushed you and told you that you were going to do all this stuff. That made me feel I could really do things, you know, come back to Houston . . .yes, I had to work for Shell, had to do what ever it took to make money.

JRW: What did you do?

ASD: I was a Texas attorney for Shell Oil for 5 years.

JRW: Downtown?

ASD: Yes, I started at OST which is a building, it was 1500 OST - it is still there - and excise and use taxes and then ultimately, I came downtown and did legislation and other tax matters and federal tax matters for Shell and then ended up going back out, after about 4 years, out there to deal with some more federal excise taxes and those kinds of things, but I wanted to do more of the income taxes and complained, complained, complained. There was a brother, Frank Petty, who worked for Shell who stepped in and said, "No, you are not going to fire her. You are going to give her the exposure you promised her, exposure to the income tax area." That is what brought me downtown and got me into federal income tax area.

JRW: Were there other Black attorneys there when you got there?

ASD: There was one person and I feel that the only reason that Shell hired me was because I went to Howard, and Jean Carmichael had gone to Howard while he was at Shell and became a tax attorney at Shell. So, it sanctified Howard University as a source of attorneys. So, there were two Howard university attorneys in the tax, and you know, Jean, ultimately about 20 years ago, probably about 8 or 9 years after I left Shell, he said, "I really feel that you guys are discriminating against me," and he walked out.

JRW: Serious.

ASD: He just got tired of training people, seeing them move up and training people and seeing them move up. And Bookout just told him, "Look, you just need to be glad that you are here." Bookout the president. It was at that level because. They took a hard line

and he just said, "I'm not doing this." And he walked out. No retirement, nothing. And he had been with the company 20 something years.

JRW: Wow, what strength. It took courage.

ASD: The problem with it is that it had such a negative impact on his family. His son is doing well. His family did okay because they had a very strong mom. But the devastation of that Black man by a corporation such as Shell is so typical of what they do to Black men. Now, I was fortunate that another Black man found me a spot at the Port Authority and I began the Port's attorney. So, I got out of there but the other people like Caroline Greenhouse, I mean, Shell fired her. Linda - I can't think of her name - she came out after I was there in their legal department, she got fired then. Melba Christian is still there. So, she has been there now probably going on 25, 26 years, at least.

JRW: Has she been able to find advancement, do you think, by this time?

ASD: No. I don't think there is any advancement. I understand she is in the legal department doing her job. Whenever I see her, she is still Melba. She is the same person and.... she still has her job.

JRW: This then is the time period where you and Shelvin and Zinetta and Joanie and Haroldean . . .

Tape 3

JRW: So, the law firm that the 5 of you put together in Acres Home.

ASD: Yes, it was late 1975. The Gulf Coast Legal Foundation had closed the office in the Acres Home area.

JRW: Which Gulf Coast Legal Foundation?

ASD: The foundation was the legal entity, the public law, the free property wall kind of firm. It is now called something else. I have forgotten the name of it. But basically, they have bridge offices.

JRW: Offering legal aid?

ASD: Offering legal aid to people who could not afford lawyers. And that entity closed their office in the Acres Homes area. So we said, you know, here is a community of 40,000 people, and they need to have a law firm. That was our market study. And so, that is when we decided we would go out there and take care of that.

JRW: Were there any other lawyers out there?

ASD: No. There were no lawyers here.

JRW: Were there any attorneys in Acres Home at the time?

ASD: There were no attorneys.

JRW: In a community of 40,000 African Americans with no access to legal counsel?

ASD: Legal services . . . nothing close by whatsoever. We thought -- this was our market study -- we thought with that number of people and these were folks who weren't bad, we could go and provide them with legal services, even if it was just a consultation to try to help them or maybe we'd charge them like $15 for a consultation. So, we went

to the bank where we knew the banker and borrowed $5,000.

JRW: What bank was this?

ASD: This was Houston National Bank and James J. Smith was the banker. J.J. was there.

JRW: This is the same J.J. Smith who . . .

ASD:Who was over the Fannie Mae office and he said that he could lend us $5,000 if we all were liable for it. So, we went jointly and separately liable for . . . it took 5 of us to get $5,000 back in 1975. We had just formed our . . .

JRW: Was that a pretty significant move though for that time - women, African American money banking?

ASD: Going to borrow some money? Yes. Especially for a law firm. Nobody had probably loaned any money for a law firm in the history of the state of Texas and never women. And that is why we got this attention because we were women. Now, we thought that Shelvin's dad knew the minister from Mount Ararat, the largest church out there in Acres Home.

JRW: What is Shelvin's last name?

ASD: Shelvin Hall, and her father, Reverend Shelvin Hall, knew that ministry so we thought we could go to him . . .

JRW: Was she from here?

ASD: Initially, she was born in Cuervo, Texas. Her parents are from Texas. They are

Lewises. Both of her grandparents were Lewises. Her mom was a Lewis. And so, she thought that with her Texas connection, that that would help us and then we could go deal with the ministers because, you know, they are really the source of the furrows for our people. If our people have an issue, they don't care what it is, they're going to the minister and that person makes the decision.

JRW: And the dissemination of information?

ASD: And folks that they should go to. And so, we thought that that would be good. So, we borrowed this money and this was our deal - Zinetta and Haroldeen had an office downtown, but Shelvin had just left working for Judge McDonald who had then gone on the federal bench. She had come to Houston . . .

JRW: Gabrielle McDonald?

ASD: Right. She had come to Houston to work in the law office of McDonald and McDonald.

JRW: Where did she come from?

ASD: She attended Boston University School of Law. She left BU to come to Texas, her native state, to practice civilized law with the most eminent female civil rights lawyer in the country, Gabrielle McDonald. So, she came and . . .

JRW: Houston's own Gabrielle McDonald.

ASD: So, she came here to work in her office and she did that as a fellow and I have forgotten what kind of fellow it is but they pay you for one year or so to work and so she

had done that year and she did not really have anything to do. And I don't know . . . Zinetta met Haroldeen in the elevator and she worked for Gulf Coast Legal Foundation and that is how we know about that.

JRW: Who is she?

ASD: Haroldeen worked for Gulf Coast. So, we knew we had intelligence at Gulf Coast and Zinetta had her office there in the building. And so, she had set her little office up at 609 Fannin.

JRW: It was her and Don Caggins?

ASD: And Don Caggins. And Haroldeen then came and joined them when she left the foundation after . . . I don't know who else was in that office - a couple of other people... Frank Rush was in there at one time. But anyway, Joan worked for the City of Houston.

JRW: Joan Edwards?

ASD: Joan Edwards worked for the City of Houston.

JRW: As an attorney. We had in May or March of 1975 formed the Black Womens Lawyers Association because we had been talking about Black women lawyers coming together. And so, we met up, all of us, in the Black Women Lawyers Association. That is how I met these different woman. I heard that there was an association being formed because my grandmother knew of a Black woman lawyer, Norma Mills Watson. And Norma Mills Watson's ... went to my grandmother's church. So my grandmother felt ... O.K., this is a Black woman lawyer and I think you should know her. So, Norma Mills

Watson told me about these Black women lawyers who were getting together and we met at St. James Episcopal and then ultimately, we had our first . . .

JRW: At Southmore . . .

ASD: Yes . . . official meeting at the Holiday Inn by Sears and I still have that roster from that first meeting where we came together as Black Women Lawyers.

JRW: As forming that organization?

ASD: Yes.

JRW: Is that right?

ASD: Yes, and so then, our law firm came out of that organization. We said, "Well, we can meet socially and professionally but we can also form a law firm and provide services."

JRW: That organization is still in existence?

ASD: I don't think so. It changed a couple of times to different types of groups but not any more. There is a group of Black women attorneys called the Downtown Group that meets but they are downtown. Back then, I had convened all of the lawyers in the downtown area for a meeting in 1977. There were probably about 10 or 11 of us in all of downtown - men and women because I wanted to start a Houston section of what is called the institutional lawyers. Back then, if you worked for a big firm or a big company, you were called an institutional lawyer of the National Bar Association, so I was a member of the Black Journal Bar in 1975. So, our little group of this, you know,

the Acres Home group, we wanted to be at the National Bar. So, we went to Washington, D.C. and to the convention in 1975, the law firm as the lawyers, so all had a 1975 picture. But Thurgood Marshall was the speaker at the National Bar and all that. And that'd how this started.... the activities of the National Bar had started ..... it was my first convention in 1975 ... we were affiliated. And then, we opened our office in Acres Homes. Zinetta found this place. Al Hopkins owned this little building next to a barber shop and we opened our office. And this was our arrangement.

JRW: What street was that?

ASD: Wheatley. 7214 Wheatley. And we had a little sign in front. We were going to have one lawyer who would be there during the day, and that was Shelvin because she wasn't working somewhere else. And then the rest of us would be there late Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. So, the 4 of us would take a night from 5 until 9 and Shelvin would be there during the day because we felt that if people were working people, they would need that. So we said, O.K., well, maybe they don't know we are here. So, the Saturday, we would walk up and down the street, go to the laundromat and we'd hand out information telling about us. We went to Mount Ararat Church and the minister introduced us but he never, ever sent us any business. Then, one day, a guy in a yellow Corvette who was the head of the Postal union drove up to the office and he had injured his legs - he was on a crutch - you can imagine somebody on a crutch getting out of a Vette. And he came in and he said, "I am the head of the Postal union."

[Reverend Bill Lawson enters]

JRW: The whole conversation is getting pretty northerly.

ASD: It is true.

JRW: You [Lawson] and I are going to have to sit down at some point also. What this is is that I am working on my Ph.D. in history and I am teaching downtown U of H. At the central campus, we have what is called the Public History Program in the History Department and Joe Pratt and Martin Melosi have put together the oral history project which is to do an oral history of Houston. And so, what I am doing is focusing my attention on that aspect of the community with which I am most familiar and just want to document people's experiences of living and . . .

JRW: O.K., so we were talking about your law firm. I just happened to have an *Ebony* from 1976 here with Quincy Jones on the cover looking all Quincy. Open it, look here. Who is that with the biggest Afro in the bunch? Is that Algenita Scott?

ASD: That was fun. Definitely fun.

JRW: Who is Gwendolyn?

ASD: That was Joan's. Haroldeen had a bug and Joan had the Gremlin. I don't know what Zinetta drove back then. And I had a Z.

JRW: I know you did!

ASD: I worked for a corporation, so I had the Z. And Joan had that laminated so all of us had the laminated versions of it. Mine is at the court house now with Levi Benton.

JRW: Zinetta has her Afro wig on. As she told me, she couldn't get her hair to puff up

right so she walked around . . .

ASD: She hated her hair. She said she hated her hair. It was amazing. All that happened and the people at Shell never knew it, they never saw it because we lived in very separated worlds. And I was worried, I said, they are going to see this article and know that I have this firm, and work with this firm. They never did. It never came up. It was never an issue.

JRW: In talking with Joan and finding out that she was the first African American lawyer in the City of Houston Legal Department. That was an interesting conversation with Joan. She is kind of reserved, you know, and it was interesting.

ASD: Yes, she was always the scholar in the group - hardworking and always going to school and doing stuff. I mean, just determined. And so she did her part. But she had her night, too. So, even with her kids at night and even on Saturday, we were pretty much gone. I had a big old dog that I would take with me, Kwanza, and Kwanza would go with me to the office and sit there with me at night until 9. And when the guy came up in the yellow Corvette and he came in and he said, "My name is so and so and I am head of the Postal Workers union. I don't know who you are ... but whoever you all are, you need to go back basically where you came from. None of my people will ever come and use you. You don't look like lawyers. We are not comfortable with you being in this neighborhood and I am never sending anybody to you." And that was his purpose for the visit.

JRW: Broke leg and all?

ASD: Broke leg and all. He came and he talked . . . that was what he said. It was a great day. I mean, it was just like yesterday how you remember these kinds of things. And I don't know who he is or where he is and I probably didn't write his name down but that is what he came to tell us. And he came out of a little office, drove up to tell us he will never use us. And I guess he voiced what probably other leaders of the community felt and that is that we don't know you, you don't look like lawyers, and we will never send any business your way. So, we got no business out of Acres Home. Now, the business that we did get . . . we represent a lot of people from the church, a lot of people that we knew through other sources because we actively sought business, we actively were in . . . we'd go to clubs, we'd go to places wherever we knew people were and let people know we were in practice. And, in fact, that is really how I met my husband because we were in Syl's promoting the firm . . .

JRW: You were where?

ASD: At Syl's Club. Short for Sylvester, who just died recently. It was a club on the corner of Wentworth and Dowling.

JRW: It is still there?

ASD: The building is still there, owned by Arthur Jackson, another lawyer. We had been in to see Arthur . . . we were just going around, "Can you send us some business or refer us some business?" We want to do business... whatever kind of business that we could. Old school mates that would come in. And primarily people from our church. And that is how we were able to pay the bills. But anyway, there was a lawyer - Ernest

Clauser - who was not a lawyer at the time but he worked in a real estate office. He worked in the office, in the Robinson Real Estate office . . .

JRW: Judson Robinson?

ASD: Yes, who was my husband's stepfather, where John's law office was. He and his brother, Piggy, had Robinson and Davis firm in the Robinson Mortgage office. So, this guy said, "Oh, he is a lawyer and his name is John Davis." You know, I'll meet him. I am like, "O.K., well hi." He had just passed the bar after I had passed the bar.

JRW: Where did he go to law school?

ASD: He went to South Texas College of Law. But I had never met him, didn't know that he had attended Howard. He attended Howard 2 years before me, was involved in an automobile accident in his sophomore year which disabled him and sent him back to Houston. So, he went to U of H and went South Texas College of Law. But, that's how I met him, promoting the firm, were busy trying to promote this law firm and then borrowed this money to do it. We were able to pay a secretary. They would break into the office and steal the equipment, steal something, come back and sell it to us. I mean, we had real challenges in that little building.

JRW: Who was the secretary, do you remember?

ASD: I have forgotten her name, but a woman who lived in the area. Our landlord was Al Hopkins. He was very understanding. Our rent was like $100. So, we were busy trying to pay our bills, pay the firm . . .

JRW: Raise children.

ASD: All of that. I wasn't even married then.

JRW: A couple of you had children then.

ASD: Joan always had because she had kids all the way through school, and Zinetta had kids. But Haroldeen and I, we weren't . . . we were just hanging.

JRW: Haroldeen had her miracle babies.

ASD: Yes, much later. They were my hostesses at my wedding. That was the firm's official role.

JRW: When did you get married?

ASD: In 1976, one year after that article.

JRW: So, that meant, not too much longer after you had actually been passing out flyers and actually met John Davis.

ASD: I met John probably in the fall of 1975 and we got married August 21, 1976. So, it would have been 30 years this August. Yes, it is all in this old magazine. But we found that a lot of our cases were family law or divorce and those kinds of issues or some property issues, but primarily it was family law issues with our firm. And because Zinetta and Haroldeen went into practice together, Shelvin and I considered going into practice with them in that office. But Don was there so that meant that there was not going to be enough room for 5 people and I wasn't leaving my regular check job to get out here to practice law. I just was not convinced that that was the thing to do.

JRW: It is a hard life.

ASD: I watched Zinetta and Haroldeen talk about it and Shelvin was like, "I don't think I want to do that. I think I had better stay here with my good people."

JRW: My first construction office as a general contractor was actually, I had restored ... Frank and Kirby and Ben Durant and Kenneth Baugh at their office on Caroline and so that was my first renovation. So, after I did the renovation, one of the offices that I had renovated, I actually moved into. And so, it gave me insight into the law of the sole practitioner and what a challenge that is, what a challenge it is to have to do all that law oneself and then trying to collect and you collect in rings and cars and some cash, bartering - just that whole thing. It is a very, very challenging . . .

ASD: And then the more I saw it, the older I got, as I watched with my husband's practice . . . I realized that the private practice of law was not something that I wanted to do because people come here because they know you, you do services for them because you know them and they can be extremely disappointed. And the more you know somebody, the better you know the less likely they are to pay you and treat you as a professional.

JRW: And be more demanding of you.

ASD: They do not respect your time and your services. And so, I knew that was not for me.

JRW: So, the community, in essence, rejected . . .

ASD: Rejected our efforts, totally. Rejected our efforts.

JRW: Was it because you were women?

ASD: I think so. I believe so. I mean, just thinking about that guy who came - there was a classic - I think he voiced what a lot of other people were not voicing.

JRW: And there was definitely the need . . . I mean, you had done your market study and just the sheer numbers indicate there has got to be a need.

ASD: Yes, people needed lawyers. I mean, if the ministers in that area had sent us the business the way my minister sent us business, then we would have survived. We kept the firm open long enough to pay that $5,000 back to the bank and closed the office. That was our goal. We did not want a bad debt. And so, once we realized this is not going to take up, they are not going to send us business . . . we really needed the ministers. In that neighborhood, you have to have the support of the community. And there were some women out there in the community that they did not . . . the Beula Shepherds and those people - they didn't appreciate our being up there. We had not come through them. We had not come through them. And we heard about these women and they were like, "No, you didn't come through us. We have no reason to support you." That was my first political lesson, that if you don't come through people, then there is not that tie-in. They have no real commitment to you.

JRW: Quite the contrary, even.

ASD: Yes.

JRW: That is amazing. You haven't paid your toll to cross this bridge.

ASD: Exactly.

JRW: What are you doing over here?

ASD: Exactly, and we don't know who you are so we are not going to trust you. Why are you here?

JRW: And go away. We are not even going to give you a chance to let us know you.

ASD: Right, or send you something, a little bit of something to see whether you . . .

JRW: We are not going to even bother testing you.

ASD: Not even test you.

JRW: You already failed the test.

ASD: Yes, failed it.

JRW: Well that is a life lesson.

ASD: Yes.

JRW: That is a life lesson.

ASD: It allowed us to establish the relationships between us that I think continue to this day. I mean, the article . . . the guy called us . . . I wrote *Ebony* to say, look, we started this firm and here we are. And the guy called me back and he said, "Home girl. This is Lerone Bennett. And he said "I am from Texas and I see that you guys have started a law firm. I am going to send somebody down to cover." And he did. And it shocked us. We

were like... But keep in mind, I'm out of Howard. I don't think that this is unusual. You are supposed to be famous and do something and be in Ebony. And I know now that that was really . . .

JRW: Groundbreaking, pioneering . . .

ASD: That was major to get. We couldn't get that coverage now. If you don't come through the editor himself, and I don't know and I have no idea what Lerone Bennett's health is or anything now but he was making that decision and he made that decision for that particular article.

JRW: He was the senior editor at that time?

ASD: Yes.

JRW: That is amazing.

ASD: He saw the Texas thing, the writing - you know, just trying to get people to know us and tried to market our firm. And that was the other thing - you couldn't advertise. You couldn't be in the Yellow Pages like now, you can be in the Yellow Pages and advertise, put something in the newspaper or have TV . . . you couldn't do that as lawyers back then.

JRW: Why not?

ASD: Because it was against the Professional Code of Ethics. You could give somebody a card but you could never have an ad.

JRW: O.K. It was considered solicitation?

ASD: Solicitation. It would violate the Code of Ethics. And that ultimately changed and lawyers could advertise. But not in 1975.

JRW: The fact that almost a grass roots effort on your part, I mean, including walking to the neighborhood, handing out flyers is . . .

ASD: Living by a card, saying, "I am a lawyer. I am a lawyer." And I don't think we got one referral from just, you know, walking up to people. Because people come to you. It has got to be word of mouth. It has to be that. If a person says, "I know this person," that is what makes a business go. A very early lesson.

JRW: We not only have the issue of your gender but perhaps also the issue of your race.

ASD: We didn't have the issue of race . . .

JRW: But I am saying in terms of people trusting . . .

ASD: A lot of people still don't want Black lawyers representing them.

JRW: So, you were fighting two battles - you were female and you were African American.

ASD: Yes. So why would you go and get a lawyer that looked like that? That was not the thing. But we did it. We did it and learned from it.

JRW: And it was a pioneering effort in that other young women see that it is possible, whether they choose to do so or not, you know, but that they can put their heads together. I would say that Mr. Brown had the wagon and Mr. Root had the mule and look what they were able to do. I think that is what I see in terms of this firm that you all put . . .

everybody had their expertise and whether it was accounting or whether it was . . . whatever, whatever, whatever . . .and you put it all together . . .

ASD: Where did you get this magazine?

JRW: It was donated to me by one of the people in the pictures in there. Zinetta had it as an extra copy.

ASD: I know I have it some place in my mother's house.

JRW: I am going to make sure it gets formally archived though for perpetuity.

ASD: I have got to show that to Mrs. Lawson.

JRW: And so, after you formed a firm, you all did service to the client . . . after you formed that firm . . .

ASD: Yes, we had an office and letterhead and DBA and all that kind of stuff . . .

JRW: And you went on. You stayed with Shell for a while.

ASD: I never left Shell. I stayed with Shell from 1974 to 1979. And then, the opportunity was presented to me because one of the people in the firm had become president of the Houston Lawyers Association – Shelvin, she was only the first woman since Barbara Jordan to be president of the Houston Lawyers.

JRW: That would have been 1953 or so when it was formed?

ASD: I think Jordan was president . . .

JRW: No, I am saying when it was formed. The HLA was formed . . .

ASD: Yes, it was formed in 1955. It took another 20 years or so to have another woman in there. And I thought that Shelvin was the first president until there was some article on the YMCA that had a story about Barbara Jordan and included in her bio was the fact that she had been the president of the Houston Lawyers Association. So, I thought that that was... knowing Barbara Jordan she had been president of the Houston Lawyers Association. And so, that fit. And I never got a chance to ask her even though I ultimately worked for her because she was at Chase Bank, and people do not talk about her role with Texas Commerce in moving Texas Commerce into the community and getting these branches set up. They really don't talk about what she did in banking.

JRW: What did she do at Texas Commerce?

ASD: She was on the board. She was the first Black on the board of Texas Commerce. When Texas Commerce and the banking industry was changing from a one route bank to a multibranch. And so, she was at Texas Commerce Bankshares which was the statewide entity that operated Texas Commerce Bank. Because she had been in Congress and a sponsor of the Community Reinvestment Act, when Texas Commerce got in trouble, they said to the regulators, "Oh, by the way, we have this board member who was in Congress and who knows community reinvestment." So, the regulators even trying to enforce this act, could not ever argue or say anything about what Texas Commerce did because Barbara Jordan was commandeering the ship and making Texas Commerce the bank that it needed to be in the community. She was the definition of community reinvestment. She headed up the community reinvestment committee. The community affairs

committee. Her role on the community affairs committee of the bank . . . it didn't matter what any of the people wanted to think, they either didn't say it or if they said it, you know, she handled it. Because that was the thing about well, why do we want to do loans in the low and moderate income areas? All we are doing is giving away money. Those people can't pay back money. It was that kind of conversation that constantly flowed. Why do we want to do applications for mortgages when it counts against us if we have a higher rate of declinations? She said, "I don't care. We are going to do applications wherever we can because we know that there are people out there who want to do loans." Then, I had this push about getting involved with the churches and using them as a source of information. And I mean, she really called me out in the meeting, she said, "Algenita, you need to make sure that what we are doing with the churches, we do because it is good business and not" . . .

JRW: You worked for her in what . . .

ASD: I was the bank's community affairs officer, an employee. She was on the board of the community affairs committee and chaired that board.

JRW: Which oversaw your department?

ASD: Yes, oversaw this department and the whole area of compliance. So, our presentations went to the board because you had to demonstrate to the regulators that you had board involvement in your decisions, board involvement in where your branches were. That is why our first branch that we did in the community was on Lyons Avenue near her office. She made the presentation. She was the one who did it. That is why it is

called Lyons Lockwood, Lockwood Lyons. That is why it is on this side of the Denver Harbor tract and not on the Hispanic more populated side because she wanted this branch in Fifth Ward. She felt it was underserved. She knew that there was .... and since its beginning, that bank has blown all our branches out of the water. Totally underserved. Major deposits. Large. And because of its location, serves a lot of Hispanic and Black, run by a Hispanic branch manager initially because we had to try to appeal to the Hispanic community because everything else was run by Blacks -- the architect was Black, the location was Black.

JRW: Who was the architect?

ASD: Lyons Avenue was Black. His mother is over the St. Elizabeth group. It will come to me. But anyway, that whole thing of putting those wedges there. Because Texas Commerce was in a lot of trouble with the community. And when she said . . .

JRW: They had been redlining.

ASD: When she said, "We are clearing this up by doing this stuff," there was no argument about that because we were clearing this up and we were like marching through these neighborhoods. This branch over here - she did this branch. I mean, she was very adamant about making sure that we, as employers, were coming up with the right answers. And we knew that if we went to a committee, then we had the backing of the chair of the committee. When the chair of the committee said, "Keep doing mortgage applications," when the chair of the committee said we want to achieve the intent of the act, and her conversations with the regulators . . . you've got a regulator talking to

Barbara Jordan . . .?

JRW: Yes, who wrote the act.

ASD: We have never, the whole time after I went there, we never made anything less than our standard. And, I mean, they were in such trouble that they needed to put something together to be successful and that was the reason that I was hired, to do that because you had to work with community groups and we had to be out there involved.

JRW: I was just about to say - it is interesting how life evolves in that all of your experiences and strengths and all of that can kind of come together and be utilized . . .

ASD: Dealing with, once again, the impact of credit enhancement and tax enhancement. Do you remember the tax law? The basis for construction on formal housing is tax credits. The mere fact that anything you do is the benefit of the public dollar being recycled. The community development block grants.... it's still public dollars coming in to enhance the loan, to enhance the abatement that was up and down OST there, Al Calloway did it. To enhance ability to get stuff done, putting in these tax increment districts - it is still the public dollar coming back to support development that would not happen but for the intrusion or the support or the enhancement of the public dollar. So, it all ultimately tied in. But it was really that whole Barbara Jordan impact that just fascinated me with what her role was and it is not talked about enough. I missed the event where they celebrated her something or other last year at TSU. But the call just then from TSU was because the bank had put her picture in these branches. And with the changeover and the merger, the bank won. It is now controlled by Bank One. So, all of

that stuff has been taken down. So I took a picture and presented it to TSU.

JRW: The Hartman....collection.

ASD: No, for the Barbara Jordan/Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs. We probably have one in Fifth Ward. That one is probably still there. They haven't gotten together and taken that one down. And I don't know if we still have one at the Power Center.

JRW: That is an intriguing story.

ASD: Chase... And, I mean, for years, she chaired that community from her wheelchair and every day was 9 to 5, so that she could be there so she could speak, she could run those meetings.

JRW: That is a story right there. That is a great article.

ASD: Phenomenal. And at the time of her death, Channel 11 was the station that had been designated as the feed station for the funeral and that kind of stuff. And so, the guys at Channel 11 . . . Steve Smith and Marlene McClintock, the news guys, because they had worked with my brother because he's still at eleven. My sister worked for Barbara Jordan - they brought me in so I did all of the commentary because people didn't realize a lot of the things about her. Her aunt being this doctor, you know, did all this stuff in Houston. And her role as far as the community impact of her role after she left Congress. She was in Congress some years.... anywhere from the Nixon impeachment and all of that... but after she left Houston. She made such a tremendous difference because she brought with her that ability to convey the correctness of what corporate responsibility really was.

JRW: It must have been all-inspiring just to be in the presence and to watch a mind and spirit like that operate, let alone the voice that goes along with it.

ASD: Yes, it was, and you also have the . . . it is like she had your back. Do you know what I mean?

JRW: Yes.

ASD: You came up with the stuff and you knew you were presenting information to this relatively less receptive environment - I won't call it a hostile environment - a less receptive environment of folks who had not done business in a low to moderate income community.

JRW: And saw no need to do so either.

ASD: Just couldn't even understand why anybody wouldn't be thinking about that. And then, voila. You know, you are sitting there and you get this tremendous support because the regulation is there, and during the Clinton years, regulation was enforced. So, you saw a lot of things - hiring and doing stuff that . . .

JRW: You saw the billboards change. You saw the faces on the billboards especially heading downtown and branch locations . . .

ASD: And the Bank of America right here. And hiring Austin Coleman, hiring these people to get out there and do projects like the building on Almeda that would not have been done but for a department that had a responsibility to demonstrate its commitment of lending in the community.

JRW: When you say the building on Almeda, do you mean . . .

ASD: Zinetta's building.

JRW: The opening of the branch in that building?

ASD: No.

JRW: Oh, doing the deal.

ASD: Acquisition of the building. It was the acquisition of the building by the Lawsons, Zinetta and all that group. The loan itself was underwritten by the lease. So basically, Texas Commerce was paying itself. So, they knew they could do the loan for a group that had not operated a building before because it was in the building. And the lease was structured so that it was paying most of that principal, most of that loan that had debt service, because of the size of the branch, then a separate part to lease the ground where the driveway goes through. Then, another part to add on to the lease, the preferential parking across the front. Then, to tack on to the lease the space for that, see, and so you keep adding and adding so that you can get enough money to take care of the bulk of the note.

JRW: Who put that all together?

ASD: That was a combination of folk. A guy that I worked for had the idea. He was the head of the department, community development group, and he said, "That is what we will do.... if they want to do the building", you know, because I came in "my friends want to buy this building." And the insurance company that owned the building would not talk

to them. They would not even entertain an offer to purchase. So, the guy that I worked for, because he is a white guy from Galveston, he could get on the phone and call them from Texas Commerce and say, "This is Texas Commerce Bank calling" Met Life or calling New York Life, whatever the name of the insurance company was, and they responded to him. So, that is how they were allowed to even get in touch with them to talk to them about buying the building.

JRW: Otherwise, it would not have happened.

ASD: It never would have happened, plus the people who our whole department reported to had done the survey and had decided it is better to build your own building like Fifth Ward. Why would you come in and lease a spot when you could build your own building? It is cheaper. If you are going to build your own building, you are going to spend a million dollars. You come in and lease this, you are going to spend a lot less. And so, they came in with this report and there were like 7 or 8 people in the room. It was a report to Mark Shapiro. I knew we were down for the count and that I was going to have to tell Zinetta it wasn't going to happen. And so, this person that I reported to said, "This is what we thing, this is what we find. We feel it is better to have our own spot. We are going to buy Ms. Baker's hamburger place on the corner and take that whole corner." And he said it would be a better place, a better building, da da da. And so, you know, we made our little pitch - we think that this is a good option, support community ownership and that. And Mark Shapiro was the person chairing the meeting. The one thing about corporate committees is that the highest ranking person in the room makes

the decision. It is not like a democracy and you vote. The phone rang. He left the room to take the call. And so, the group voted 7 to 2 or whatever it was to get Ms. Baker's site and build their own building like Fifty Ward. And so, Mark Shapiro came back into the room. So, this guy reported, "We have taken a vote and the vote is . . . this is what it is." And he just said, "Well, ladies and gentleman, we are going to go into the existing building and we are going to be a tenant there like we are in other places. And we are going to facilitate community ownership. Appreciate your time. Thank you very much." He got up and left. I mean, that was Mark Shapiro, because he was committed to facilitating ownership and knew the role that the bank could play in that. And it didn't hurt that as a kid, he lived on Southmore. That didn't hurt. He was not afraid to go into the community and he was not afraid of that area and knew that that was going to be a successful site. If you put a bank in a five story billboard which is what that building is, it is a billboard. It is tall, it is obvious. Great thing to show examiners. Great demonstration of community support. So, it made all the difference in the world. And that is how it came about.

JRW: What a story.

ASD: And that's why they own the building.

JRW: What a story.

ASD: And we did the loan for that group.

JRW: What a story. You have also been involved in other community development projects including HEB, OST development project and all. You have a 12:30 meeting or

something.

ASD: I have to pick up a young lady at 12.

JRW: Are you still with the bank now?

ASD: No.

JRW: When did you leave the bank?

ASD: As a part of my preparation for retirement, you were allowed to retire at age 55. The bank entered into an agreement with me to allow me to serve as a loan executive to the Lawson Institute. That wasn't even my idea. I don't need to take credit for that. But the guy that I worked for knew my relationship with Reverend Lawson when Lawson had been on the board, ministerial advisory board for Chase New York - I got to know them very well. I got to know them a lot better than really I wanted to know them because of some other issues that didn't involve me but he said, "Well, Algenita, you like working for him, why don't you just go work for him until you turn 55? That is all you need, you just want to be here to you get 55?" I said, "Yes, then I can quote-unquote retire," and find other things to do. And so, they entered into an agreement and they paid me and I came to work here. And at the end of that, 9 or 10 months or so . . . it is almost 1 year - I have been here a year. Then, that was it and I was "technically in retirement."

JRW: God likes you! He loves all of us. That is fundamental. He doesn't have to like all of us. But you can tell the folks that he likes.

ASD: He came up with a good idea. It was .....before you got to that point but ...

months? He said months and I was like....

Tape 4

ASD: My responsibilities with the Lawson Institute . . .

JRW: What were your responsibilities with the bank?

ASD: Under the loan executive committee, to assist the Institute in community development, facilitating affordable housing, providing community services in the southeastern parts of Houston. It was just that general description.

JRW: And so then your function was as liaison between the banking institution and this institution?

ASD: No. There was so little work for this institution. I literally shut down, packed up, left the bank totally. I was out. And then, my responsibility here was to . . . I would send them a letter from time to time to let them know what we were doing. Primarily because of Chase's support of this organization, as Chase modified itself with the merger, they had a lot of excess furniture, a lot of excess things and because I had worked with our facilities in the real estate area and knew those folks well, they would call up and say we have this and we have that. "Send it." I sent stuff off to the senior housing project. Big conference tables. We had a big conference table over at Wheeler.

JRW: You are still on their payroll? They were paying your salary?

ASD: I was on their payroll during that time, that year, until October of 2005. And so,

in October of 2005, loan executive . . . and banks do that all the time - loan executives. I know they have done it with a couple of people that I knew who were at Chase. And they would send you out and you, a lot of times, had to go to positions and they come back in and do whatever they want to do. Or for my position, I wanted out. That was the best parting gift I could possibly have come up with. And I wanted the designation of retirement because you get certain advantages and privileges as a retiree.

JRW: Yes, you are still part of the family.

ASD: Yes, and you get the right to come back in and participate in the group health insurance - those kinds of things. And in the meantime, I had gone to Texas Southern University to see what I could do for them because I really, really wanted to teach and I was hired by the School of Business. So, I did that for this past year.

JRW: Do you enjoy teaching? Do you enjoy the classroom?

ASD: Yes. That is just . . . I mean, I come in here every day with stories "my students said this, my students said that."

JRW: It is my passion.

ASD: It's just so wonderful. It is really good. I enjoy it -- the students and what they bring in, what you learn from them and that kind of thing. My commitment to the university and to its special purpose and special need and openness, and open admissions process is extremely important and there's a tremendous role for, I think, people like me to play who do not have those Ph.D. designations because, number one, I speak the same language that most of the people do as my native tongue and so I think that is good that

students can hear that and that is what the corporation expects. And in many of the situations that there are the Ph.D.s you are not getting from them the corporate experience because they haven't had it.

JRW: That's right. Never left academia. High school, college to college.

ASD: And the students need to hear from people who have been involved in the public environment.

JRW: Yes, that is why I am so pleased for myself being in the classroom that I have not been in academia for 30 years and you can really tell people who have been in academia for 30 years. Much of their stuff is based on theory and it also can get stale and they have lived this kind of isolated existence. I think students appreciate the energy, they appreciate the difference between someone who has not been in academia their entire life since kindergarten and someone who comes into academia from the "outside." It is just a whole different energy and I think for those who do come from the outside, it is because one wants to and you bring a lifetime of experiences and insights and stories to tell. Not theories, not all this stuff out of the book but it is kind of like that movie that Rodney Dangerfield was in. He was a well-to-do businessman who went back to college, you know, and the professor was being all senatorial with his bow tie and so Rodney Dangerfield as the lifelong businessman . . . no, you just pay the inspector and then you do this and this and this. So, I know for myself, it is a great deal of joy for me to teach and to pull their coat tails. Put their coat tails and tell them what is not in the book in which you have to have existed and experienced on the outside in order to pull their

components.

ASD: A book will say, this is how you do a proposal. A book will say, here are the component parts. The book will say, these are the subject matters. The book will not say, and you need to find out when the proposals are going to be issued because you have to be connected to the public entity of the corporation, you've got to find out who within the organization is responsible for evaluating it. You have to find out who is the connecting person making the decision on that particular proposal to get it accepted. Even if you are an entrepreneur, you are selling yourself. You have got to be a sales person. You have to be a sales person whether you are in the corporation, outside the corporation entrepreneur. They don't even have the sales program at Texas Southern University and that is extremely critical that you have to be able to sell yourself, you have to be able to stand up on your two feet and talk your way into environments and it is not all substance. It is more knowing how to sell.

JRW: You have got to sell you first . . .

ASD: Building confidence, making the person comfortable with you and have advanced communication skills. They need to know that. They need to know how to interview. They need to know what a real interview is like. They need to know computers and filing stuff electronically and all that is just big, big roadblocks for our kids in getting through the process. You have got to try to figure out how the networking piece is going to play. If a part of that interview is writing, you have to write. They're not teaching kids how to diagram sentences. How do they know what to write? How do they know subject, verbs

... they don't.....

JRW: And so, they end up writing as the speak not formal academic writing or standard American English but simply vernacular English and then wonder why . . . as a matter of fact, there is a guy, he wasn't able to make it through the Ph.D. program. They were real... every time he submitted his dissertation, it was kind of like he was at U of H but he had gotten his masters elsewhere and that he just didn't know, hadn't been taught how to write, which is really what the masters process is. It is learning how to apply those skills you learned in undergrad that you are supposed to have learned in undergrad. What did you teach specifically?

ASD: Advanced communication skills. Basic writing. Memorandum letter writing. Proposal writing. Interviews. Resumes. Those kinds of things. Persuasives. Speeches, presentations, board presentations, power point, those kinds of things that we never had back in the day. And that is what I always say - I never knew that you were supposed to make these presentations. I never knew that what you did counted on your ability to present. Within the corporate environment, that is the way it is done. It is where the meeting is at - how to conduct a meeting, how to develop an agenda, how to run a meeting, how to make a motion. Everything was a motion with them. You move. We voted on the topic or persuasive. Demanding voluntary involvement. Demanding the set up and speak.

JRW: Is this a graduate course?

ASD: It is undergrad. I had 148 students. Business law, of course, I really enjoy

because it goes through the different aspects of the law. You know, when we got to the court system, I brought in Zinetta. When we got to bankruptcy law, I brought in Nelson to tell them about bankruptcy. You've got the criminal law and the different amendments and all that I brought in a career criminal, somebody who'd been to jail three times. So he could say "when you say like, knock-knock, and you say come in - you have waived your fourth amendment rights." That is what it would take - somebody who could say, this will never do. You can't go in the drug business.... Those kinds of specific things. Because it has to be real, and it has to be brought to them in a real fashion. Negotiable instruments, check writing, financial education, those kinds of things. I mean, I could do that 29 - 30 hours. I could do that all day.

JRW: And it is interesting that they will stay there .... when you got it going.

ASD: That was a real criminal..... they were there for another 30 or 40 minutes. Because they were like what about this, what about this?

JRW: So, are you still teaching for the fall?

ASD: That was last year.

JRW: So now, here at the . . .

ASD: So, here, my roles and responsibilities from answering the phone to assisting with our guests, assisting with our senior housing project which now we are at a crossroads and trying to make some decisions if people come in and a lawsuit gets involved, whatever, then we are all involved in whatever. Then we're all involved in what ever. Our big thing now, we are working on it and we'll be calling you, is our fund raising

effort. We are doing a major fund raise in October. So, we will be involved in that and whatever it takes for the boys school. And that is our real goal, to raise the money for the boys school. I have a project that I am putting together called Men Making Men and I think if we get enough of men to commit to support in the school and the board . . . they need to see the men. They need to see men who are involved in different aspects and to really get a feel for that and to see that you gotta' stay in school. It would help us with our fundraising, it would help us with marketing the school if we get you committed and do that and we are trying to get that going for next semester. It probably will be mid to late August or even early September before we start calling on people to try to . . . so that is basically what I am doing, what ever it takes.

JRW: Are you enjoying it at this point in life?

ASD: Oh, yes. This is like vacation. This is a vacation. And the Lawsons are very supportive of me. They help out dollar wise so that is good. And they can not afford to do that, they can not afford to keep the doors open. But they are doing this out of their pockets. People don't realize that. They think well you just set up the place and money comes in and that is good as long as you got Ken Lays around but you turn one of them to ashes and you've got to start all over again, build more relationships, get more folks to support this kind of thing. So, that is what we do.

JRW: Well, I thank you for your time. I went just as I had hoped it would. Four whole tapes and also there are other stories that lie within this story, I think particularly when you spoke about Barbara Jordan and the banking system and all. There is a whole story

there. One of the things that comes out of these interviews as well that our program is and Joe Pratt who is my mentor, Professor Pratt, my mentor, chairman of my dissertation committee and also who . . . we have the *Houston Review Journal* . . .

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