

ODIS O. RHODES

Interview 232b

2001, at his home, Lufkin, Texas

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with R.L. Kuykendall, Dr. Odis Rhodes speaks about growing up in Lufkin after moving from rural Nacogdoches county, attending Dunbar during segregation, and living through the World War II years. He describes the primitive plumbing conditions in his neighborhoods growing up and recalls the first indoor plumbing and washing machine in his family. He recalls his early teaching career and Brandon and Garrett and Dunbar, Lufkin's African American schools before and during desegregation and the issues that surrounded integration of the schools, hospitals, and parks. He talks about Jones Park, Dr. Packard and Dr. Allen, and the beginnings of new black neighborhoods once the local foundries began facilitating borrowing at local banks for their African American employees. Dr. Rhodes talks about his predictions for the future, which include a continued struggle for equality and more difficulties between the races.

R. L. Kuykendall (hereafter RLK): 2001 we are continuing the conversation with Dr. Rhodes at his home. Dr. Rhodes I would like for you to give me a little more information concerning the neighborhood you have lived in and the kind of things you experienced in those neighborhoods. Just run it down to me as best as you can.

Odis O. Rhodes (hereafter OR): Well basically I lived in three neighborhoods. In growing up here in Lufkin I lived in I would say basically three neighborhoods. Two of them were very comparable so, when you talk about one you virtually cover the other. The first neighborhood was on North Raguet Street just about two or three doors down from the old New Zion Church that existed on North Raguet Street at one time. The other one was what was known as Walker Quarters which was just behind the Raguet Street neighborhood and across the tracks. I guess to try to accurately more identify where the Walker Quarters were or was, it was almost directly behind the Congo Club behind the two railroad tracks behind there. They were quite comparable as I say. Building wise most of the homes were three room houses consisting of the living room which also served as the bedroom usually for the mom and dad. There was the kitchen which was also the eating place so there was no special provision made for dining. You were just forced to put your little table in the kitchen and eat there and then there was the bedroom where most of the kids slept or all of the kids slept. Even with large families they had to force themselves into those three rooms. There was virtually no inside plumbing at all, no bathrooms, no running water on the inside. There was usually an outside toilet and here again it was just a pit dug into the ground with a little shell built around it where you took care of your bodily needs there, and that toilet would usually serve three or four households. Then further down there would be another toilet which served another three or four more households. The same thing was true of your water. You had a water faucet in the yard and that one water faucet would also serve those three or four households. So,

you had no individual toilet, no individual water line, so your washing clothes was done outside. You bring your water in to wash your dishes in the dish pan or whatever and you would also bring your water inside to take your bath in the bedrooms usually. Basically that was the facilities. There was no gas at that time inside these houses. You usually had a wooden heater or you might have gotten a coal oil heater we called it or a kerosene heater but there was no gas line installed inside of these buildings. And there was a gentleman...I can't remember the fellow's name at the time but this was in the mid forties and early fifties and usually there was an old gentleman in the neighborhood with an old horse and a buggy or a wagon and he would go to the sawmill and pick up scrap lumber and he would sell this lumber to the households that had these wooden stoves and wooden heaters and what have you. Now I noticed one concern was when did I remember getting or having the first washing machine in my house because I didn't have one until I was grown and gone and had gone to college and finished and gone overseas and spent two years. When I came back, I was long married then, my wife and I got our first washing machine, probably about four or five years after we were married. So far as in our house growing up I think would be more appropriate to try to recall when I first had inside plumbing and that was when my dad and mom moved on the site where my mom and dad lived until their death on 901 G lenn Street. That was somewhere in the mid fifties I believe when we first got inside plumbing and boy we were really, as we say, in high cotton at the time, eating high on the hog you might say, because here the Rhodes have an inside toilet like everybody else on the street. But that was long after I had been in Lufkin. I was a junior I believe in high school when we finally got inside plumbing and we felt quite privileged to have something.

RLK: Dr. Rhodes let me just interrupt you. About this period of time when you seemed to move up into the world with inside plumbing and things of that nature what kind of work was your father doing that seemed to have led to that type of improvements? Obviously there was more money coming into the family with your mother working and all.

OR: My dad continued to work at this recap tire company which was now, this particular one was run by a fellow by the name of Mr. Williams. I forget his first name. Though you could buy new tires at this time, but the tire repair business was still a fairly new business so this fellow still continued to vulcanize as they would call it. Recap tires, vulcanize tires, patch tires as they would call it so my dad continued to work there for quite sometime until I believe the mid-seventies perhaps he began working at Lufkin Industries. He did make fairly good money at this tire company. It was one of the better paying jobs at this time other than the Papermill and the Foundry. He started working at Lufkin Industries in the mid-seventies and there he worked until he retired. He did do rather well. My mom worked very, very hard although she was just a maid you might say. She did domestic work all her life after she left the country, but she was very thrifty and very ambitious and very determined and made very good use of what she had. The people she worked for would often give her rather nice things so far as clothing and pieces of furniture and kitchenware and things of that sort. So, I suppose we were one of the more fortunate families during that time to have acquired and have given to us a number of things that many black households did not have at that particular time.

RLK: Let me ask you how well you can remember World War II. The kind of things that may have taken place that may have caused your family to live in a certain manner. What kind of problems existed for you? I know we all had those kind of problems and just didn't realize it and being in Lufkin?

OR: Because of the ration when World War II first began we were living in the country and it had such an impact on that small community. One because of the number of young fellows that went off to service that we knew about and then two the kinds of things they ask common citizens to do in order to aid the war effort. I can recall that they would have us to go through the woods and we would actually dismiss school on some occasions and go through the woods looking for scrap metal and bones of carcasses of dead animals. Because they took these bones we were told, and made soap and other kinds of goods from them. Of course the scrap metal was melted down and made into all kinds of tools and weapons of war and this kind of thing. So it had impacted and made quite an impression upon us and we, I think, were a little more appreciative of the more modernistic conveniences that existed in Lufkin when we moved to Lufkin than the people who had lived in Lufkin all the while. So, I think because of that kind of background and that kind of upbringing my mom and dad made a greater effort and I think were perhaps a little more appreciative and made greater efforts to improve themselves beyond the conditions from which we had come from I think in the country. Maybe some of the people who lived here all the while didn't realize what dire circumstances we are...if you want to say they were more advantaged than we were out there in the country perhaps didn't realize and didn't appreciate the fact as much as we did. I think that contributed to perhaps my mom and dad first making a greater effort to go beyond where we existed in the country and certainly instilled in me to make a greater effort to achieve more than trying to get away from the cotton fields. That was one of my primary motivating factors in pursuing a formal education because I said I would do anything in the world to avoid having to go back to chopping and picking cotton, pulling corn and digging potatoes and I saw education as being my way out. And my mom felt the same way and more than anyone else in my family she insisted that we kids stay in school and go and get a good education so we could better ourselves and we wouldn't have to live through the harsh conditions that she and her family had lived through and my dad had lived through.

RLK: I can remember as you speak of the war years and picking up scrap metal and we also had school dismissed early on certain days to do just that, picking scrap metal. And did you have I guess living in the country as such we had what we called Victory gardens in our backyards. This was also aided in growing fruits and vegetables that you probably could not have gotten because a lot of those things were being used for the war effort and for the soldiers. Candy and all those things they were not able to get. Can you speak in that frame?

OR: Well I guess we were just so accustomed to growing every conceivable thing under the sun in the garden in the first place. No special effort as I recall was made for growing certain things because we grew virtually everything anyhow. There were certainly

things... I can recall having to have the corn ground into meal more frequently because my granddad would usually just go to town once a week and you would just stock up on staples such as flour and corn and these kinds and corn meal and sugar and these kinds of things but now because of the scarcity of these items because of the war we found ourselves having to ground our own corn into meal rather than buying pre-ground corn meal. Some things like that even making sugar cane and we found ourselves trying to figure out ways to make granulated sugar from cane syrup that we had not attempted to do. I recall Granddad, I don't know exactly what he would do, but he would pour off the syrup prematurely or let it cook longer or something and it would tend to harden and crystallize and therefore he could take and beat it up into crystallized sugar whereas before the war years he would just simply make it into syrup and just buy sugar. You couldn't buy sugar when it was rationed. When you used that up that was it until you got some more stamps. And so he started trying to figure out a way to make sugar from the cane syrup that he always made every year anyway.

RLK: What about the gas in the area? Did it have an impact on the tractors and other...

OR: Well we had no tractor so, we had no car. (laughter) So, the gas shortage didn't affect us at all because we had absolutely nothing to use gas. The closest thing we got to travel was the old wagon and horses and that was it. That was our primary source of transportation. My dad never owned a wagon and horses but my granddad did so we always rode with him when we went someplace like church or town or whatever.

RLK: Did you see the war efforts affecting children in anyway, any particular way?

OR: The primary effect that I could see children would just be torn to pieces when their...well mostly their brothers because they seemed to avoid trying to induct dads into the service that already had children. Certainly if they had three or four kids, school age but they took many of the brothers. Of course in those days families stayed together until up teen years and you see kids just torn to pieces because they had never heard of places like Japan and Germany. That just seemed like in a totally different world out in outer space so they just assumed they would never see their brothers or uncles or sons. Mothers were having their sons taken away and sent over and it was just like they were going to another world and we will never see them again. That is just the perception of the world we had at that time. We thought right around here and we get to go to Nacogdoches city from the country that was a whole...and you talk about going to Lufkin that was way down there. And now they are talking about going to New Jersey and California and Germany. That is in another world. That is outer space somewhere so they were never going to get back here again. So you found people in absolutely terror and awe that their sons and brothers and uncles were being sent away and never seen anymore. Not thinking that they would actually be killed just that they were going so far away they would never get back home anymore. That is just the way the world seemed.

RLK: Can you remember anyone whom you knew who was killed in World War II?

OR: Not from the country. I don't recall anybody from out in the country getting killed in World War II. I guess most of the war deaths that I can really recall happened during the Korean War or Vietnam. I can't recall any of the soldiers from around Nacogdoches County or none from Lufkin actually getting killed during World War II. I am sure there were some. Now it seemed that when I got to Lufkin and attending Dunbar I heard that some ex-Dunbar student had been killed during World War II. I really didn't know him because I think he came here in '44 and the war was just ended. Wasn't it '45 when it ended?

RLK: Yes, it ended in '45.

OR: It ended in '45 because I can remember on D-Day all the sirens and horns and cars honking and planes. I can remember all of that so that occurred after I was here.

RLK: D-Day and VJ-Day.

OR: VJ Day, yes.

RLK: Victory in Europe and Victory in Japan.

OR: Right, right.

RLK: Am I telling my age? My brother told me these things.

OR: I know you wouldn't know nothing about that. (laughter) But there were a number of veterans from World War II who came back to Dunbar and finished their education after they had put in their tours of duty during World War II. This was a time when there was no age limit as to when you could finish high school or when you stopped playing athletics. I can remember Dunbar had a tremendous football team in 1945 and about half the team was comprised of veterans that had returned from World War II.

RLK: Talk a little more about that.

OR: Well they were encouraged if they didn't finish high school before going into service they were encouraged to come back and finish up their high school education. Those that didn't want to finish their high school education they provided trade school for them. I can recall the old Carver School just along where Timberland Drive is now they had an old George Washington Carver School there. They would hold night school for these veterans to teach them a viable trade and those that wanted to actually go back to high school they could go back and finish up and get their high school diploma. And quite a few of them did. There was no restriction on a age to participate in high school athletics – you had some twenty-two and twenty-three year old guys coming back here participating and competing against fifteen and sixteen year old kids and virtually crushing them. So, Dunbar won the district championship with ease that year and I think went to the final state playoff. But unfortunately they didn't win the state and the next

year I think is when they set the age limit to high school participation, participation in high school athletics.

RLK: This was before we knew what we call Interscholastic League in the black school setting.

OR: Right, this is all black. At that time I think they called it Prairie View League or something like that at that time. Prairie View pretty much wrote the guidelines for the black schools and the black athletic programs in Texas. That was basically it and this governed all the black schools until integration took place years later. As I reflected over some of the items of interest that were listed on the list here, healthcare for instance, I can recall back in the forties and fifties that they would only take blacks into hospitals, and here in Nacogdoches County and Angelina County as well, the administration health system would not take black patients except they would have to stay in the hallway. They would not give them a room. They did not have a ward for them at that time. They would only allow them in...and black physicians could not practice in the hospitals. They would not...

RLK: What year is this?

OR: We are still talking about nineteen...mid-forties and early fifties. I remember Dr. Packard who was the black physician. I understand Dr. Stewart and maybe another black physician had preceded Dr. Packard. When I came to Lufkin Dr. Packard was the only black physician here and the patients that had to be referred to the hospital he had to refer them to a white doctor because they would not allow Dr. Packard to follow his patients into the hospital and treat them. I believe this practice was broken under Dr. Allen. I think he was the first black physician that was allowed to actually practice medicine in the hospitals here.

RLK: When did Dr. Allen come?

OR: I am not certain of the year that Dr. Allen came here but it must have been in the sixties because I was teaching in Lufkin at that time. I was teaching at Brandon or was principal at Garrett, one of the two and I went to Garrett in '64, so it was in the mid sixties. I am almost certain that he was the first black allowed to practice blacks at the hospital. So, medical care was not good but of course it was during that time that doctors did make house calls. Even a white doctor would make house calls at black homes but of course it would be at their chosen time I guess or any home would be their chosen time but it was very difficult to get a white physician to visit a black home to tend to the patient. They would see black patients. They had a segregated waiting room at that time. Some of them would see them, not all white doctors would even see black patients but there were some that would see black patients. But of course some were segregated and that existed for a long while even after integration had been mandated by the courts. I recall many physicians' offices still remained segregated. You could go see them but you still had to sit in the segregated office, I mean waiting room. Hopefully all of that has dissipated at this time. You can see virtually any doctor you want and anybody can practice medicine in the hospital regardless of color.

RLK: Were there any compared to the whites, statements or any feelings expressed at the time?

OR: Very seldom!

RLK: In light of that, what were the white doctors' attitudes toward a particular person while he was treating him? Anybody else say anything about what a fellow's medicine should have been or medical attitude or something?

OR: There were two or three white doctors I can remember most blacks referred to and they usually would request those two or three white doctors. I could call one or two names but for fear I would miss somebody I won't call them. But usually when you ask a black person who was his doctor if it was not Dr. Packard, if it was not the black doctor you usually heard two or three names and that was it. Those persons usually give fairly good care to the black patients because they chose to treat black patients where others chose not to treat them at all. So, you did have some white physicians that did show compassion and concern for black patients but very few of them. And even they had limitations because the system would not permit them to place their black patients say in a private room or even in a non private room. They had to place their patients in hallways at that time. So, they couldn't get the best of care because the best facilities were not there in the hallways.

RLK: Let me ask you then being in the hallways, visiting times for these black patients, would relatives stand in the hallways as they came in, loved ones at any given times because you didn't have rooms for them?

OR: I don't recall any restrictions being placed on visiting your relatives and loved ones.

RLK: But it had to be in the same hallway?

OR: But it had to be in that same hallway. I can recall when a big stir came up in Lufkin about the inability of black physicians to treat patients and utilize the facilities at the hospital. I can recall the Citizen Chamber of Commerce making a stir about that. I can't recall what year it was. I think it was during Dr. Packard's tenure. It is possible that the later part of Dr. Packard's tenure it is possible he was seeing patients in the hospital. That would have been in the late fifties and early sixties because it was before Dr. Allen came. Dr. Packard passed before then. It seems to me that the Citizens Chamber of Commerce made such a stir about not allowing black doctors to treat patients in the hospital it seems to me along about the later part of the fifties or early sixties the hospital finally relented and allowed Dr. Packard I believe to see patients at the hospital. So, it could have been during Dr. Packard's later years that he was permitted to treat patients in the hospital.

RLK: Is it possible the Citizen Chamber came up about that period of time? Had it been around for some period of time?

OR: Yes, the Citizen Chamber has been around for...I think it was called the Negro Chamber of Commerce. I think later on it took the name Citizen Chamber but the Negro Chamber of Commerce has been around for quite some time. It was the primary black organization other than your churches but even your churches didn't speak out very much at that time.

RLK: Can you remember the kinds of things the Citizen Chamber may have helped with other than what you are speaking about here?

OR: Well they tried to get some housing going. As a matter of fact I think the Citizen Chamber was instrumental in getting the first...well I won't say the first houses, company houses, because there were two or three families living on what was known as Smith Hill. When I was in high school there was very few but I believe Lufkin Industries or Texas Foundry allocated some funds for some of their employees to build some houses here at that time was Garner Street, the next street over here. That was back in the...I believe that was in the sixties, mid sixties that one of the foundries, I want to say Texas Foundry, it could have been both because the neighbor right across the street, that is the manner in which he got his house and he worked at Lufkin Industries. So, it could have been both foundries but I'm sure one of them. They provided some funds for their employees, their black employees, I'm not sure the whites too but the whites perhaps were getting employee benefits that they could get down payments or they would make the down payments on their homes and they could take over the notes. Until that effort was made it was very difficult for blacks to get homes because they didn't have that up-front money that was required to get a loan or the down payment or whatever.

RLK: Was Smith Hill the only area that this was going on?

OR: This was where it began to the best of my knowledge. This is where the companies first began making provisions for their black employees to purchase homes. Now later on I understand there have been other ventures like this off of other companies but this was the first time it was done. It was tremendous!

RLK: Yes, yes.

OR: After they saw that blacks could be dependable and a beneficial borrower, you might say, then the banks began acting more favorably toward other black applicants for home loans and I would say it was primarily because of the effort that was made here for many of the blacks ended up with good track records as being good payment. Then the community realized that hey here is some untapped resources we can use here for not only bettering our city but also bettering the bottom line at our bank so, they kind of opened up the purse strings after that.

RLK: It was indicated that blacks do want something.

OR: Yes, they do want a better way of life. They do want homes. They do place a value on having nice things and decent neighborhoods. I think for a long while they didn't perceive us in that way.

RLK: Do you know if there was any outcry as to why based on the facts that some were making this possible for their employees to receive this in the papers that someone might have been opposed to them doing it? Not that they could do anything about it but just being vocal about it?

OR: I can't recall any opposition being expressed. I think everybody saw it as a win, win situation since the lending institution knew that their money was guaranteed so to speak. Especially that seed money. They weren't going to complain because here we got some seed money coming in here from these industries and I suppose they felt certain if the employees fell down on the payments that the industry probably would have stepped in and picked up the tab. This perhaps was the mindset of the lending institution so they felt it was a win, win situation so, how can we complain about that.

RLK: So, I guess you are also including possibly that the citizenry had no complaints about what was being done?

OR: It might have been a little envy. I don't think it was necessary complaints but they began wondering why couldn't I be fortunate to get some kind of deal like this. I think they more or less...envy might not be the appropriate word, maybe admiring their favorable situation they just happen to be working for this industry that was making these provisions so, why couldn't I be working for some of them. I suspect a lot of the employees began seeking employment there because of this.

RLK: The majority group, and we must call it by comparison the minority group, they each were working at the time but to your knowledge was the same kind of thing being offered in the city to those in the majority group?

OR: I am not certain since there were virtually no communication across racial lines at that time. I hardly knew what was going on in the white community.

RLK: Okay.

OR: As a matter of fact after integration or desegregation took place I was absolutely awestruck to realize some of the things going on in white communities all these many years and we have never even heard of any such thing in the black community. I'm not sure what was going on over there. I am almost certain that if they did it for their black employees they certainly had already been doing it for their white or they certainly offered it to them at that same time or else we would have heard some complaints.

RLK: Yes, this is what I was asking. Maybe it is good or okay to make the assumption that when this happened it was good to see it was already going on across town.

OR: It had already been going on across town. No doubt it already had been, absolutely.

RLK: I am sure there would have been something very vocal and maybe some action at the same time those the majority take it on their own they start getting in trucks to start doing things to destroy the next person.

OR: Absolutely because even now when they acknowledge that there were traumatic and dramatic negative effects on the black race because of past discrimination but even now with the affirmative action you see how they are screaming and hollering about affirmative action. Even though yes, but for generations and centuries we segregated against you and we denied you your basic rights and denied you your constitution. No you couldn't even hold certain jobs for a hundred years but now you got them and they gave you preferential treatment for the last ten years and that is enough. We are sick of this. So, you know they would have raised their voices to the high heavens back there if they felt that something was being done for blacks that was not being done for whites when even now after acknowledging it for years and generations of segregation they still raise their voice to heights when they feel that blacks are getting a little better break than they are.

RLK: You know, you say that I thought I would mention affirmative action. I know when I was in service and in the Navy and the terminology that was used in the Navy and different parts of the services there was a terminology that was fitting to that particular service and so forth but we had in announcement we used affirmative or negative. Affirmative meaning yes and we think of yes as meaning right. Negative as meaning no meaning no, wrong! And since you mentioned the word affirmative action and we didn't coin that word.

OR: No we didn't.

RLK: Okay, then to me and you can tell me since we are talking about these terms how you feel but affirmative action says we have been doing something negative, something wrong, let's become affirmative in our doings so now we are doing something right. On the other hand there are groups of people who say that affirmative action is wrong so then right becomes wrong. And, spiritually speaking I think we speak where in the scriptures where it speaks to where a man today begins to try to make right things wrong and wrong things right. So, we are seeing this being played out in attitudes of the people and how we...well we can't live together because of changing things around. I just thought I would say something about that in terms of the fact that you had mentioned the word affirmative there.

OR: I think the people that use this term affirmative action to conjure up all kind of special treatment for blacks and minorities and all kinds of set asides and all kinds of quotas and these kinds of things, these are simply those people that oppose equal opportunity for blacks and other minorities period. Because if they would actually read the concept of the actual meaning of affirmative action as it was intended originally it simply means as you say it, we will take some positive action to try to help to right the wrongs that we committed for all of these many years. We will not simply say we will

remove the obstacles to integration we remove the obstacles to a simulation. We will take down these barriers that we had setting up here for 200...we will take the barriers down. So, rather than just say we have taken the barriers down we are going to take some affirmative action to try to help rectify some of those wrongs that we did. It doesn't say we are going to put 20% here and 10% of this and then we are going to give this. It doesn't say that at all. It simply says we will attempt to take some affirmative positive action to try to help to correct these wrongs that we imposed upon these people for 200 years. Basically that is all affirmative...rather than sitting here waiting for them to come and say, "Can I now become a police, can I now become a superintendent?" they said, we will go out and invite them. "Hey we have a program going, we would love to have some of you become." We will take affirmative action, we will take a positive action, we will seek to pull them in rather than just say, "Well we taken the gate down if you want to come in come on in." And, that is really basically what it means but these people who are opposed to equal opportunity for everybody period they will come up and try to convince you that affirmative action means quota for a black. You got to have this and this or they are going to step over qualified white people. It doesn't mean that at all. It simply means we will take some positive or affirmative action to correct some of these wrongs that we heaped on you for 200 years. That is all.

RLK: You mentioned another word that I don't want to take your point away...

OR: No, no.

RLK: ...but hearing you talk about it, it's something we can think about and somebody listens to our taping they are going to think about it too. You used another word and the word is quota, and I've heard this statement before about quota. I can distinctly remember a few years ago, I don't know if it was a newspaper relating to quota, someone had done a name thing as having quota's for this as you pointed out. But I went back to my old eighth grade, I taught eighth grade a lot and I remembered that the United States set quotas for those coming from overseas into this country and then they said these kind of people with these skills are the ones we want to bring.

OR: We want to reach out for. We are going to apply affirmative action for these people.

RLK: See the word is changed when you have a person very vocal and I must say who has money attached to their being vocal and you can get out something else needs but they weren't met before.

OR: Absolutely. Usually my response to these people who argue that affirmative action simply means quotas in the United States cannot allow quotas and my first response is I don't know when you stopped allowing quotas you have used them ever since the existence of the United States because thirty years ago before even the concept of affirmative action was thought of you were using quotas. Because you were saying here are certain jobs that absolutely zero blacks could get in. That is quota. You said here's some jobs and in order to hold this job you must be a white male. That is a quota. I mean

there were certain jobs blacks could not hold because you had set certain requirements. That is a quota.

RLK: That was supposed to mean not that they couldn't do it, that wasn't a quota they didn't know how to do this. Just tell me some more things that you can talk about.

OR: I am not even sure what that is. I guess we have just about...well let's look at the future since my eyes dropped on that. I guess that should be at the end and maybe we are about at the end with these sessions. We talked about the kind of entertainment and what kind of activities and we talked about the activities that were available to us here in Lufkin, about Jones Lake Park.

RLK: Can you tell me anything about Jones Lake before it became a lake for blacks?

OR: Well Jones Lake was an all white lake park at one time and when blacks began to occupy more and more territory on North Lufkin around Jones Lake and when blacks began requesting and even after 1954, I believe that is when the Supreme court said you must begin to desegregate...

RLK: Yes.

OR: ...then I think the dominate society starting looking around and trying to identify what was it that they could give to the blacks to pacify them so they would stay in their own neighborhoods. And, I think they decided Jones Lake because kids had started requesting going to these other parks, Winston, Winston Park.

RLK: Are these black kids?

OR: Yes, these are black kids started wanting to go to Winston Park and wanted to go swimming at this other park down here.

RLK: Kiwanis Park?

OR: Kiwanis, no the other one behind Lufkin Industries back there.

RLK: I know the one you are speaking of.

OR: Anyhow, they said well what can we do to keep them over there. Hey, let's give them Jones Lake. I think that is what motivated them to give Jones Lake. Well when they first gave us Jones Lake there was no swimming pool there. We had to swim in the lake itself.

RLK: Oh okay!

OR: This one the young blacks started wanting to go swimming in these other parks that had swimming pools. Then they said well let's build them a swimming pool. And, so they

built the swimming pool. This must have been in the early sixties because here again I was teaching in Lufkin at that time and I think I started teaching in '59 or '60. Somewhere like that. And that is when they built the swimming pool and it was primarily to pacify the blacks and persuade them to stay in your own community. Don't be coming across over here and the same was true about Dunbar School. We had been needing a school for years. The old dilapidated stucco school that was on League Street totally inadequate but there was no pressure put on until the Supreme Court started mandating that we had to tear down the walls of segregation. So they decided we better give them blacks a new school so they decided to give us a new Dunbar. At first they debated about putting them over there where the area where Dunbar Addition is, where you live now. They talked about building a school there on that little knoll and making a beautiful school. Then they decided no that would put it in close proximity to too many white kids and make it too pretty it might be too inviting let's put it under the hill.

RLK: Wasn't the garbage thing down farther between?

OR: Yes it was further on out.

RLK: You got the zoo on out.

OR: Past the zoo.

RLK: Past the zoo, okay. I was told that the property was cheaper as compared to the cost of the addition.

OR: Well I'm sure it was cheaper.

RLK: It stands to reason that you are close to the garbage dump.

OR: It's going to be cheaper. (laughter) You are right. I think economics perhaps played a part in it and also the social issue played a part in it. They wanted to isolate Dunbar far away from the mainstream as they could. So, how far can we go, down under the hill far away.

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OR: We had also been requesting a gymnasium. The old Dunbar never had a gym. There were other little schools Chester, Oak Ridge, several schools in poor communities had gymnasiums. Dunbar never had one. So, now they are going to build us this new school and beautiful gymnasium. They just knew this was quieting us down and we would be satisfied to stay over here on this side of down under the hill. A nice gesture but by that time the Supreme Court was not only mandating that you tear down the walls of segregation but you must integrate with deliberate speed. So, even building a new school didn't keep the blacks segregated.

RLK: Didn't appease them.

OR: Didn't appease them, that's right. I can recall when we were on top of the hill here at the old Dunbar we requested to use the gymnasium at Lufkin High School when it was over here over on Raguet Street. They played their basketball games I believe on Monday's and Wednesdays, something like that. Anyhow, we were going to choose the nights when they did not play their games and we could use the gymnasium. They wouldn't allow that, didn't want us using it.

RLK: Same independent school district.

OR: Same independent school district educating kids in the same district. Providing equal opportunity for all! (laughter) But, we are not going to build you a gymnasium and you can't use ours. You can play out there in the cold. I can recall on a couple of occasions it was so cold playing out that we had to play in shifts. We literally played basketball in shifts. One would go out and play about five or ten minutes until everybody froze to death.

RLK: Where were the others?

OR: They were inside getting warm and then they would run out there and play for five or ten minutes until they were about froze to death and then they would come back and warm up and thaw out and we would run back out there.

RLK: Well let me just ask this, suppose or did it ever occur where maybe the opposing team did not have that many players on the team, they could have at least ten.

OR: Well that is possible. That never occurred to anybody because I guess most teams at that time had at least 10 basketball players.

RLK: Good or bad huh?

OR: Good or bad, they could have ten bodies out there somehow. I tell you one night we had to even use our trainer because one boy got hurt and we didn't have but ten. He said "boy you go out there." It is funny now as some old comic says it was funny now but it was rough then.

RLK: I was about to say we can laugh about.

OD: We can laugh about it now but it was rough then. But, those are the kind of circumstances we came through. Dunbar opened its doors must have been in the fall of fifty because I finished the spring of fifty and the next class finished from Dunbar in '51 so they must have entered the new facility in the fall of fifty. Then the first graduating class was in '51 that next spring. Anyway I never got to attend the new Dunbar because I finished the year before it opened up. But, they made for and provided a lot more

provisions at the new Dunbar because they were trying to persuade kids to stay at the Dunbar campus.

RLK: Let me ask you this, I know you have somewhere among your possessions the clippings from the newspaper speaking to the grand opening of Dunbar.

OD: Unfortunately I don't because I was not here when the grand opening occurred. I was off in college.

RLK: Do you know if anything was done? Can you remember if anybody said anything that it was that important to the entire city that the newspaper would?

OD: I can't recall anybody talking about that so, and I don't remember seeing any headlines pertaining to that, so I have to think that maybe it didn't happen. (laughter) That never occurred to me "where are the headlines? Where are the newspaper clippings?" where they had the big grand opening showing off like they did over here.

RLK: School board members were here.

OD: School board members present and taking tours of campus and all that kind of thing. Surely somebody would have had some clippings if that happened because we do have clippings of the new high school opening over here and television cameras out and the whole nine yards.

RLK: There was something very similar, in a sense of speaking at the time would have done a similar thing as television does now and we had cameras and things of that nature.

OD: So, what do I see in the future society? I see a conglomerate of things.

RLK: Let me do this. Let me ask you if it would be...I don't want to use the word better, compare maybe the experiences you came through with things that are happening today and maybe that might answer the future through a comparative type thing.

OD: Well I think that is probably what I was about to elude to. There was one stretch of time when I really felt uplifted about the direction that America was headed and I guess that must have been somewhere in the late seventies maybe most of the eighties maybe. Because it appeared at one time that there was a strong consensus across all racial groups, even economic groups that this America must become one America where everybody truly is equal and everybody truly has an equal opportunity. We must try to understand and be tolerant of each other and accepting of those policies even though they might be different than what I prefer but so long as it's not adversely affecting me or adversely affecting society I must be tolerant of these things. I might not be able to accept them but some of these things I must tolerate. I must try to understand my brother or sister better on that other side or we must try to get together and have a meeting of the minds and find some common ground and I can see us kind of migrating in that direction. I'm not so sure

if I see that. It seems to me and this perhaps can be said for both sides or all sides. There are so many ethnical groups now it's hard to say other sides, but it almost boils down to white-black because most of the other ethnic groups are going to be identified either white or either black. They are trying to decide now what title it is and trying to decide what Colin Powell is now. They want to make him be an offspring of one of the kings or George the VIII or somebody because he shows a lot of ability and a lot of talent. They want to make Tiger Woods an Indian or...well anyway. So they are either going to place you in one of these groups I think conceptual of psychological wise or whatever and it seems that we have reached, I don't want to say a brick wall but maybe a plateau where on the parts of many whites they are saying enough is enough. We have gone far enough. We have allowed them to go as far as we can allow them to go. We cannot truly allow them to gain equal footing with us. We just...now they might not be saying that but in actions they are showing that. We want you to come so far. We know we can't revert back to where we were fifty or hundred years, we know that and we don't want you to go back that far because you can be more beneficial to us being as close to us as you are. But we don't want you to get up here and be sitting in seats of power and influence along beside of us. Maybe one or two of you every now and then but we don't want any droves of you coming over here. That is why every time they see these big contracts going out to these athletes and entertainers they try to look for some more perimeters to try to throw up to try to squeeze them back because if you get too many of these boys like Shaquael and Tiger Woods bringing these hundreds of millions of dollars every three or four years bringing in forty or fifty million dollars a year I don't care what kind of industry he is in or activity when you get enough money in America you got some influence and you got some power. I don't care what color you are.

RLK: That is true.

OR: They are afraid if we allow total equality, too many of these folks will be up here where we are and we don't want that. So, they begin to slow the wheels down a little bit and beginning to say, some are just open to say it, "Now you have gone far enough, they give you more breaks than they give me." "You have a better opportunity getting jobs than I do, you get more preferential treatment than I do. That is why you doing as well as you are. You are getting the breaks now and I'm not." So many of the whites are saying "put the brakes on, it's gone far enough."

RLK: So out of that you can build an outlook for the future in a matter of words.

OR: I think the future will see us continuing to make slow progress, slow from where we are right now. We are not going to make the rapid progress that we made from say from the 1960's or mid to late 1960's on through the '80's. We are not going to see that rapid progress. We are not going to see old raggedy barefoot boy here one day and then he is up here eight years later. We are going to see some grudgingly slow tedious grinding progress. It is going to be tougher and slower but we are not going to allow the wheels to completely stop. We are not going to allow the hands of the clock to be turned back. There are going to be some weights put on the hands of the clock. The hands are not going to move as fast as they want to. That is what I see. There will be slow steady

progress but it will be nothing like the progress we saw between say the mid sixties and the mid eighties. There is going to be more resistance from the dominant group to the progress that we do make. It's going to be subtle but that resistance is going to be there. They are going to look for other reasons other than the fact they are black for being our reason for slowing it down or not granting this or not granting that but it's going to be there. That is what I see in the future.

RLK: Well Dr. Rhodes we have come to about sixty minutes in the process. Our objective was to meet you at the times you could do it where you could feel free to speak. I do want you to know that I appreciate you for allowing me to visit with you and learn some of the things you know. Some of the things you experienced from a child up to your full growth in terms of age and things related. But also when I do these kind of things not being from Lufkin, coming here as a full grown adult, I have learned a lot about Lufkin. I see similarities in my growth where I grew up. We are not any different no matter where we are. It's a comparative type of thing. It doesn't say that one was better off than the other. The point is we have all kind of minds taking place doing bad things, good things but it's all related to one group so I've learned a lot speaking with you. I've talked to other people and I must say this I've never lived in another place this long. I didn't live at home but for 17 years and I've been here for 31 or 32 years. Still I don't know a lot about Lufkin. I wasn't here as it came through. I know more recent occurrences though. I do appreciate you allowing me to visit with you and learn things about you. I've told you this before, I highly respect you. No, you are not God. Yes, you are human, but I respect you a great deal and when I learned this respect was I think it was 1974 in the project for Leland and I heard you speak. I never had been doubtful of being proud of what I am but it's the way you delivered what you had to say. If I had ever not been proud of me being me that day was the first day I started. I still do that, I still think about you.

OR: Well, I appreciate those kind words.

RLK: Well it is true. I don't know if you've heard me say it before but I always...you mentioned it to me once before about...but anyway...it has to be to me. It has to be and the last job I had you had set something in motion before I got to Garrett. You left, you got there in '64 you said?

OR: Yes, in '64.

END OF INTERVIEW