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Edelbert Rodgers

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Yvonne Jones: Okay. Today is Wednesday, November 17th, 1999. I'm meeting with Dr. and Mrs. Edelbert Rodgers, Class of 1933 for the Dr. Edelbert Rodgers Minority Alumni Research Project for Illinois Wesleyan University. Dr. and Mrs. Rodgers, first of all, I would like to thank you for taking time out of your schedule for this very important project for the university, not just for the alumni but also for the future students of the university. So I wanna say thank you personally.

Virginia Rodgers: Thank you for coming, yeah thank you...[giggles]...

Jones: I – I want to start, first of all, by asking-

Dr. Edelbert Rodgers: -Not only that, but my daughter joins in this sort of thing. She thinks she had the top stool. She says she wants to know your address...

Jones: Okay, I'll leave a business card. I'll give you a business card.

Dr. Rodgers: Yeah...[giggles]... I will give you her address.

Jones: Okay. That would be nice.

Dr. Rodgers: Yeah.

Jones: What I'd like for us to do is pretty much to have a conversation and even with dialogue –with you Mrs. Roger. Mrs. Rodgers, you can talk about how life was in Illinois or wherever you decided to live after you got married, you know, right now we're talking about his experience of when he came to Illinois Wesleyan and when he left but then after that, okay? What I first of all would like to ask you is, Dr. Rodgers, is how did you decide to attend Illinois Wesleyan?

Dr. Rodgers: First of all, I came from a family where nobody had graduated. I found out later on ...[to Mrs. Rodgers] Just a minute. I found out later on that my mother had some distant cousins that didn't say very much to us but who had graduated. And in this book-

Jones: -When you say graduated, do you mean from college or from high school?

Dr. Rodgers: No, no, no, no, no. There is this book that I gave you... and I wanted to ... the – the – the book has to do with our kind of people. Have you seen it?

Jones: No.

Dr. Rodgers: By Lawrence O'Brien. It's a HarperCollins publication...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ...1999 and it has to do with the black middle class – he called it the upper class and I looked in that and I said, where on our lives see where mom had distant cousins were image-

Jones: -oh, okay...

Dr. Rodgers: - and I found out that some of her relatives who were in that had graduated from college. What I wanna be granted is that you have or haven't come from a very large family is people are gonna bother where you go. They don't want you to visit them too often.

Jones: Now how big was your immediate family?

Dr. Rodgers: When I left to go to college, about 6.

Jones: So you had 6 siblings or 5 siblings?

Mrs. Rodgers: No. No. There were 10 in his family.

Dr. Rodgers: Wait a minute! Her question is when I left to go to college – that's what her question is.

Jones: Right. So – but your total family, you – there were 10 of you?

Dr. Rodgers: It was 10. Yeah!

Jones: Oh, that's a big family. Now where were you originally from? Are you from St. Louis or...

Dr. Rodgers: My grand is from Mississippi and we came to St. Louis when I was 7 years old. And I always wanted to go to – in other words, I didn't say I want to go to college but I've always had an ambition that I wanted to live with a different kind of life. In other words, I didn't have any idea of what this doctor is talking about middle class and all. In other words, I wanted to do something more than what was going on around me.

Jones: Okay...okay... So you grew up in St. Louis.

Dr. Rodgers: I grew up in St. Louis.

Jones: Okay. All right. Well, how did you – when you went to high school, did you know that you wanted to go to school in St. Louis or out of St. Louis?

Dr. Rodgers: I'm – I knew that if I ... went to college I'll have to go outside of the State of Missouri because the State of Missouri had no... accredited college in the whole state.

Jones: Oh!

Dr. Rodgers: There was no accredited college-

Jones: ...Mm-hmm – okay, for black students... to attend?

Dr. Rodgers: I felt that I was black enough for her to understand...[to Mrs. Rodgers]...

Jones: No, but – but the viewers, who may not – they may not know that though.

Dr. Rodgers: Yeah, well, in – in another words, there was a... institute down there but there was no accredited college campus in State of Missouri.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: And ... all I knew was some fellows who had gone away to Iowa, or to Wisconsin or some place like that. But I didn't know anybody that – going to college. I didn't – I mean, there was no college for me and I knew that – and I knew that I'm gonna go to college some place.

Jones: Right. Well, how did you discover Illinois Wesleyan?

Dr. Rodgers: The best I can remember, I was always a member of the YMCA and the YMCA would have speakers to come in and they would talk and among the speakers that would talk was Alonzo Stagg who was the ... coach...the coach of Chicago – University of Chicago for many, many years and he's been an old time football player but the man that I was impressed with was Branch Ricky that discovered Jackie Robinson-

Jones: -oh!

Dr. Rodgers: - And Branch Ricky graduated from Ohio Wesleyan and he would talk and he would talk about ... playing baseball with a black fellow and how he wished to get out some on the St. Louis Cardinals...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ... and that was many years before Jacky Robinson came up in '47 and it – long before Jacky Robinson came up, you know. And I was impressed with that. One of the things that happened is that... in the city of St. Louis a lot of things were organized around the church-

Jones: -okay...

Dr. Rodgers: -and they had a rhetorical contest because I'll be in downtown... downtown which is not bourgeois and then at the western end, the churches were the same way – I was in a downtown church and, of course, they had a contest and a rhetorical contest and I'd read everybody from downtown and then, of course, right have to go up against a girl from the west end and that's where they bourgeois... and when I beat her, I got a enumeration a nice blue ribbon ... [giggles]... no money!

Jones: Oh! Just the honor?

Dr. Rodgers: So some of the guys that I had beaten when I hadn't got college scholarships and everything. I got a blue ribbon...

Jones: Were the – the gentleman that you beat, were they black or white or ...[overlapping]... all black-

Dr. Rodgers: -No! [overlapping] All black. All black. It's a black community.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And... I had an idea that one time that I may want to be a minister – they've been that kind of thing – a minister or a lawyer – those are two things that I had in mind...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ... and when I get ready to go to college, Wesleyan was one of the colleges that I've got up and Wesleyan was...were whether across the river and secondly, Illinois was a free state...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ... and Missouri was a ... slave state...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ...and Illinois got to be a lot better than Missouri.

Jones: Right. Well, now, just to expand on that, when you say it was a free state vs slave state, were you treated differently in Missouri compared to Illinois?

Dr. Rodgers: I've had been treated an awful lot worse in Illinois than I was in Missouri because in Missouri you lived in a black pocket...

Jones: Okay...

Dr. Rodgers: ... and you'd have to turn around and ask somebody whether you were being mistreated or not because I thought it was a normal way of life.

Jones: Right.

Dr. Rodgers: There was a lot of people over there but we would deal with them.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: I didn't know any but I assumed that Illinois was gonna be better.

Jones: Mm-hmm. When did you find out how different Illinois was and what was your first experience – negative experience I should say?

Dr. Rodgers: Well, when I got ready to go to college, she sat there with ten children and my father gave me the encouragement. He said, "I don't think you can make it," and I said, "I think I can." I think his idea was that stay there and help him with the ten children.

Jones: What – what did he do for living?

Dr. Rodgers: He – he was a butcher in a packing house.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And ... what happened was that as soon as I got out of high school. I had gone to high school and – and took a business course and along about the last year and a half, I decided I wanted to go to college and I took some college courses. I didn't take enough of them, which I found to be troublesome once I got to Illinois Wesleyan. You say, well, when did I know there was a difference. Well, when I was going to this ... evening meeting ... with YMCA, there was a fellow there, Mr. Lewis. And he took an interest me and they got me a job. They got me a job in a downtown YMCA, what they call was the pooler.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And what a pooler is really is a janitor. And I was a night janitor. And I was – I worked at night in this YMCA and I think I made \$18 a week. And I put in ... 3 weeks in a month. I put \$18 a month in the bank and the third month I gave it to my family, you know, to take care of them.

Jones: Right... right... now what year was this?

Dr. Rodgers: It was the year 1928.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And... I left that job and I got another job working in a drug store. Then I got a job working with Coca-Cola and so forth.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: When Illinois Wesleyan opened up, I took the money that I had and I got on the end of urban railroad. That was the interurban railroad that was the railroad around and in between Missouri and Illinois and all that side. And I went up there to enroll. I never forget that night. That's the first time I had ever ridden home...

Jones: -oh, really?

Dr. Rodgers: ...on this interurban and I'm on my way. But when I worked at the YMCA ... I bought a fabulous – two fabulous suits because it was some Englishman that got to stop in there and they got broke and they sold the suits and I bought them for \$5 a piece.

Jones: Hmm... Can't do that now...[giggles]

Dr. Rodgers: Well, I did it then.

Jones: Yeah.

Dr. Rodgers: ...because 5 dollars was 5 dollars.

Jones: That was a lot of money-

Dr. Rodgers: -yeah...

Jones: -yeah.

Dr. Rodgers: So when I got out in a middle of night and I woke again, it was the middle of night and I'm in Bloomington, IL and I've never been ridden to home before and there

I was and I asked somebody where I could stay and there had been a room in house open there – the rushes. And he took me to the rushes.

Jones: Right. It's a black family? Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: I can't – I've got everything in black-

Jones: ...[laughs]... No, you can't-

Dr. Rodgers: [overlapping] ... I call them white folks, so – but – but when I got to the rushes, when I got out with this fabulous suited clothes on that these Englishmen back then wearing, they thought I had money so they moved me up in one of the better rooms.

Jones: Oh!

Dr. Rodgers: ...[giggles]... You don't mean... [giggles]... and at the last minute did they find out that I had been out and I wanna eat, so they put me in a room on the second floor about the size—about the size of a bathroom...

Jones: Oh, god!

Dr. Rodgers: ... that's the one where I've stayed. Oh, no... no gosh ... I made it with them all right. I mean I didn't bother – they didn't bother me any way. I'm in college and I went to – I went to Illinois Wesleyan.

Jones: Now, were you the first in your family to go to college?

Dr. Rodgers: I'm the first in my immediate family to go to college. Yeah.

Jones: Okay. Now you mentioned before about the connection with – hearing the speakers at the YMCA. Was that how you heard about Illinois Wesleyan?

Dr. Rodgers: I heard Branch Ricky. He didn't talk about Illinois Wesleyan. He graduated from Ohio Wesleyan.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: So I said, okay, it's a good Methodist school, you know, and he talked about it so I go to Illinois Wesleyan. But I think if you look at the state of Illinois, you will find something... unusual – that – the vast majority of the counties in Illinois, there are no blacks at all. Are you aware of that? Or have you checked up on it?

Mrs. Rodgers: Well, you're talking about when you were there...

Jones: ...[overlapping]... you were there...

Dr. Rodgers: That's all I can talk about...[Jones laughs]

Mrs. Rodgers: Well, but -

Dr. Rodgers: -that's all I can talk about-

Mrs. Rodgers: Just a minute – but you make it sound as though it could be in the present.

Jones: Yes – it's different – a little different now.

Mrs. Rodgers: Yeah...

Dr. Rodgers: I've come to Illinois in 1928...

Jones: Right, while you're young.

Dr. Rodgers: So when I got to Illinois Wesleyan, I noticed a chill when I got there, I mean, it wasn't a big welcome, you know.

Jones: Now, did you – did you submit an application? Did they know you were coming?

Dr. Rodgers: I sent my 100 dollars.

Jones: Oh, so you sent the money.

Dr. Rodgers: Yeah.

Jones: Did you send in an application. I mean, did they have an application process or how were you admitted?

Dr. Rodgers: They gave me permit to enter.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: They sent me a permit to enter on a Friday rather than somebody who wanted to enter on a Saturday, so I end up at Wesleyan because I got the first amidst...[overlapping]

Jones: [overlapping] points. Okay. Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: I got the shock of my life when I had the first spiritual, I think it was Kappa...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ...and I sat on about the third seat and as far as you could see on the left of me, nobody sat and as far as you could see on the right of me, nobody sat. That wasn't a very good feeling... well, I went – I went on with that kind of image and I went to class and knowing like that... and...

Jones: When did you – you mentioned before that there were a couple of other black students with you.

Dr. Rodgers: Later on! I never felt them – that was in my class in the high school that I graduated from. Remember, the downtown high school that I graduated from. I was – that was a – I was in the first class to graduate from the Michon high school because they had one high school for all blacks in St. Louis – Summit high school. Then came Michon High School and I was in that first graduating class

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: Many years later, they had a Hall of Fame and I was the – elected to the Hall of Fame-

Jones: -oh!

Dr. Rodgers: -in Michon High School. I was so glad, about 10 years ago my brother who didn't go to college was elected to this hall of fame. I felt really good about it. And there have been some distinguished people who have graduated from that particular high school. But anyway one of the fellows from that high school decided to come to Illinois Wesleyan and he made it a lot better for me because at least I got a buddy.

Jones: Right.

Dr. Rodgers: And he came in, we stood up at the same band and everything else.

Jones: Do you remember his name?

Dr. Rodgers: Hmm?

Jones: His name...

Dr. Rodgers: Henry Barnebey.

Jones: Okay. Henry Barnebey.

Mrs. Jones: He is deceased man.

Jones: Right. Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: His experience was a little bit different. His parents were separated but they would together own the money. His mom had a job. His father had a job and they both sent him money.

Jones: Oh, that was nice.

Dr. Rodgers: Nobody sent me money.

Jones: Oh! ...[Rodgers giggles]... oh... so how did you support yourself?

Dr. Rodgers: I'm getting right over to that.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: I went around and found out what the blacks were doing in Bloomington and I found out that what they were doing were shining shoes and I never shined any shoes except my own. So I got out and I said, I'm looking for a job, you know. And on and I walked into some kind of shop and a store trying shoes and they put dye on the shoes instead of renovator – now what you'd call...

Jones: ...polish?

Dr. Rodgers: No. No. No. That's the renovator that you put on shoes before you shine them.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And you wipe it all.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: And I think that he thought I must've went to – going up through its ceiling because that's a no-no. Because first of all, you don't put dye on shoes unless you're gonna dye them.

Jones: Okay...[giggles]

Dr. Rodgers: And he came to me and they fired me, you know, and he felt so sorry for me he gave me a quarter so I realized I'm going to have to shine the shoes. So there was

a guy in the neighborhood that I got to know who was the shoe shiner, Harry Woolridge. And I said, "Harry, will you let – teach me how to shine shoes?" He looked at me like I'm crazy. And I said I'm going down to your shop and I work right beside you and give you all the money and all the tips. He thought that was a pretty good idea. So I went there – I went inside and I think I worked from 7 o' clock in the morning to 7 o'clock at night-

Jones: Oh, God!

Dr. Rodgers: - in order to pick up on it.

Jones: Right.

Dr. Rodgers: And so when Harry got through with me, I'm a pro, you know what I mean? They have something to know they called retail and I learned how to do that too...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ...and I shined... I didn't have a job and I went up to the school and they found a couple of jobs, the professors had some kind of jobs...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: But I could tell that wasn't going to work, you know, with a hour here and a hour there ... And one of the things that caught me and made me believe that somebody big upstairs is looking out for me because there was a park in Bloomington – now this thing, whether the Grant Park or what it was- the Franklin Park-

Jones: -Franklin Park, yeah -

Dr. Rodgers: Franklin Park. And I was at Franklin Park and munching on a – on a clean bar and I – far from myself, you know, and I went back, into this a room in rush-end. What they had was a restroom in that town called the rush-end because of Mrs. Rush and Mr. Rush. Mr. Rush waited about 302 businesses and Mrs. Rush waited about 200-220 great many people, you know what I mean? And when I went back to that house, they said, "Mr. Kurtis called you," and I got up and ran all the way to that YMCA where Mr. Kurtis was and they had a big-O for me. I was a – to shine shoes at that YMCA, get all the money and all I had to do was to pick up the stuff in there. They had a sustaining room and they had a regular room. With the regular room was the regular Joes that came in but the sustaining room where the doctors, and lawyers, and your business people came ...

Jones: Hmmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ...I got in there and somewhere in there they had some kind of pension or something like that... and the first weekend I was there, I made 18 dollars.

Jones: Oh, gosh! ...[Rodgers giggles]... That was a lot.

Dr. Rodgers: I never made that kind of money ...[overlapping]...

Jones: Yeah, not that fast.

Mrs. Rodgers: Isn't it - isn't it sunny...

Jones: ...Oh, no, it's fine. No, it's fine. It isn't bothering.

Dr. Rodgers: But – but – but... I was never so happy in all my life. I know it and at that time there was a old silver thing with a – a lyrical thing. Aaron Smith is running for president, you know...

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: ...and he was catholic, and they would be cussing out catholics all around me and all that kind of rubbish, you know.

Jones: Well, now, all this took place your first year [overlapping] in Bloomington at Illinois Wesleyan?

Dr. Rodgers: First time I'm there – I'm right.

Jones: But, now, when you came the first year, did you live on-campus? Did you know what you were going to major in?

Dr. Rodgers: First of all, I did not live on campus and nobody did I know lived around me, nobody black. Nobody shopped uptown where they – it is and you didn't eat at those places in uptown where ... I mean around the school, you know, like that. Everything was done right at this rushes place, right? But in that YMCA was the – one of the most wonderful man I ever met in all my life, and that was the basket man, George Barr. And – and George Barr was an old farmer that left Palatine, Illinois and came to Bloomington so he could educate his children. So he came there and I would sit there, you know – they would put a little... chair that where I could—stool-- I could study and I could shine a shoe then in between and like that. We got along famously. But I found that meeting Barr was one of the best man that I ever met in my life.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: Whenever I got into some kind of trouble, I'd go over there and I'd sit on that ...stool outside and tell Mrs. Barr and with Mr. Barr got through with me with like a load that lifted from my shoulder. I thought he was Mr. Wonderful. I found out he was wonderful during the depression when certain lawyers came down and they would talk with him at the bar because he was that kind of man. Later on, I wanna tell you a story about Mr. Barr. He came to me amid the bar, didn't tell me anything about a year later on, but somebody in a sustaining room – that's the doctors and lawyers and all, was some money missing, 'cause I know they'd come by me and say, when they come in here we want you to say hello to Mr. Smith and whoever call his name. I wondered what that was all about. About a year later, Mr. Smith at the bar told me that they discovered somebody was stealing money from the men when they were going to take a shower and they would steal pocketbooks and things like that. And who around there gonna do some stealing? ...[points to himself]

Jones: They thought it was you!

Dr. Rodgers: And Barr says, what they were going to do was take me out and beat me out – beat me until I confess. And he said, I kept telling them, you didn't do it, you didn't do it, you didn't do it. And finally, they came in one day and they said that while they were watching, that one of the guys who was on the committee to find the thief, what they had done is they'd go behind the shower, then put some soap in a hole and drilled it in the – with a soap in this, you know, so you couldn't see out of.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: He came into the shower and started filling up the whole holes.

Jones: Oh, god!

Dr. Rodgers: And they found out who it was who was doing the stealing, you see.

Jones: Well, thank goodness for Mr. Barr.

Dr. Rodgers: Hmm?

Jones: I said, thank goodness for Mr. Barr.

Dr. Rodgers: Well, I knew Mr. Barr was that kind of man and I knew that's the kind of thing he would do. Incidentally, there was a fellow before I graduated from Wesleyan, who was a homosexual and he told me about him. So, in other words, what they had done was somebody that was so anxious in getting out of the school until they got a flash camera and got him in – caught him in the act.

Jones: Oh!

Dr. Rodgers: They took a picture of him in the act and, of course, he left the school.

Jones: Hmm. Did this happen on campus or ... [Rodgers moves his hand] no, it wasn't on campus.

Dr. Rodgers: This fellow worked at the YMCA and he said he was doing some washing and ironing for the people in this place and I was sustaining him so... I wouldn't wanna give you his name because later on somebody played football with him and had the same name.

[taper beeps]

Mrs. Rodgers: That's been taping all of that?

Jones: Yeah.

[giggles]

Mrs. Rodgers: We've been wanting to be explaining something to you...

Jones: ... Oh, is it 4 o'clock already?

Mrs. Rodgers: Yeah.

Jones: Gosh!

Mrs. Rodgers: Because the dining room – the waiting see ...

[after a break]

Jones: -although this is fine. This is perfect. Yeah, that's perfect. Okay, now we're back from dinner...[laughs]... big commercial break... Dr. Rodgers, so while we were at dinner, you mentioned something about a – a study that you did on the history of Negroes in Bloomington while you were a junior at Illinois Wesleyan. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Dr. Rodgers: I don't call it a history at all. When I wanted to know something about the town, something about the people—who settled in there, what did they do and I went into the courthouse and I began to check the records and I looked at the criminal records and I looked at the birth records and the death records. I found out what kind of work they did and so forth. One of the things I found out was that they somehow instead of commerce that something there, he ...[coughs]... kept a number of blocks at

an even from 1890-1910, 1920, 1930... it was always about the same number ...[overlapping]... no more.

Jones: [overlapping]... Oh, wow, wow...

Dr. Rodgers: ...no less.

Jones: Wow...

Dr. Rodgers: I found that to be a fact.

Jones: That's interesting.

Dr. Rodgers: ...about that particular town. The kind of work that they did and they lived, you know, and that I did, and they – and they published that in the Argus-

Jones: Okay. Now while you lived in Bloomington, were there quite a few – like churches in town that you were aware of?

Dr. Rodgers: I attended the – one church. But going to church was one of the activities that students did in those days. You went to meet the girls at the churches in there.

Jones: Oh, okay. All right. Speaking of activity, you also mentioned that you were on a debate team-

Dr. Rodgers: -yeah-

Jones: -at Illinois Wesleyan. And while you did not participate in sports, you attended most of the sporting events. Is that correct?

[Roger nods.]

Jones: You also mentioned that you knew Fred Young...

Dr. Rodgers: Yeah. Yeah.

Jones: ...while you were a student here. Okay. And ... the other black male students that were there when you were there, were they involved with any other activities?

Dr. Rodgers: When I – the first year I was there, there was Earl Kohl – I got – you got the name...

Jones: Mm-hmm. But you can say it. Say it, yeah.

Dr. Rodgers: Sure. The name, yeah and they – they – they played tennis and they played basketball.

Jones: Mm-hmm. Now that was Earl Kohl, Arthur, Taro, Henry, Barnebey [overlapping]

Dr. Rodgers: Barnebey

Jones: Barnebey... and then Harold, Barca... Harold, Barca

Dr. Rodgers: Harold Borsaw?

Jones: Borsaw!

Dr. Rodgers: Borsaw stayed during graduation and they gave him an honoree degree.

Jones: Okay. Now, Illinois Wesleyan gave him an honoree degree?

Dr. Rodgers: Right.

Jones: Okay. But he came after...

Dr. Rodgers: After. Yeah.

Jones: ...you graduated from Illinois Wesleyan. Okay. Okay. What did Harold major in? Do you remember?

Dr. Rodgers: Harold Borsaw?

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: Harold majored in Sociology and he was a social worker.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And he was head socially and they would – he had a top position in Chicago...

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: He married a lady who was a – a Normal student who graduated from Normal.

Jones: Right. Plus she was a normal person, right?

Dr. Rodgers: Right.

[Jones laughs]

Jones: You get a lot of kidding with that word.

Dr. Rodgers: No...

Jones: Okay. You also mentioned during dinner something about your first job when you graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University.

Dr. Rodgers: When I graduated from Wesleyan, it was in 1933 but some it was probably the bottom of the depression.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: In other words, that's the lowest that it got – in 1933. At one time, I had considered going to Mississippi to teach for nothing. In other words, some singers were coming up there and they talked to the president of the college and he said about going down there... I would get keep, I mean now there's something I would get, some food, and clothing and maybe some money when they got here. About that time, we had also been doing some volunteer work for a social agency and I was given a job working for ... the ... relief agency as a social worker.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: Now social workers made a thing about not to call ourselves social workers. They called – throughout the country, many college students got the job of doing it- basic families that find out whether they were worthy and making out ... a lot mischief to give them food and clothing as they needed it.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: And at that time, I met this Saut – Bethy Sautiston, who I thought, was one of the most wonderful women that I had ever met in my life. If I ever had a boss, that would be the number one boss I ever had.

Jones: Mm-hmm. And she was Swedish?

Dr. Rodgers: Sautiston? Yeah. Bethy Sautison is a wonderful – wonderful person and barely democratic.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And some of – some of the students who had been in school with me and as classmates were working at that same time at the same job.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And they paid us 65 dollars of money.

Jones: Mmm...

Dr. Rodgers: And if you had a car, they paid you \$10 extra.

Jones: Oh, wow!

Dr. Rodgers: So I bought a car. \$10 down on a car and \$10 a month cause I got a car.

Jones: Now, so, this was your first job-

Dr. Rodgers: -first job-

Jones: -after Illinois Wesleyan. What exactly did you do?

Dr. Rodgers: Hmm?

Jones: What exactly did you do in this job?

Dr. Rodgers: I had practically everybody in the town – black – was on a welfare.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: I could name the people who didn't. That would be some people who worked at the post office, you know, like that and I know... But outside of that, the doctor who wasn't on welfare but he could've been that dentist was on welfare.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: -I remember one...lady who had a sick son and rather than to take him to black doctors, he died, because she refused to go see this black doctor. I mean – I mean, it was during tough times really.

Jones: Well, now you were talking about 1933 being a low point during depression while you were a student at Illinois Wesleyan 'cause that was while during depression time. How did it affect you as a student while you were on campus or while you were a student at the university?

Dr. Rodgers: Happy soul. My family didn't have nothing. I didn't have anything to lose at that it was a subsistent start of things all the way down. A lot of the students had gone a level down and they weren't doing it as well they had been doing before.

Jones: -So you noticed that difference?

Dr. Rodgers: A little – a little money I made down there in YMCA was subsistent without living at all.

Jones: Right. But you saw how it affected the other students that came from more affluent background?

Dr. Rodgers: I didn't see how – how it affected other students, but I'm pretty sure that the depression just about struck everybody at that particular time. There were some tough times.

Jones: Mm-hmm. Were you close to any of the professors while you attended Illinois Wesleyan?

Dr. Rodgers: The professor that I was the closest to was Dr. Radcliff.

Jones: Okay . . .

Dr. Rodgers: Dr. Radcliff would invite me over to his house. I think his birthday was a one good day for that and he'd invite me in for – but I – let me tell you about Dr. Radcliff. Dr. Radcliff's grandfather was a soldier in Wellington when he fought – when he had beaten the Napoleon at Waterloo...

Jones: Oh, god!

Dr. Rodgers: That's 1815. He said that – and – and for his service at Waterloo with ... he was given land in Novosco in Canada. . .

Jones: Oh, wow!

Dr. Rodgers: . . . and he came to Canada and he was a farmer in Canada but he wanted his kids to be educated so he sold his farm and became a groomer. In other words, he was a horse boy and he did that work in order to see that his son and his daughter got an education. And Dr. Radcliff graduated from University of Mount Alison in Canada and then he graduated from University of Chicago. He got a doctor's degree.

Jones: Now, Dr. Radcliff taught Sociology?

Dr. Rodgers: He taught Sociology and he was entirely liberal. In other words, I'd go to his house and if I – I go to Bloomington, my wife and I stayed at his house.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: He was a liberal – he was at right spot at Wesleyan.

Jones: Now what year did you two get married? You said, January 20th is your 51st anniversary, so...?

Mrs. Rodgers: I'm looking if it's – 'cause Denise gave us a .. she gave us . . .

Jones: ...certificate ...

Mrs. Rodgers: . . . What year was that? In '48?

Dr. Rodgers: '48.

Jones: Okay.

Mrs. Rodgers: She gave us a anniversary certificate (not sure).

Jones: [overlapping] Oh, that's nice.

Dr. Rodgers: We weren't going to celebrate at all. She came down here and opened up the hotel...

Jones: Oh, that's nice!

[overlapping]

Dr. Rodgers: Made her way and invited people . . .

Mrs. Rodgers: No – well, no hotel. Restaurant.

Jones: Well, that was nice.

Mrs. Rodgers: Rare – one of the very ... nicest restaurants in this area. It was really nice. But yeah – went back and found – yeah – pictures of everything down there.

Jones: Oh – okay. Okay. All right. Let's see. Okay. So working for Betsy Sautiston was your first job. Then what was your next job?

Dr. Rodgers: Mmm?

Jones: What was your next job after your job with Betsy ...Sautiston?

Mrs. Rodgers: Be – Bec – Was it Becky? It wasn't Becky. What was Sautiston's first name? Bessy?

Dr. Rodgers: Bessy Sau...
[overlapping]

Jones: Bessy...

Mrs. Rodgers: Bessy...

Dr. Rodgers: Bessy Stautiston.

Jones: Okay. Bessy.

Dr. Rodgers: I must have had a – any number of jobs and otherwise I was subsistent.

Jones: Okay. What made you decide to leave Bloomington, or – what – at what point did you decide to move out of Bloomington?

Dr. Rodgers: I moved to take a similar job in St. Louis and be near my family.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: ... And I stayed there, doing whatever work I could find to do until I was ... I wanted to take a job in a post office . . .

Jones: ...Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ... and while I was in a post office, I got drafted for the army.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And I was in the army for three years.

Jones: Mm-hmm. Now what year did you go to the army?

Dr. Rodgers: I went to the army in nineteen hundred and... what three from four ... 1940... '42 . . .

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: . . . And I came out in '45. I was in the army 3 years.

Jones: Okay.

Mrs. Rodgers: But we're – excuse me for this, but I thought you – I thought you were drafted when you were attending University of Minnesota.

Dr. Rodgers: I was drafted the first time when I was at University of Minnesota but they – they – the draft age went up and they weren't taking 'em at that particular age and then later on they were kind of taking them at a later age.

Jones: Well, let's – let's back up a little bit because when you decided to go to University of Minnesota, how much time – how long was that after you left Illinois Wesleyan – or graduated from Illinois Wesleyan?

Dr. Rodgers: Seven years.

Jones: Seven years after? Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: I was in the – at University of Minnesota in 1940 and 1941.

Jones: Okay. And . . .

Dr. Rodgers: That's when I – in 1941- '40 – that's when I rolled around and got the three – up to four – fifty colleges to find out which one would give me a job so I could work my way through school.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And I selected from Yale, Ohio State and Minnesota. I selected Minnesota.

Jones: Okay. Now you received your higher degrees after Illinois Wesleyan from the University of Minnesota?

Dr. Rodgers: I got my master's degree from University of Minnesota.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And I was teaching at Lincoln University of Missouri when I met this lady.

Jones: Okay – oh, okay! So you were teaching there when you met Mrs. Rodgers? Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: Yeah.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: I don't think she would've married me if I didn't have a job...[giggles]...

Jones: Smart woman... [Rodgers giggles]

Dr. Rodgers: And ... I graduated from New York University. . .

Jones: Okay. Now, New York University, is that where you received your Ph. D.?

Dr. Rodgers: Right.

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: Because I got my Ph. D. I was in Clover. I had a sabbatical leave one year and I had a GI bill. A GI bill paid all my expenses plus the – and I – I lived like a king...[Mrs. Rodgers giggles]

Mrs. Rodgers: I wouldn't go so far – yeah but ... [Jones giggles]

Jones: He did pretty good.

Dr. Rodgers: Hey, when you go to New York City and you're single, you don't have no trouble finding where to live but when you go to New York City and you're married, you gotta pick a round as to where you're gonna live.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: And if you go to New York City and you got a child, you are in bad shape. And I was lucky because I had a ...

Mrs. Rodgers: Omni friend...

Dr. Rodgers: . . . Omni friend who looked out for me and got us in a nice little cozy apartment. . .

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: . . . where I stayed with wife and child.

Jones: [to Mrs. Rodgers] Now you said too, you got your degree from NYU as well?

Mrs. Rodgers: Mm-hmm.

Jones: Okay. And you were in obstetric nursing?

Mrs. Rodgers: Well, my first – I didn't have a degree when I was doing graduate of nursing – I – see, back in those days it was three years nurses trained ... and the irony of it is you had to take a state board...

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: ...and I trained in Baltimore... in a small black private high school. But we had to take the same state board that those nurses who graduated from Johns Hopkins hospital took.

Jones: Oh, wow... So how did you do?

Mrs. Rodgers: I did all right.

Jones: Did all right?

Mrs. Rodgers: yeah. [giggles]

Dr. Rodgers: Well...

Mrs. Rodgers: And you couldn't have practiced as an – as an RN unless you pass that state board.

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: When she got to Flint, she got a job that paid with the school system and she was on the same track as I was on.

Jones: Oh, okay. Well, yeah – let's – let's go back to talk about how you ended up in Flint, Michigan. So we talked about your post-graduate work being in New York. You had a child named, Denise, right?

Mrs. Rodgers: Right.

Jones: Okay. So how do we get from there to Flint, Michigan?

Dr. Rodgers: When I was...

Mrs. Rodgers: Well, we were at Lincoln University...

Dr. Rodgers: ...I was at Lincoln University, and one of my friends told me he is going to Virginia State College and I went there and I got in...

Dr. Rodgers: . . . He was in good graces with the president. Let's put it that way.

Jones: Now you had a teaching position there?

Mrs. Rodgers: Yeah.

Jones: Okay.

Mrs. Rodgers: And, that's how he ended up going to Flint. I mean – what – did you write letters to different places for Flint, or what?

Dr. Rodgers: I was out of a job...

Mrs. Rodgers: -yeah-

Dr. Rodgers: and I sat down and I wrote – a job all out – over the country.

Mrs. Rodgers: No, well, but any way.

[Dr. Rodgers giggles]

Dr. Rodgers: And I got one job. She said I only got one job but ... I probably told her I only needed one job ...[everyone laughs]... and I got a job in Flint, Michigan...

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: ...they paid more money, had better hours. . .

Mrs. Rodgers: Good benefits. At that – at that time... among school systems, Michigan was third. It was New York, California, Michigan as far as the school system. . .

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Mrs. Rodgers: ...and then the thing that helped too was General Motors and it was a strong union town and teachers had a strong reunion.

Jones: Right. Now what year did you move to Flint?

Dr. Rodgers: Nineteen hundred and thirty six, I believe.

Mrs. Rodgers: Yeah, it was. . .

Jones: Okay. Then you lived there for 37 years?

Dr. Rodgers: Right.

[pause]

Jones: Okay. Here's the one question for you. How has attending Illinois Wesleyan University affected you with who you are today?

Dr. Rodgers: I think attending Illinois Wesleyan ... caused me to be ... more interested in civil rights than anything I can think of. In other words, I wanted to get into the trade and I wanted to be concerned with something that had to do with the betterment of black folks.

Jones: Mm-hmm. You mentioned earlier during dinner the fact that you were very involved in the NAACP. Can you talk a little bit about how that started for you?

Dr. Rodgers: Well, I found – I found out that Bloomington had a weak NAACP... and I found out that what they needed was a change of officers, change organization and I went in and became the... fundraiser – mostly for the NAACP.

Mrs. Rodgers: Was that in Bloomington, right?

Dr. Rodgers: Bloomington. Umm... no – no, that's Flint. [overlapping]...That's Flint.

Mrs. Rodgers: That's flint. That's Flint. That's right.

Jones: Right – okay – so that was in Flint but were you involved with NAAC-

[Rodgers shook his head]

Dr. Rodgers: No.

Jones: Okay. So this is when you moved to Flint...

Dr. Rodgers: Moved to Flint...

Jones: ...You became actively involved.

Dr. Rodgers: Yeah. Like – like – my daughter says me, how many Germans did you kill?

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: I didn't kill any. But I marched with Martin Luther King twice...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ...and I was in – first of all, in Detroit and secondly in Washington. I wanted to march on Washington.

Jones: Mm-hmm. But now you... just previously said that ... the fact that you attended Illinois Wesleyan has helped you become more interested in civil rights. Was it because of your experience at the institution ... umm... because there weren't that many other black students while you were there?

Dr. Rodgers: [after a pause]... I think at total expense – I – I – whereas most students had other students as their roommates and things of that sort, and their buddies... my roommate was musician. My – my – my roommates were the poorest in a cohort.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: Or he was a laborer and so forth and I – and I developed a feeling that ... we need an organization that's concerned with all the people rather than some boudoir organization that's concerned with a segment of the people.

Jones: Mm-hmm... okay.

Dr. Rodgers: ...because when you met a friend in Bloomington, you met a good one. I'm thinking in terms of Dr. Radcliff ... and I'm thinking in terms of George Barr that I met.

Jones: Okay. And some like Bessy ... Sauterson.

Dr. Rodgers: Bessy Sauterson... yeah!

Jones: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: But of course, if you had a snake you had a snake, and I had this ... Vice President who – I went to him during one day and I told him that the professor sitting classes alphabetically. And when time became sit me, I would sit over in one corner... and he looked at me and he said, "Well, maybe because you have stinky feet."

Jones: Wait, now this was at Illinois Wesleyan?

Dr. Rodgers: Illinois Wesleyan... Yeah! And that man was prejudice from beginning to the end.

Jones: Mm-hmm... but now, he was the vice president?

Dr. Rodgers: He was the vice president at the time. I had one that taught History of the Hebrews and he told me that I got a D in the class because I knew as much when I went into the class as I did when I came out of the class. In other words, I hadn't learned anything, I just happened to know it.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: I think that was an excuse to give you a lower grade. That was one of the many incidents and negative incidents that I met at that particular place.

Jones: But you had mentioned that you had – like you said, along with the negative you also had positive experiences, like with Dr. ...[timer beeps]... oh!

Dr. Rodgers: Well, it was a fellow on a debate team, Shay Litch who later on became ... the ... president of first national bank in Flint-

Mrs. Rodgers: -in – in Bloomington.

Dr. Rodgers: ...in Bloomington who was a very nice fellow. In fact, I had a man in the office with me who told me that he wanted to teach the... Illinois State...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: His job teaching at Illinois State. He said, you lived up there. Do you know anybody? And I gave him the name of Shay Litch and Creger went to—what is this-- Bloomington and he met Shay Litch and Shay Litch took him out to the golf court and wined and dined and everything else because Shay Litch was a true liberal.

Jones: Mm-hmm. Now... while you attended Illinois Wesleyan, was there – were there many opportunities to interact with the students at Illinois State?

Dr. Rodgers: Absolutely! I had some very good friends at Illinois State. In fact, particularly Russel Debo. And I think Russel Debo was who was the bossman you had up there – ya – who – who was the mayor?

Mrs. Rodgers: Harold Washington.

Jones: Oh, Harold. In Chicago?

Dr. Rodgers: No. the man the white man and with the mayor of Chicago...

[overlapping]

Jones: Daley...

Mrs. Rodgers: Daley?

Dr. Rodgers: Daley?

Jones: Yeah...

Dr. Rodgers: I – I was – I went to Chicago on a convention and I went to oak town and there was a fine lady down in the lobby playing on a piano and everything, you know, and I'm thinking that my money wouldn't take me in on that...

Jones: mm-hmm.

Dr. Rodgers: I got on the phone and called Dibo and in about 30 minutes, he was up there and we went down there and he – he rechecked his pocket and pulled out a water about big enough to choke a horse...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: Knowing Dibo, I think if ...[chuckles]... wrongly leave in a ...

Jones: Aww!

Dr. Rodgers: ... that he would have made it with him.

Jones: So he opened a lot of doors?

Dr. Rodgers: Oh, yeah. I could write a note and say, see Dibo and he did that kind of job anytime.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: He was a very good friend. And ... very ... wherever I was in – it was Thanksgiving or Christmas or something of that sort, the Thomas' had the doors open. We could go out there and – and eat. And the – and the story was that when old man Thomas got through praying – now the dinner with cold ...[both laugh]... but the food was tremendous.

Jones: Mm-hmm... mm-hmm... what type of social activities were there for, you know, black students when you were there?

Dr. Rodgers: For black students... I went to this Vice President and talked to him about going to the dance and all, and he made me- made me reassured that you'd dance with your girl – The one that you bring.

Jones: Okay. So you had to bring someone or... were there black students – more black students at Illinois State?

Dr. Rodgers: I ain't know a black girl at Illinois Wesleyan.

Mrs. Rodgers: [overlapping]... She said Illinois State.

Jones: Oh... [overlapping]... Illinois State.

Dr. Rodgers: Illinois State had a – a surplus.

Jones: Okay.

Mrs. Rodgers: Where? Where did the...

Dr. Rodgers: Didn't go ...

Mrs. Rodgers: Didn't – didn't – didn't Peter attend?

Dr. Rodgers: Peter went to Illinois State—I'm sure.

Jones: Okay. So is that how you – how you socialize ...[Rodgers nods]... okay, with black ...[overlapping]... students...

Dr. Rodgers: [overlapping]... that's right –Illinois State.

Jones: Illinois State. Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: And – and – and when Illinois Wesleyan got those fraternity houses and sorority houses – I have not been inside of a fraternity house or a sorority house before or since.

Jones: Oh, really?

Dr. Rodgers: No...

Jones: Was it – I mean, during that time, you were not allowed or – or...

Dr. Rodgers: You were allowed on so many places and – that you'd figured that you were allowed the rest of them.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Mrs. Rodgers: You mean not allowed?

Dr. Rodgers: ...Not allowed... yeah.

Jones: Was that an underwritten... law or, you know...

Dr. Rodgers: Anytime you start breaking into it, you find out it's written...

Jones: Mm-hmm. Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: ...although the people on the outside were pretty nice but you... couldn't eat in the dining store or Walgreens and all like that.

Jones: So in town you couldn't...

Dr. Rodgers: You couldn't ... no.

Jones: No. did they – in town, though, did they treat the Illinois Wesleyan students different than Illinois State?

Dr. Rodgers: No...no...no... who came through Flint, MI – a – a – people who came through Bloomington, if they wanted to eat they'd go to Mrs. Rushes to eat.

Jones: Okay...

Dr. Rodgers: Shows would come, Tracy and Dade and different shows would play, they would come back to live.

Jones: Okay...

Dr. Rodgers: Mary Church Tyrol is famous black woman you've heard about – when she came there she decided she could have stayed in a hotel but she decided to stay at Mrs. Rushes. And only young guy would squatter around town or they would never forget.

Jones: Oh!

Dr. Rodgers: Mary Church Tyrol ... and she would – and she was there the year that Oakland was a hundred years old...

Jones: Oh, god!

Dr. Rodgers: ...and she had been honored for that.

Jones: Okay. Now you had mentioned the fact that you had been pretty involved with the NAACP. Are there any organizations that you still do volunteering work today or you want to have an active involvement with?

[Rogers shakes head]

Jones: Not now? When you lived in Flint, were there organizations beside NAACP?

Dr. Rodgers: Didn't have time.

Jones: Okay. You put a lot of time into that...[pause]... Now your last position in Flint, you were on the teaching staff?

Dr. Rodgers: The last position that I held was 1974. But from 1974 to 1993...

Mrs. Rodgers: Mmm... well...

Dr. Rodgers: Hmm?

Jones: We're talking before you guys moved.

Dr. Rodgers: I worked in clinics.

Jones: Okay.

Mrs. Rodgers: Well – not only he worked in clinics but even when he was at the college, he had his private practice also even when he was at college.

Jones: Okay...

Mrs. Rodgers: And then we left the college. He worked in... several clinics.

Jones: Okay. So you were a clinical sociologist?

[Dr. and Mrs. Rodgers speak together]

Dr. Rodgers: Psychologist.

Jones: Psychologist. Okay. Well, as you look over your wealth of experience and your life, in general, what has been probably – I mean, besides marrying Mrs. Rodgers and have a daughter, what has been probably one of your most rewarding experiences that you can remember?

Dr. Rodgers: Whenever you work, whether you – as a teacher, as a therapist, it's a lot – it's a lot of little many things that add on. I'm out ... morning grasping one day, sweating all over and some lady clapped and came up to me and she said, "You know what you did in my class?" I said, "No."

Mrs. Rodgers: I think – I've given your class.

Dr. Rodgers: She said, "I had a term paper to write and you told me which books to read and what to do and all and I did it. I did all right. I sure appreciate what you did." That's the kind of stuff that lifts you up.

Jones: Right.

Dr. Rodgers: Then there was a guy that somebody asked me about this millionaire that they're writing about, you know, a social book that ... he lived in Detroit and he makes ...

Mrs. Rodgers: Work of art...

Dr. Rodgers: Work of art – he makes ... 40 ... worth 41 million dollars and he changed over to somebody who was making 200 million dollars. Some girl came to me one day and she said, "I'm leaving this place." She said there's no men around here. I said, "You write about that." I said, "Look at that fool in there with his hat on" ...[laughs]... She went up and told him what I said...[Jones giggles]...I got all wealthy and dedicated in my office and I thought he was gonna slap me. "Tell me what you told that girl." I said, "Now I'll tell you. You're wasting your time and you could be making something out of yourself." And we became friends. He turned completely around. He went to college, turn around and they got a couple of degrees and all that sort of stuff-

Mrs. Rodgers: He had a Ph. D.

Dr. Rodgers: Hmm?

Mrs. Rodgers: He had a Ph. D.

Dr. Rodgers: He had a Ph. D.

Jones: Oh, wow!

Dr. Rodgers: And find out where the money into it. And he start buying- McDonald franchise...

Jones: Oh, gosh!

Mrs. Rodgers: He had six at one time.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ...And he had a McDonald franchise and then he bought a Classics factory... and I got a plaque in here that says, "You're the man that made me a man." And he asked me what it is ...

Jones: Yeah... yeah...

Dr. Rodgers: ...that I did and all like that.

Jones: Well, you know what – it – it also makes me think about... visualizing first time you were at Illinois Wesleyan and that experience in Chapel compared to the last time that you were at Illinois Wesleyan – the students met you and embraced you and ... did you have any feelings about the difference in those two very separate experiences at the same campus?

Dr. Rodgers: I was so sure the Illinois Wesleyan hasn't changed... until it took me some time to get over it, to get accustomed to somebody like the president that you have there now. And the kind of atmosphere that you have right there now. Because I met him one of them old students, you know, that was in one of my classes and I talk to you fairly frankly, and I said, "I think we were in a class together." And she says, "It could be – it might be..." and I looked at her, you know, and I -

Jones: -and this was – this was several years before you had been back the last time, right? Was this like your – I forgot –

Mrs. Rogers: No, it was in the last time. Weren't we there the last time?

Jones: Right. But I was – he had mentioned...

Dr. Rodgers: No.

Jones: ...that before...

Dr. Rodgers: ...That was the time before...

Jones: ...right...

Dr. Rodgers: ...sometime in December when you racked up and I ...

Mrs. Rogers:... oh...oh... I see...[overlapping]

Jones: Right.

Dr. Rodgers: "It could be, it might be" – when you were in a class that spade, you don't let go mistakes like that.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ...and I thought – I got some thoughts –you know – I mean I can't – this kind of place hasn't changed...

Jones: Mm-hmm... but it wasn't until you came back last time?

Dr. Rodgers: That's right... that's right.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: Everyone said, "You came!" And I had to pinch myself and say, is it real? ...[Mrs. Rogers chuckles]... Are these people really civilized?

Jones: Yeah...Well, I can't tell you how rewarding just meeting you was for the students, you know, because when you were on campus that weekend, and I remember you were walking from the football game back and forth and the students who walked past you and had met you the night before and said, "Oh, how you doing Dr. Rodgers? It was good to see you, Dr. Rogers." It was nice.

Dr. Rodgers: It is like, imagine a kid who has some parents that did not accept the parent and didn't say, "Well, this is my father but my father does not own me." This is my alma mater. Now would my alma mater thinks of me is nothing... you know what I mean?

Jones: Right.

Dr. Rodgers: One of these guys, I keep telling her the story about a – a – musician. He – he turned out to be an alcoholic but when I graduated, all of my friends around were so happy, you know, and we call him Happy Heavens, and happy as a little devil – lil- li – li – devil like I have to tell you. I got to tell you something-

Mrs. Rogers: -you weren't there...

Dr. Rogers: I said, "You gotta tell me what?" I gotta tell you something little devil. I said, "Will you tell me what you were gonna tell me." He said, "You are a nigger." [laughs]

Jones: Wait, now, who said this to you?

Dr. Rodgers: One of my buddies... the guys that...would – you know – who was at the gathering, and we probably said Reagan bread...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: ...[giggles]... But when I graduated, this is what he got to tell me.

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: "You are a nigger." And I – and I thought after that you know, I – I – I go downstairs and I sit with some white woman who looked like she's been hit by a truck or something like that, and she came, sits there and she sitting with me, she's got to turn and turn this way, you know and I said, you know, and I ...[gestures]...

Jones: Hmm... well if you were to have an opportunity to leave lasting impressions for students who are there now and students that will come in the future, any words of advice or just thoughts ...[overlapping]...

Dr. Rodgers: These people who are leaving there now are going out into a different world from the world that I went out into and they can be as nice to people that they – possibly – they can be. And there's no need of trying to be, you know, I used to – I used to think of ways of getting even with them, you know what I mean? What can I do to get even? My little sister came back in. She'd been somewhere in this colored school and some white freak had turned around and tried to give 'em 50 cents in order to get in the car with him and everything and we went down, we called the police and the police called this guy and carried him down to the police station. When the case came up in the court, they found out that he was the head of a factory. He had a place downtown in St. Louis and his lawyers on the stand –didn't wanna handle a case like that. And I ... we went into the court and they had a term principle and they through colored parents and we go down on that day the case comes up. Nobody showed up ... how many people came up and occasionally would be called, cases call, cases call, cases call—we're sitting there like a bunch of fools and later on we find out that his important lawyers had made it fix it so that the case wouldn't even come up. But the judge said the case has to come up.

Mrs. Rogers: She asked you a different question though.

Dr. Rodgers: What's the question?

Jones: If you wanted to leave... impression-

Dr. Rodgers: -I'm trying to say that these kids are going out into a different world from the world that I went into...

Jones: Okay.

Dr. Rodgers: ...There's no need of doing things that we had to do...

Jones: Mm-hmm...

Dr. Rodgers: I said I thought of an idea. The judge turned around and when the case came up, my sister turned around and looked at him and said, "That's the man. That's the man that promised to give me 50 cents to get into his car." The judge turned out and fined the man--\$25 fine. I'm so mad, I don't know what to do. I first think I wanna do this—to get my brothers, get this man on the street and beat the devil out of him. And I started thinking, the first cop that comes up and sees you beating up this white man would say that you attacked him and he might shoot you. So I said what is it that this man wants? This man wants anonymity, right? He does not want to be found out, right? So I went to a bunch of guys, you know they published a little free papers...

Jones: Yeah...

Dr. Rodgers: ... and I got to talking with him and I – I said him what the plan was. I started writing down a plan of where this man lived and they published this negro paper with a mad name "Attack little children" and sent a copy of that to every block in which he lived.

Jones: Oh, god! ...[Rogers laughs]... That's probably the worst thing you could have done.

Dr. Rodgers: Han?

Jones: That – that probably had a greater effect than if you had done something physically, you know...

Dr. Rodgers: ... He can handle something physically...

Jones: Right.

Dr. Rodgers: He can handle something physically. If you tell him exactly what happened, something physically you're gonna come out in a second.

Jones: Mm-hmm...Did you ever hear from him after that?

Dr. Rodgers: Yeah. I was getting in a house when they looked like he was coming down the street and I was the fastest thing getting into the house...[giggles]...[inaudible because he laughs simultaneously]

Jones: Oh, Mrs. Rogers, did you wanna leave any lasting impressions or lasting words? You wanna offer any...?

Mrs. Rodgers: Well, I'd like to say even though I didn't really know my husband in the early years, and my daughter and I were very proud of his achievements and the many difficulties he had to overcome to achieve what he has achieved. And we're very proud of him.

Jones: That's very nice. Well, I wanna thank both of you once again for your time, the cheeseburger, you know, the whole nine yards...[giggles]... this was a great visit. Thank you so much.