

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROSALIND CARMICHAEL
FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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TRANSCRIPT BY

FANTASTIC TRANSCRIPTS

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Dr. Rosalind Carmichael on December 11, 2015 in Elizabeth, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth.

Robert Alcantara: Rob Alcantara.

Vanessa Bodossian: Vanessa Bodossian.

Sara Rolfsen-Kohn: Sara Rolfsen-Kohn

SI: Thank you very much for having us here.

Rosalind Carmichael: You're welcome.

SI: For the record, we're surrounded by many books and pieces of art. It kind of plays into some of the things we're going to ask you about. To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

RC: I was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina in 1951.

SI: For the record, what were you parents' names?

RC: Arlene Manning and Robert Carmichael.

SI: They were both from the same town in South Carolina.

RC: Yes. Dillon, South Carolina.

SI: Starting with your mother's side, do you know anything about how her family developed in that area or if they came to that area at some point?

RC: Her mother and father and grandparents were all born in that area. I'm trying to remember. I don't think they were farmers, but they did work the land for other people. My mom had nine brothers and sisters. Her mother and father died very young, at forty-one, forty-two, so they kind of had to raise each other. Today, of the ten brothers and sisters, including my mother, three are left.

SI: Your father's side.

RC: My father, now his family owned a farm in Dillon, South Carolina. They didn't work for anyone else. They used the proceeds from their farm for their livelihood. In the South, you put in tobacco, you picked cotton. That's pretty much what my father's family did. He was raised by his mother and grandparents. His father wasn't in the picture.

SI: Was that unique for an African American family to own their own farm? Do you have any sense of that?

RC: I'm trying to think. No, I don't think so, in that area. But even though they owned their own farm, some children were sent out to work on other farms and those farms could have been owned by white people. Now, what I remember--they did that and what did you call it? I can't think of the name.

SI: Sharecropping.

RC: Sharecropping. They were involved in sharecropping, but my father's people did own their own farm, and the children went out to work on other farms. Basically, my family was agricultural, and in my father's family education was key. Even though they were on the farm, everyone was expected to go to college. They went to historically Black universities. That was expected, which is unusual, but it was.

SI: How many brothers and sisters did your father have?

RC: Now, my father was an only child, but he was raised with cousins, his aunt's children. But he was an only child.

SI: Do you know if your parents met in Dillon or in college?

RC: They met in Dillon. My mother was fourteen. My father was seventeen. She still has a letter, a love letter he wrote her when she was fourteen years old. My mother today is eighty-two. They met in Dillon, a small town. That's where they met. I was conceived when my mother was a junior in high school. Consequently, she did not finish. She didn't finish school at first, but later on, she went back because school was key. They were together a while. He went to the military. They married March 2, 1951. I was born March 19. She likes to say my father wanted to do the right thing. Even though they didn't stay together--they separated--I'm trying to think. He wanted her to work on the farm while he was in college. She said, "No, I can't work on the farm." So they didn't stay together, but they got back together when I was fourteen, which is unusual. Broke up when I was three and got back together when I was fourteen, which is another story. [laughter]

SI: Both your parents went pretty far with their educations.

RC: Yes. My dad--oh, yes--he received a BA, and then--I don't know where he got the master's, but there's a story behind that. He was working in a small college and it was a Black, historically Black college. The members of the faculty joined the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. The school district said, "No, you can't belong to the NAACP." That was out. This is in the South. They said it was a Communist organization, which we know it wasn't. They said, "You have to get rid of your membership. You cannot belong to the NAACP." A group of Black teachers, maybe twenty, said, "No, we won't do that," and all of them were fired because they did that. Then the NAACP, the national headquarters, found out about what happened and sent all of those faculty members to school to work on their master's. That's how he got

his master's, from that act of defiance. He did the master's and then he worked at a historically Black college in Columbia, South Carolina, Benedict College. Later on, he went--I can't remember--maybe Columbia University or NYU [New York University] for his PhD, I think in microbiology. He got that kind of late in life, but by that time, he and my mother were separated. When he and my mom initially got back together, he was teaching at Benedict College; she did not have a degree. He couldn't have a wife without a degree. That's the way it was. He made some connections for her to go back to school. She got her BA from Benedict. After they separated, she got her MA from the University of South Carolina. The whole thing was about education. Even though my father's people were poor, the family pushed education and almost everyone in my family then pursued an education. It was understood that I would do the same thing. Even though my mother and father weren't together for about fourteen, fifteen years, it was understood that I would go to school.

SI: When you turned three and they separated, did you move up to New Jersey then?

RC: Actually, yes. Let me get that right. Initially I stayed. Believe it or not, I stayed with his people. They were close-knit. Even though my mother and father had separated, I was the grandchild. I stayed with his people until I was three. They may have separated when I was two, because I stayed with my father's people until I was three, and my mother came up North--that's what many of our people did, they migrated to find a job. She lived with her sister and then she decided she wanted her child. She didn't want me to stay down South, so she came and got me. They didn't want--this is the story, they didn't want to give me up, so she had to steal me. [laughter] She had to steal me. I was outside playing, she said, in the yard. She brought her brother-in-law. He drove a cab. She didn't know what to do. At this point, she was twenty. She was a young mother. He said, "Just take her." And he just took me off the ground and put me in the cab and that was it. Another story is that I thought my father's aunt was my mother, because she was raising me with her sister, my grandmother. When I got to New Jersey, we came up to Newark--Newark, New Jersey--my mother said I cried all the time for my "mother." She was so hurt that she was going to take me back. She said after three weeks--her nickname was Dean, D-E-A-N. I said something like, "Dean, I'm hungry." I had accepted her, so I stayed. Been with her ever since. [laughter]

SI: Are your earliest memories of Newark?

RC: No. My earliest memories are of the South. Every summer, my mother would send me back down south to stay with my father's people, even though they weren't together--and I'm so thankful to her for that, because a lot of times when men and women break up, children bond with the woman's family. But my mom made sure I continued that connection with my father's family. Every summer, I would go South until I was about fourteen or fifteen. From Newark to Dillon, every summer for about ten years. I didn't see my father that much because he wasn't there. He was in Columbia, South Carolina. I didn't see him, but his people really kind of raised me. I'm very close to them. A lot of them have passed. But that time in my life was a very good time. It was a settling time. I felt really good about having both sides of my family, even though my mother and

father weren't together. I think she was wise as a young mother to make the decision to do that. I'm thankful for that.

SI: We will ask you about your memories of Dillon in those summers, but your earliest memories--do you remember where you were living, what your neighborhood was like?

RC: In Newark?

SI: Yes.

RC: Yes. The neighborhood was low-income. We always lived in apartments. At this point, my mother had no college degree. She didn't get that until I was fourteen and she went back South. So we lived in low income areas because she worked in factories, dress factories. And we always lived in apartment houses--no, three family houses. We always lived in three family houses. We generally followed her brother. She had a brother in Newark. Wherever he was working as a superintendent and there was an apartment available, he would tell her and that's where we would move. Low income, but happy. I was happy. I was an introvert, a very introverted child. I am an only child on my mother's side, so it was just me and my mom.

SI: You went into school in Newark.

RC: Yes, I went to school in Newark from kindergarten to sixth grade. Yes. Sixth grade. I was a terrible student. D's and F's. Didn't do well. My mother was very upset. My mother had another child, maybe a year after I was born, but that child was stillborn. Being a young mother, she would always say, "If that child had lived, she would have been smart," because the family was very intelligent. I just didn't do well. I know now at sixty-four, the reason I didn't do well was because of the environment. She was having problems paying bills. It was a struggle with male friends that she had. The environment was just not conducive to rearing a child well. I probably rebelled. I didn't know that then, but I probably rebelled. Definitely I didn't well in school, at all. I was a problem child.

SI: Was that why you found going to Dillon [inaudible]?

RC: Yes. Because it was just wonderful. In the South, I spent my summers there. I just loved being there because it wasn't hectic as where I was being raised. I did not begin to flourish until my mom broke up with her male friend. She left him and we moved to Elizabeth with her sister. Then I began to flourish because it was a calming influence there. It was just amazing. When I was in the sixth grade, because my record was so poor, they put me in a slow track, but the teacher recognized something. She recognized something. By the time I left sixth grade, they put me in a higher track. They saw potential and now I was calm. I was able to do my work. Environment is important. It really is. Really is.

SI: Sixth grade, you would have been eleven or so.

RC: Eleven, yes. It was just my mom, me, and my aunt and her child. No problems. Just go to school, do your work. Go to school, do your work. When I became a teacher in Newark, I recognized that some of the kids had the same kind of problems that I had. I understood. A lot of it is environmental. I was able to relate to them on such a level. I understood them, so they related to me. They grew too. I loved teaching. I loved it. Loved it. Because those children were me. I understood what they needed and I understood what was probably happening in some of their homes, not all of them, but I understood. When they would come in acting out, we would talk and they would share.

SI: When you would go down to Dillon, would somebody come get you or would you mom go down with you?

RC: No. Generally, I went with my grandmother. By that time, my father's mother had moved to Brooklyn. I would see her periodically, because at that point, I was her only grandchild. In the summers, either we would drive down with her, her sister and her sister's husband, or we would take the train. That's how we would travel. My mom wouldn't go. She didn't have a close relationship with my father's people. She made sure I did, though. Traveling South, you'd pack a shoebox with chicken--and what else did we have? Pound cake. That was what we did every summer. I have a cousin, who is my age, and we were kind of raised together until we were three. She was in Dillon as well. She stayed there until she was eight years old. She was like my sister, since I don't have biological sisters or brothers. Well, let me take that back. My father did remarry. He has three children that I don't know. They're all grown now, but I don't know them well.

SI: Was that in between?

RC: Yes. When my mother and father broke up, I guess in '68, and he remarried--I really don't know--sometime in the '70s. What's interesting--I think she's about--his new wife, whom I've met, is about four years older than I am, which is quite interesting. [laughter]

SI: You're traveling down South in the era of segregation. What was that like? Did you notice it as a child?

RC: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. Certain towns you had to be careful driving through because the cops would stop you. I remember a couple of times we were stopped. As children, we didn't really understand what was going on. But I remember being stopped by a police officer and we had to follow him way out in some woods. My uncle got out. I don't know what the conversation was, but then he got back in and we got back on our way. Through my studies over the years, I figured maybe money changed hands. Maybe that was it. Money could have changed hands. Nothing physical happened to us. Nothing was said in front of the children, so I never saw anything. But I knew something was awry. That's about the only thing I can remember about that. The segregation, of course, growing up, I remember very well. I wasn't used to certain things because I lived in the

North from kindergarten to sixth grade--no, I left Elizabeth in the eighth grade. My mother and father got together when I was going to go into the ninth grade. I had to move South with them, and I really didn't want to do that. Moving South was a totally new experience. I was used to going to the library. When we moved to Columbia, South Carolina, I found out you couldn't go to the public library--Black kids couldn't go to the public library. This is in 1964. We couldn't go to the public library. I was an introvert. I was a reader. They said there was a Baptist church that had a library in the basement and that I could go there. [laughter] So I did. I made up my mind I was going to read every book in that library, so I started with A. So I read and I read. That was it. When segregation was over, we could go the public library and I was so excited. I could go to the library. So I walked. It was about forty-five minutes from my home. I walked to the public library. I remember at that point, I was fourteen or fifteen, didn't really have a fear. I just walked in--really excited because I was going to get a card. Looking back now, you could tell--everyone was white and you could tell they really didn't want me there. The librarians didn't want me there, but I was determined. I asked for an application for the card. The man kind of pushed it. I filled it out. Still no fear--I really was not afraid. I filled out the form. At that point, when you filled it out, you could get your card that day. You didn't have to wait. I gave him the application and I'm standing there. They created the card. I remember it was a man. He created the card. I reached out my hand for the card. He threw it on the floor. The point is, do you pick it up so you can come back or do you get angry and walk away? I wanted to read. I picked up the card. I left. I shared it with my mother. I was upset, but not destroyed because I understood what was going on. At fourteen, fifteen, I said, I want to go to the library. After then, every Saturday, I would walk forty-five minutes to the library, get my books. No one really bothered me. I took them home. The next Saturday I would do the same thing. I was a reader. My mother, if I did anything wrong, the way she punished me was to take away my books. That was my punishment. "You can't read." That was my punishment. I would always tell my students in Newark that story because many of them didn't want to read. I would tell them the story. Their whole thing was, "You didn't fight? You didn't fight?" No, I didn't fight. Maybe I am where I am today because I picked up that library card. I picked it up. I didn't let anybody say no, you can't come in here. For a long time, I was the only Black person going there because people were put off. But I was young. You know with youth, you just go get your books and leave. That's what I did for four years.

SI: That was in Columbia.

RC: Yes. That was in Columbia. From '64 to '68, I was in high school in Columbia. I wanted to stay in Elizabeth because all my friends were here, but my mother said no, you have to come South. You have to come South. I don't know if I regret that or not. I think I would have been a good student here as well, but she wanted me with her.

SI: Could you see any change in the quality of education between the Elizabeth schools and Columbia?

RC: I probably didn't pay any attention to it then, but looking back on it, I went to an all Black high school and the teachers seemed more concerned with our learning than the teachers did when I was in Newark. Now, I had a good teacher in Elizabeth. She was good. Elizabeth was a little different than Newark. I'm thinking that in Elizabeth, after sixth grade, when I was in the slow class, seventh and eighth, I was in the fast class. I was the only Black person in my classes. That could be the reason the education was good. I don't know. That could be the reason. There was a difference in Columbia. All of the teachers, of course, were Black during that time and they wanted us to succeed. They taught us well and they knew their subject matter. They wanted us to succeed and the majority of us did. Later on, '66, '67, '68, with integration, we got white teachers. Also, black students could go to the white school. A lot of the Black kids left the Black schools, thinking they would get a better education in the white schools. A lot of them left, but I just stayed where I was. I had a really good German teacher who was white. I took German. [laughter] But there is a story about my taking German--I took Spanish for two years, and then the Spanish teacher got married and left and there was no more Spanish. They tell you, you have to have four years of a language. Being immature, thinking I could just do German to have the four years. I took the German. I did okay. The teacher--I can't remember her name, but I really liked her. She went to Winthrop College, which was white. She attached herself to me for some reason and we became very, very close. I took German at Douglass, too. [laughter] I would have begged my professor for a passing grade. Yes. That was funny. Everyone at Douglass in my German class--it was about eight women had a German surname but me. I said, "Oh, lord." [laughter] But I made it. I made it.

SI: The German class in high school, was it mostly African American?

RC: We were all Black. We were all Black, yes. I can't remember the class. But I just remember I passed it and the teacher liked me. I liked her. We probably took it because the Spanish teacher left. We had German, French and Spanish. For some reason, I didn't think I could do well in French. So I chose German. The only thing I can remember now is *ich liebe dich*, I love you. [laughter] That's all I remember. It was interesting because when I got to Douglass, you have to, of course, take a language. They give you a test to decide where to put you. I said, "Oh, I'll take German I," even though I had two years. I took the test and I don't know what I did on that test, but they put me in conversational German. It was--whew. I could read it and write it, but I couldn't speak it. They put me in there, because I did well, because I could read and write. But I don't remember my German teacher's name, [inaudible] at Douglass. I got out with a C. I don't know how I did a C. I was happy. Well, they did numbers at Douglass--one, two, three, four, five, instead of A, B, C. I got a three. I think. One, two, three, four, five--a three. I would have begged her for anything except a failing grade. That was Douglass.

SI: Going back to your earlier years in Newark and Elizabeth, you said you were very introverted, you would go to the library a lot. Were there any activities, clubs?

RC: Because I was an introvert, I didn't join anything. I would tell my students in Newark, never do that. I was totally academic. Totally books, books, books. I regret

that. I tried to pull out when I was a junior in Columbia. I tried to join the cheering squad. I wanted to cheer and wear the little dresses and carry pom-poms. I think I was terrible; I didn't get in. When I wasn't chosen, that was it. I said, "Well, I won't do anything like that again." I was the one who if you were in gym and they had to choose teams, I was always the last chosen. That was me. That's just who I was. I just decided sports were not for me. I'll just read. Of course, I was in the Honor Society. I did that kind of thing. I also worked for the library club and joined the Future Teachers of America, but no other kind of activity. I don't know why I didn't join the newspaper because I liked to write, but I didn't join the newspaper. I remember one year there was a contest where you had to write a play. Your play was going to be performed on stage. I wrote this play about drugs. Now, I'm in Columbia, South Carolina in the '60s. I wrote a play about drugs and the drug king and how he was destroyed by good people or something. Being so conservative in the South, the administrators said, "Mm-mm. We can't have anything like that. Nothing about drugs." That's another thing that kind of pushed me away from being involved in school activities. I pretty much just studied, just read. I was a reader. I would read everything. I liked science and had considered going into medicine, but my father was in microbiology and I didn't like my father. I blamed him for taking my mother and me from Jersey to the South. So as a teenager, I didn't like him. Anything he did I wasn't going to do. I think I would have been a good doctor, though.

SI: You became a doctor.

RC: Well, yes. [laughter] Another kind of way. Yes.

SI: As you're growing up and going between the South and the North, obviously a lot is happening in the larger Civil Rights Movement. Was that talked about a lot in your household? Was there any activity by your mother or your aunt?

RC: No. The person I am today--it's a wonder I am who I am, because I'm pretty political. When I was raised, it was all about survival. It was all about making the money to pay the rent and buy the food. Even though we knew what was happening and we watched things on television, we weren't intimately involved in anything at all. Now, I do have an aunt who's still alive. She's eighty-four. She did go to the March on Washington. At that point, '63--I think it was in '63. I can't remember if I was in the South or not, but I didn't know about that until later on. I didn't know she had gone, so I must not have been living with her. She did go. But my mom, the whole thing was survival. Just a high school education, a child to raise, and working in the factory--we didn't do anything else, anything else. I wasn't raised in a political household at all, which is interesting to see the kinds of things my father did with the NAACP, but we weren't with him at the time. We were not political, but we knew what was happening. We knew. My mom told me later when Malcolm X was assassinated, she had watched him on TV. She never followed him or she never really read about him, but when they talked about him, she watched it. She said how upset she was when he was killed. I never even knew she thought that way. But she told me about that later, but we weren't that involved.

SI: Any questions about early years?

SRK: I grew up in the South as well. I grew up on a farm, too. When you were on the farm, did you do any of the farm work or was it just a kid playing on the farm?

RC: No, we didn't play. Now, when I would go down--when I was like, eight or nine, the most I did, I put in--you call it putting in tobacco. We would go to the tobacco fields and we would do what you call sucker. When the tobacco leaves grow, they have little growths on top of the stalk, which will stunt the growth of the bigger leaves. The kids, we were taken out to the fields and it would usually be really hot. We would be left there to sucker the tobacco. We'd go up and down the rows taking the little leaves off. There were always big green tobacco worms on the plants. We had to be careful with that. We would just pray for rain because if it would rain, we could go home. Later, the young men would have to crop the tobacco--that's breaking the leaves off of the stalk. They would then bring the cropped tobacco back to the barn in a drag and we would do what you call handing tobacco. We would hand it and the women would string it up. We would have to get up at four in the morning. They just said get up. You had to come out. We worked. On Saturdays, the family would give us \$1.75. We could go uptown--we called it uptown--to buy things. I did work on the farm. Now, my cousin, who stayed year-round, picked cotton, because cotton was picked in August. By August, I was back in Jersey. She did the cotton and we both did the tobacco. I know farm life. I really do know farm life. It was a hard life and they worked, but we were happy. We enjoyed it. We were children, so we enjoy being there and being with family. As an aside, the young men were treated much better than we girls. They were given more leeway than we were. So if they wanted to go uptown or go somewhere else, they could just go. Girls, we were protected. I shouldn't say the boys were treated better. The girls were just protected. The guys could just do anything. We resented it. We knew it would happen, and we resented it. But there was nothing we could do. But when they would go to town and we had to stay home, the boys would bring us cookies. These are my cousins. They would bring us something, but we couldn't just be out there. That was the South. But I loved that too. I enjoyed being there. That's my southern story. [laughter]

SI: When you would go into the town, I would imagine that was segregated as well.

RC: Segregated. Yes.

SI: What were the norms that you would have to follow?

RC: You know, as a child we didn't go that often. When we went, I can't remember anything untoward. You just went in, got what you wanted, they waited on us. I don't remember blatant racism. It was just like you knew your place and you just followed whatever you were supposed to do. I don't remember anything that was a problem as a child. I'm sure the adults saw different things. But we were with adults. We never went alone. We got whatever. A lot of times you had corner stores--well, not corner. We didn't have corners, but they had little stores. We would go there. People would know

you. Somebody might ask you, "Are you Mr. Bob's gran?" We would just get what we wanted and leave. I didn't experience anything blatant or being challenged or anything like that.

SI: Would you go to movies or restaurants?

RC: Now, I don't remember ever going to a movie in Dillon when I was growing up. I never went to a movie when I moved South when I was fourteen. I always used to go to movies in Jersey. One day in Columbia, I just said, "Ma, let's go to the movies." I'll never forget. She didn't want to say no, so she said, "All right. I'll take you." We went. Of course, it was segregated. We had to sit upstairs. The Black people had to sit upstairs. I remember--now this is 1965 and the movie was *Flower Drum Song*. I remember the movie, *Flower Drum Song*. After that, for the four years I was in Columbia, I never went to another movie. I just didn't go. We didn't go. I just didn't like it, having to sit upstairs. I had forgotten about that. Yes.

SI: When you were in high school, what were your favorite subjects? What did you see yourself doing for a career possibly?

RC: I just loved everything. I was a student. I was a perpetual student. I liked reading and writing. I loved English and I was really good in math. I remember as a ninth grader, they gave me my schedule and I had an Algebra I class. I went in and everyone in there were seniors and juniors. I left. I said, "I have to be in the wrong place," but that was my class, and I did well. I just liked it. All I did was study. When all you do is study, you do well. I loved everything. I really did enjoy reading and writing. I decided because I enjoyed reading and writing when I went to Douglass, I decided to major in English. That's the only reason. Initially, like I said, I was going to do science, but I just changed my mind. My father would have a lot of *Scientific Americans* and I had this space in the pantry where I would go when my parents would get on my nerves. I would go in this pantry and turn on the light and just read all his *Scientific Americans*. I said, "Well, maybe I might be a doctor," but then I fell out with him. So I chose English because I enjoyed it.

SI: Where you were living, was it kind of like faculty housing?

RC: No. It was a low-income area. This is interesting. When my father called my mom to say, "Come on. Let's get back together," I guess she wanted a marriage. She assumed he was a college professor and he was a college professor, but she assumed that meant money, that he made a good living. They didn't make much money at all. I'm thinking--now you're talking in the '60s--they may have made three thousand dollars a year. I know you can't conceive of that. But we didn't have a lot of money. He was a professor, but that didn't mean he had things. We lived in a low income area and it was called Washington Carver Village. You know how they have these mother-daughter houses side by side? There were two bedrooms, a kitchen, and living room. It was just where low income people lived. It was neat and it's just where we lived. When I went to high school, I came from "across the tracks," and we were poor. By senior year--I was a good

student and I was valedictorian. The problem was I lived across the tracks. People were very conservative and the high school administrators lived in the large houses--these are Black folks, everybody's Black. They lived in these large houses, belonged to these influential clubs. Here I was poor, from across the tracks, the valedictorian representing the school. It was a problem. There was colorism in the race. I was dark. They did not want me to be valedictorian because you represent the school, you give the speech. She's poor. She's dark. She can't represent us. What happened was, as a teenager, I kind of heard the rumblings, but I didn't quite understand what was going on. I learned later that they look at your average for the four years. They were trying to do a tenth of a point, a tenth of a point, but my average--all modesty aside--was so far above the other students that they didn't know what to do. So they had to give it to me. I found all this out later. They give you a coach for your valedictory speech. They gave me this woman, Black woman, who was a WAC [Women's Army Corps]; she had been in the war. She said to me--and she was a light-skinned Black woman--she said to me--and at this point, I had heard everything and I was kind of destroyed. I said, "Oh, my god. They're going to do this to me." She said, "Rosalind, we're going to show them." That's just what she said to me. She gave me so much strength. She said, "We will show them." I wrote my speech. The speech was called "How Noble the Quest." That's all I remember is the title. I practiced with her. We practiced and we practiced. On graduation night, I had to give my speech. I always wore glasses; I couldn't see well. I didn't want to be nervous. The place was packed. I took off my glasses, so I couldn't see. I gave my speech and it turned out well. That was a time they just did not want me out there because that's the way some Black people were during that time. To be bright, you had to be light skinned and have money. It's not money that we know today, but back then, if you had your own home and your children went to college, you were established. Whereas, my family, even though my father was a college professor, we lived with people who didn't have money. We got through that. I had forgotten that, too. But we made it. I made it and then I left.

SI: That was 1968 when you graduated.

RC: '68. I graduated in '68. By that time, my mom--I'm trying to think--yes, my mother and father were still together. My mom wanted me to stay in Columbia and go to school. I had to get away. I didn't have good memories. I had to get away. I'm trying to think of the word. Even though I was academic, I don't think I was wise, because I just applied to one school, which was Douglass. I was courted by a lot of schools. I was getting all these letters, but I just applied to Douglass. Thank goodness they let me in. The only reason I chose Douglass is that it was in New Brunswick and New Brunswick wasn't far from my aunt in Elizabeth. That was the only reason. I went to Douglass and was ready to go. My mom said she'll buy me a car if I stayed home. I said, "No. Got to go."

SRK: Did you live on Douglass campus?

RC: Yes. I lived on campus. I went two weeks before school--no, six weeks, I think, before school actually started. It was like orientation. We had an orientation. During

that orientation though--let me go back--we stayed on Rutgers campus during the orientation. Then we went to Douglass when we started. It was interesting. Another young lady from my school in Columbia, South Carolina, was at Douglass. She was a sophomore. She found out I was coming. She thought I would be a clinger, and be all under her. She made that clear. But by that time, I had made my own friends. I didn't have to cling to her, but she thought I would be all into her. Nah. [laughter]

SI: That's interesting. You're not the first person to bring up something like that. Somebody from their high school almost says flat out, "Don't."

RC: "Leave me alone." She thought she would have to baby me and take care of me. I said, "No. I'm good. I'm good." I enjoyed my time at Douglass.

SI: I want to get more into that, but before we leave South Carolina, just a month or two before you graduated, Dr. King would have been shot. What was the reaction for you personally and then in the community?

RC: I remember that very well. I was leaving--by that time, I think I was in German. I was leaving, I think, a German class. My high school, they called it a campus, and so when you walk, you were really outside. A lot of times you were outside. That's when we heard that Dr. King had been shot. Everything stopped. Everything stopped. We were sent home. It was in the middle of the day. We were sent home. I'm going to tell you. Am I getting King mixed up with Kennedy? When [was] Kennedy shot?

SI: 1963.

RC: King is '68.

SI: Yes.

RC: Okay. All right. No, I'm talking about King. I remember we were sent home. That's the only thing I can remember. I can't remember anything else. Watching the TV and everything happening. I don't know how long we were out of school. We didn't go right back to school. I just remember the sadness and being home and the tears and everything. I don't remember any public things that we went to. My family, we didn't do that. I just remember being home. That's all. Watching everything they said on television, but it was a sad time. I can't remember--that was April 4th, so school wasn't out. I can't remember going back. I just remember being sent home. School was out. That was it. I can't remember anything else. I would have graduated that June, so I don't remember anything else. I don't know if that's a psychological thing, but I remember being sent home. [I] remember when I found out, because we were walking to another class and we heard Dr. King had been shot. That was it, so we went home. I don't remember anything else. Just TV. That's it.

SI: You came up to New Brunswick in August.

RC: Yes. I think it was August 17th. I went to my aunt's, my aunt's home, the one my mother and I used to live with. She took me to Douglass whenever it was time to go. What's interesting--I told you about the environment that I was raised in with my mom; she had male friends. One gentleman who was her friend--they were together a couple years and then she left him because there were problems. I hadn't seen him--let's say I was fourteen when she went South and had never seen this man again. The scuttlebutt, the news got out that I was back in Jersey. I was seventeen going on eighteen, going to college. He heard. He came to my aunt's house. We never were close. He was my mother's friend. He came to my aunt's house with luggage. He gave me three pieces of luggage, so I could go to college. I thought about that. I said, "Looky here. Maybe he wasn't so bad." But for him, this is something he wanted to do. He hadn't seen my mother in five, six years, but he knew I was going to Douglass. He said, "Yes. I heard you're going to Rutgers." He said, "Rutgers." I said, "Yes." He said, "I brought this for you." I kept that luggage--it was navy blue--for all four years. That was interesting. Yes. My aunt took me. She had just had a baby. She and a couple of friends drove me to Douglass. I remember going to Douglass and we met--oh, I can't remember her name. She was a residence counselor at Douglass. She was Black. We were introduced to her. Her name was Wilma Harris. Then I went in my dorm and the rest is history.

SI: Which dorm was it?

RC: Corwin. I was at Corwin. A lot of the--I think when I came in, it was about fifty-seven Black women who came in. I think that was one of the largest classes with Black people at Douglass at the time. I don't know how many other students--maybe about eight hundred, but it was fifty-seven of us. We were very close. I was at Corwin. My roommate was white. Her name was, I remember, Ildiko Florian. We got along famously. A lot of my friends did not get along with their roommates. I don't know. I think it was both of our personalities. I think we were different. She was Hungarian. We decided that we were going to go downtown to McCrory's to get stuff to decorate our room. It was going to be an African Hungarian room. Where that came from, I don't know. [laughter] We were going to have an African Hungarian room. We got along very well. But what's interesting, after freshman year, I just lost total contact, because you can choose your own roommate then. We lost contact. I don't know if she remained at Douglass or not. She was different. She was like what we would call the "wild child" and she would just flit here and there, but we got along very well. (Ildiko?). I wonder where she is now. [laughter]

SI: Was there any kind of culture shock coming up after going to high school in the South?

RC: Amazingly no. I don't remember a problem. No. It could be because I had that circle of Black friends. We were like cushions for each other and because I was raised partially in Newark. So it was no real culture shock for me. None at all. My only fear--they kept telling me when I came up to school to Douglass, I was coming from the South and the education in the South is terrible. You're really not going to make it. I really believed that. I was afraid that I didn't know as much as everyone else. That was a fear

for me, I wasn't going to make it. But after the first class, and I don't know what class it was, but whatever the discussion, I had read the book. I said, "Whew. I can do this." So I was good. [laughter] I wasn't afraid anymore. But I really was scared at first.

SI: Who was telling you that? Was it your friends?

RC: It was well known. It's what they said in the community. Not in the southern community, because I got a good education in the South, but in the North they would say if you were raised in the South and came up here, you wouldn't do well. Maybe I was just lucky and had good teachers. But they were very concerned. The whole education though in the South was Eurocentric, definitely. By the time I got to Douglass, I knew all the folks. I knew the writers. I knew everything. I didn't know anything African American. But in terms of Eurocentric education, I was in. That's how they were taught and that's how--in the South, that's how they taught us. I had read stuff and I knew things. There was no culture shock at all for me. Now, a lot of my friends, my Black friends, they had problems. I don't know why. They had problems with roommates. They had problems with residency. They had a lot of problems. Some of them. Not all of them. But some of them did have difficulty, but I didn't. It could be my personality because I was an introvert. I was quiet. Sometimes when you're quiet, you're overlooked. [laughter] Folks don't say too much to you because you don't say much. I was very, very quiet. Very quiet.

SI: Questions? No? OK. Vanessa?

VB: At Douglass, was there a curfew when you attended?

RC: Yes. [laughter] There was a 12:30 curfew. I'm thinking that was the weekend. I don't know during the weekday. We did have a curfew. I remember I found a little boyfriend and went out. Curfew was 12:30. I don't know where we went, but it was like, 12:15 and I knew I had to be back. Here, I'm seventeen. I'm crying. "I got to get back. I got to get back." We were walking. I was crying, so he picked me up and started running. [laughter] He was running back to Corwin so I could get in. We made it. We made it. I had forgotten that. Danny, that was his name. He ran me back to Douglass. Not only did we have a curfew for dinner, we had to wear dresses. We had to wear dresses for dinner. Now, that's freshman year. We had to wear dresses. The Black women, we were like rebels. What we would do is carry skirts in our book bags or pocketbooks and get to the line and put the skirts on. They didn't know what to do with us. We would put the skirts on over our jeans. They really couldn't say anything because we had them on. I think that was over after the first year. Not only a curfew. You couldn't have men in your rooms. On Sunday--listen to this one. On Sunday, I think from 4:00 to 5:45 or something, you could have men in your room, but you had to have the door open. [laughter] The door had to be open. I just thought that's the way things were because I didn't know anything about colleges. After the first year, I think they got rid of the curfew and all. But we definitely had a curfew. It wasn't my roommate, but some roommates my friends told me, would climb out the window after curfew. Climb out the window and go do what they want to do and come back, climb

back in the window. [laughter] Of course, I didn't do that. [laughter] I didn't do that. But I enjoyed Douglass. I really did. I really did.

SI: When you would date, were the men from Rutgers College?

RC: My first boyfriend was from--they call them "Townies." He was from New Brunswick. After then, Rutgers. I met a young man from Rutgers. We were pretty much together for three years. Freshman year, a brother from town, a young man from town. After that, the young man I was with was a year behind me. He was from Asbury Park. He was a freshman when I was a sophomore. We stayed together until my senior year. Then we kind of broke up.

SI: This was obviously a time of extreme social upheaval activism. You have the Black Student Movement, you have the anti-war movement, the women's movement. Did you gravitate towards any groups or any activity in particular?

RC: Yes. The Black Student Movement. We had an organization called DBSC, Douglass Black Student Congress. DBSC. One of the years I was president--as quiet as I was, how I got to be president I don't know. I was quiet, but I was a thinker. I was president. I can't remember if it was the first year or the second year, we didn't have any Black faculty at Douglass. We decided we felt we needed Black faculty. I don't know if we went to the dean or how we did it, but they said they couldn't find anybody qualified. We staged a protest and the protest was--now, I'm remembering forty years ago, so I might miss something. We went to the cafeteria, all of us at the same time. We made sure we were strategically located in the cafeteria at different tables. At a certain time, all of us were supposed to take our plates, which was full of food. We didn't throw them. We just put them over on the table like that. We refused to move. We said, "We want Black faculty. It's as simple as that. You're going to have to do something." I don't remember any--and at that point, I think, at Rutgers, there was action the same day. I think it was a unified thing. I can't remember it that well, but I think it was a unified thing that we did because we were very close to the young men at Rutgers. They would have parties at the hall called Clothier Hall. We were close to them. We did that. I don't know how long it took, but then there were meetings and discussions. How can we find this Black faculty that you want? They did find--of course, they did find somebody. There was a gentleman out of Atlanta named A.B. Spellman. They hired him and paid his way from Atlanta to New Jersey twice a week. He taught a Black literature class. Then we had a lady named Miss Baycoats and a gentleman named Jan Carew. I can't remember the rest of them, but we did get Black staff. I know that it was time. It was the times we were living in and Douglass just knew they had to do something. This is what they did. Later on they had--now, what's his name? A.B. Spellman. He wasn't a--how can I say?--a professor. He was a visiting lecturer. That's how it was. He was a visiting lecturer. The people they hired during that year were visiting lecturers, and we enjoyed them. We got close to A.B. because we would go out to eat. We would go out to eat with him. He was a nice guy. Yes. I definitely was involved in the Black Student Movement. I definitely was involved in that. Then in the years to come, they would have six-week summer programs for incoming Black students or it could have been any

students of color. It may not have just been Black students. I was always aa worker in the programs.

SI: [inaudible]

RC: Yes. I worked with them during the summer. I worked with the girls and tried to help them.

SI: Counselor, maybe.

RC: Counselor, yes. I was like a counselor in their summer programs. That was fun. That was fun because I got to school them and try to get them on the right track. The young women were different. When my class came in, we were more revolutionary. As the succeeding classes came in, they were a little different. Times change. The fight was over and so they were a little different and they didn't push for the Black things. A lot of them wanted to party. We had to school them, show them what was necessary. That's what I did. DBSC. I worked with them. Again, I was the president. I was a counselor. One year we had a Black Arts student weekend and I organized that. We had a poet to come in. His name was Don L. Lee. Now his name is Haki Madhubuti. He came in and did a poetry reading. I got a lot of flack because the school gave us money to do this. I liked his poetry, so I called him and asked him to come. What do you call--it wasn't student center. But wherever he spoke, a lot of people were there. I decided with the group to give him a five hundred dollar honorarium and the folks were really upset. They thought that was too much money. They thought it was too much money--not the school, the students. "Give me the five hundred dollars." I said, "I liked him." [laughter] I was the one to make the final decision. Whoever the dean was said, "Well, here's the money. Do with it as you will." I don't know how much they gave us, but we gave him five hundred. He was just starting out. Let him get some money. I did those kinds of things. I enjoyed that. I did come out of my shell to become kind of active, pretty active in things.

SI: You said earlier you were a voracious reader, but a lot of it was Eurocentric in your education. Was this the first time you were really being exposed to African and African American art?

RC: Yes. When I got on campus. Yes. How that happened, I guess talking to people and I just started reading more and more. I have a story. I won't say the professor's name because I'm not sure that's who he is. But I had a professor and we had to do a paper on a writer that we liked. I liked Langston Hughes. I wanted to do my paper on Langston Hughes. This is a twenty-five, thirty page paper on Langston Hughes and his work. I told the professor, and he said, "No." He said, "Because there are no African American writers of note and so you cannot do that." I'm eighteen, nineteen. What am I going to do? You're not going to do it. The fight wasn't there yet to challenge him. I don't know who I did, but I was very discouraged behind that. And he meant that. He meant what he said. The irony in that is when he died--I remember this professor. When he died, by that time I had graduated and I had gone to Douglass for some reason and was

in the library and I saw that he had donated his library, the same professor, to Douglass. I went through his donated books and saw that a whole lot of them were by Black authors. I said to my friends, "He wouldn't let me do the paper, but he read Black authors," and people made fun of me. They would say, "Well, he had the Black authors and he read them and maybe that's how he made his decision." I said, "I didn't want to hear that." He donated a lot of books by Black authors to Douglass College. Otherwise, he wasn't mean to me or anything. This is just how he felt and this is what he told his student, unfortunately. That could have been an impetus for me to start reading more and more black authors. I'm going to see. I know what he said can't be true. My education in African American literature didn't begin until I went to Douglass. It wasn't so much the courses, until the Black professors started coming. The lecturers started coming and we were able to explore what we wanted. Then I just started reading. I just loved to read. But I read everything. I just don't read Black books. I read everything.

SI: How did you decide on your major?

RC: Because I like to read and write. I just decided English. The education piece, I don't know. I didn't decide--I guess my senior year--that I would do education because I'm thinking I have to get a job. January my senior year, a gentleman came from the Newark Public Schools. He was interviewing people for teaching positions. At that point, I think I was twenty, twenty-one. I would graduate in a few months. He interviewed me and he saw that I had gone to school in Columbia, South Carolina, C.A. Johnson. He said, "Oh, I'm from Columbia. You want the job?" That was the interview. I said, "Sure." [laughter] That was the interview. I got the job. In January, I had a teaching position. He shouldn't have done it like that, but I had a job. You take the NTE [National Teacher Examination, now the Praxis test]. I had to take the test. Then I went into Newark. At that point, to show you how Newark was--I went in '72. My first day, young, fresh, ready. The department chairperson in English said to me, "All right. You'll teach eleventh and twelfth grade. There's the book [inaudible]." That's it. No syllabus. [laughter] Nothing. I've never taught before. "There's the book." I said, "Is there a list?" "Do what you want." That's unbelievable, but that's what he said. "There's the book." It's good I'm a reader. I was able to make it my career. I was at Malcolm X Shabazz High School for thirty-two years. I stayed there thirty-two years. Then I had a problem with my department chair. I do my work, and I try to be a professional. I still had a problem with the department chair. It just dawned on me. I said, "I don't have to do this. I don't have to take this." I left after thirty-two years. I became the department chair at another school, Technology High and I stayed there for six years. I loved teaching. Loved it. I did not like being an administrator, as well. I didn't always like dealing with teachers because some felt they knew it all. You couldn't tell them anything. That was a problem. All of my teachers weren't like that, though. Some did learn from me. I remained for six years. Then I retired. I still have contact with two of my former teachers.

SI: When you started, was it called Malcolm X Shabazz High School at the time?

RC: Yes. The year before, it was South Side. It was South Side. The year I came in '72, they had changed the name. The students from the class of '72--the students protested. They wanted the name of the school changed. In order to do it, you had to have signatures. You had to have a petition. The administration didn't think the students would be able to do it. The government of Newark, the city council, everyone thought it was funny. They said, "Oh, those kids." I don't know how many signatures they had to get. They got the signatures. They took it to the city council and they had to change the name. There were some professionals who had graduated, Black professionals, from South Side who said they would never enter South Side again until that name was changed back. It was interesting, but it was a strong student group, '72. I'm trying to think. I can't remember the young man's name, but it was a strong student group that changed the name of the school. When I came in, in '72, it was the first year it was Malcolm X Shabazz High School. But there was a lot of consternation in the city behind that. People didn't like it, but they had to do it because they told the kids. "This is what you have to do," and the kids did it. They were just shocked that they got all those signatures. So they changed the name. I went to Malcolm X Shabazz High School.

SI: What was the makeup of the faculty at the time? Was it older teachers who had been there for decades?

RC: Yes. Older teachers who had been there a long, long time. Yes. I was very young, twenty-one. I was twenty-one. But most of the teachers--wasn't that many--let me take that back. Yes. What I want to say is when I came in, in '72, I think it was a big retirement in Newark. They hired a thousand teachers that year for the entire school system. A thousand teachers. But there were still some older teachers there who had been there for years. There was no assistance. They just kind of ignored you. You were just there. You did the best you could. It's just that by that time, I was into my revolutionary period and I just decided I'm going to teach these children, they're going to learn something regardless of what anybody else does. I can't be concerned with the other teachers. In this room they will learn something. That's how I operated for thirty-two years. Like I said, I loved it. Loved it. I think because I loved it so that I was able to help some kids. You never get them all. I was able to help some kids because they saw that I was like the parent away from home. That's the way I presented myself, the parent away from home. A lot of kids didn't want to come to my class because I took no prisoners. I enjoyed what I did. Eventually, I got them. Took a while, but eventually I got them. But you don't get them all. Some I had problems with. But I enjoyed my job. I didn't see it as a job. I saw it as an avocation. I saw it as giving back. I think that's why I was successful in it, because I saw it as giving back. Loved to go to work. [laughter] Loved to go to work, until I became an administrator. [laughter] Oh, boy. But I made it work. I did my best. I had five English teachers to supervise. Three history teachers to supervise. Then the last two years they gave me three world language teachers. How could I supervise a world language? I could do history and English, but world language? I don't speak Spanish or French. That was a problem. How could I help my teachers? I could help them with theory and pedagogy, but I couldn't help them with the subject matter. It was very frustrating, but I did my best.

SI: Over your teaching career, were there new courses that you put in or new aspects of your courses that you tried to [inaudible]?

RC: Well, yes. Let's say American Lit. When I began teaching American Literature, the texts just had works by Gwen Brooks and Langston Hughes. They didn't do too much else with black authors. Since I was a reader, I brought in other black writers. I instituted this program, where I called it--I can't remember the name of it. Let's say "Authors." Every day for five minutes--well, the beginning of the week, I would give the children a picture of a Black author. Then every day I would give what I call author facts, just about three or four sentences. They had to copy it down in their notebook. Then we went on with our lesson. We talked about it. But that way, they got to know Black authors. At the end of the year, we may have done maybe twenty-five authors. So you had a picture, you had five facts and you had a sample work. At the end of the year, they had to gather up--now, see, they're supposed to be keeping them--gather the material in a folder and pass it in to me for a grade. That's an easy hundred because all they did was copy, but needless to say, a lot of them didn't. The last week, everybody's running around, running off stuff, copying stuff, so they could get that hundred. What's interesting. I met this young woman, who's in her forties now, who was one of my students and she remembers the author facts. Of everything I taught, she remembers the author facts. She told me if she's in a group and they're talking about authors, she says, she just throws it out there, because she remembers it. I said, "Good." I did that because the textbooks did not have those authors. Research papers, generally I would do Black subjects. I would give them topics that were happening in the world that had to do with Black folks. That's how I would do it. One year, my department chair--I don't know what I was doing. I taught what I was supposed to teach, but I added something. The department chair came in one day and told me that my subject matter was inordinately Black and that just won't do. "You're just doing too much." This is like in the '70s, early '80s. I was a writer. He wrote me up and I wrote him up. [laughter] We wrote each other up. In essence, what I said is when I'm doing Shakespeare and Blake and Milton, that's not inordinately white. You didn't say anything about that. Afterwards, he kind of just left me alone, because I was doing--by this time, we had a curriculum. I was following the curriculum, but what you do, you do as you're asked and then you do what needs to be done. You do both. I was doing both. All he saw was--when he would come in, I just happened to be doing Black stuff. He had a problem. Later on, he just left me alone. I guess he said, "Is it worth the fight? Leave her alone." I had problems with department chairs, probably my whole career. They would come in because I was doing those kinds of things. Because I was also doing what I was supposed to do, they couldn't get rid of me because I was doing that. Because I loved the other stuff. I loved literature. So when we did *Macbeth* or we did *Hamlet* or whatever, we got in it. Those kids got in it. I enjoyed that, but they needed everything. It just so happened I was with Black children. Had I been teaching white children, I would have done the same thing. I would have brought Black authors in because you need everything. You need a world view that encompasses the world. Those were the kinds of things I did. When I went to Technology as a department chair, by this time it's 2004, so curriculum, everything's down pat because we're into the testing and all. When I went in, I saw they weren't reading--the school was seventy-nine percent Latino. On their reading lists, nothing

Black, nothing Latino. [laughter] I said, "What are you doing to these children?" What the teachers were doing is what they had been taught. In college, they read the Milton and the Blake and Shakespeare, so that's what they taught. I said, "You've got to bring in something else." I rewrote everything and brought it in. I had little problems, but when you're in charge, they may fuss, but they'll do it. When I retired, I made a joke. I said, "I know they're going back to what they were doing before I came." You never know. You never know. I did bring that in, the Latino books, the Black books and I brought in a book a review assignment cycle. I did book talks. I would go to each class and do book talks and bring these books for the kids that had images and scenarios that they could relate to, so they would read. They started reading these books. They started reading these books. That's another reason they have so many books, because I was buying books and taking them to school. When I retired, I continued to buy them, but there's nowhere to take them, so they're here. [laughter]

SI: Yes. Many, many books.

RC: Oh, lordy. Essex County College, I go and I sell to the students, very cheap--two, three, four dollars, because I want them to read. So I sell the books. That's what I do now. I'm trying to get rid of them. That's what I do now. Like I said, I love teaching. Love teaching. When I retired, I was lost because I have no children of my own. These were my children. Oh, I was lost. Didn't know what to do, but I knew it was time to go. You have to know when it's time to go.

SI: A lot of teachers I talked to of your generation talk about testing coming in and standardization being the major frustration.

RC: Yes. I left right on the cusp of that. When I left in 2011, it was really gearing up. I probably would have been destroyed because it's not about testing. I guess, I don't know. It is and it's not. It's not about testing. You have to teach children how to learn. Teach them how to learn. That's what I tried to do with mine. I saw them as mine because I didn't have any of my own at home, so I saw them as mine. I remember going to people's houses right before Thanksgiving because I gave an assignment and they left their books. I would take the books to their house and they would just open the door and said, "I don't believe you did that." [laughter] [inaudible] "You forgot your book." [laughter] They would just say, "I don't believe you did that." "Yes, I did." [inaudible] That was it. That's me.

SI: Were you able to establish a rapport with your students' parents?

RC: For the most part, yes. For the most part. What's really interesting, later on, in my teaching career, a lot of their parents had been my students because they don't move. I'm at Shabazz for thirty-two years and people stay. No problems. No problems with parents. I think once I had a problem because a parent--something was happening in the community and people were physically fighting each other. I have a bad habit of making comments in class about that kind of thing and it's not necessary. I said what I had to say. One of my student's mother was one of the ones fighting. She went and told her

mom. Her mother came to school, I guess, to handle me. She walked in and during that time--I wrap my head a lot. I'm not Muslim, but I would wrap my head and I would wear long clothes. I was sitting there reading and she came in and she saw me. I guess she just decided to leave me alone. I knew what it was and I was praying. I said, "Oh, I don't want to fight," because I knew. She came in and she told me who she was. I said, "Welcome. Is there a problem?" She just looked at me and said, "No," and left. Thank goodness. [laughter] Thank goodness. That was one problem. Then I had another problem with a mother coming in. She was alcoholic. Her son had done something. She came in to get him and walked in my class. She started hitting him and then I got between them and got her out. I was furious with the school. Why let her in? You saw she was drinking. Then I was upset for him because he had to come back to class. Here his classmates saw his mother beating him. I just didn't know what to do. I didn't know should you say something. Teachers don't know everything. I didn't know how to handle it. The next day he did come back. Well, I saw administration and they changed that whole procedure about coming in. He came back the next day and I was on pins and needles because I didn't know what his friends would say. One of his friends got up and said, "Hey, man. You took that like a man. Welcome back. You took that like a man." I was so happy because they enveloped him. Because they probably knew the environment. [inaudible] and they enveloped him. I was happy about that. But no parent ever came in my class like that again. What they would do is send a notice that there was a parent, which is what they should have done. Other than that, I didn't have problems with kids or parents. Well, now and then. [laughter] Nothing's perfect. Nothing's perfect. One little boy was so angry with me one time because I wouldn't take his homework--he was a big guy--because it was late. He took his fist and he was standing right in front of me. I was a little itty bitty. Took his fist and then he turned around and put it through the wall. He just hit the wall, so as not to hit me. I said, "Okay." [laughter] I was lucky. Again, it's that mother thing. Because they kind of see me as mom, you can't hit mom. You can be mad at her, but you can't hit her. But he was angry. He was angry. We made up later. We made up. Those kind of things happen. It's how you deal with it. It's how you deal with it. If they know you love them, it's different. It's a different interaction. I could say things that other teachers couldn't say. I worked with that, too. I played on that one because I could say what I wanted. But you had to be careful. Some kids come from environments, like you couldn't really [touch]--I'm a toucher and you knew who would understand that. One time I didn't. The little girl [said], "Don't put your hands on me." I didn't get angry. I said, "Oh, okay. I won't put my hands on you." That was the end of that. Something was happening with her. I was trying to be nice. She really jumped at me. "Don't put your hands on me." I said, "Fine, sister. I won't touch you." That's what teachers need to know. They need to know the environment these children come from. They need to know these children and how to interact with them. If they can't love them, they shouldn't teach them. They shouldn't teach. Shouldn't teach. Everything wasn't peaches and cream. I'm not saying that, but you just deal with it. See, I love teaching.

SI: So do we.

RC: [laughter] Love teaching.

SI: Questions?

RA: I grew up in the area, too. Did you see when you were growing up and going to school here, was it as diverse as it is now today? Has it changed since?

RC: In Elizabeth, Elizabeth was always diverse. Not as many Latinos, but white and Black together in Elizabeth was always that way. Newark was different. Newark, Black people lived in their area. White people in their area. In Elizabeth, it was a lot of interaction, which is interesting. A lot of interaction in Elizabeth. Today in Elizabeth, a lot of Latinos. I just regret I don't speak Spanish. I should have kept Spanish. Elizabeth is diverse. Newark, no. Even now, Newark is probably not as diverse as even it was when I was coming up. A lot of people have left Newark. Again, there's a renaissance in downtown Newark. I don't know. But that hasn't reached the schools. That hasn't really reached the schools. That's more business oriented, downtown Newark.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about your graduate studies?

RC: Graduate, graduate. The master's I did at Rutgers School of Education. I finished that in 1977. I just did that because people said, "Well, you should get your master's." I did it part-time. I did it part-time. I taught and then I took most of my courses in the summer. At that point in my life, in the late '70, I decided I wanted to be an elementary school teacher, not a high school teacher, because when I got a lot of the high school students, they weren't prepared. I said, "Well, maybe I should go down to elementary school." My certificate there would be elementary school, but I never went back. It was just rudimentary. You just went to class. Nothing real big. Just did it. Just did it. It was just perfunctory because people said, "You need a master's." That's why. I just chose education. I couldn't think of anything. I didn't want to do English, a master's in English. I just chose education since that was my career. The PhD, I started in 1990 and I did that--it's going to sound strange, but I just gotten my second divorce and I said, "Well, this will be something to do." [laughter] Really. I chose African American Studies because Temple had the only PhD degree at that time in African American studies in the world. I said, "Well, I'm not far from Philly, so let's do African American studies." That had always been my vocation. I chose to do that and I took courses--one course a semester because it wasn't a thing where you have to have a PhD. I had a job. It was really just something to do--I know PhD people will be upset with that, but it was something to do. I would have one course a semester, have to go to class, I think, once or twice a week, but I drove. Until maybe the third year--I didn't care when I was finished. The third year, they called me into the office at Temple. They looked at my schedule and everything. They told me they didn't give part-time PhDs. [laughter] Because I thought in the summer I could take the bulk of my courses, but in the summer at Temple in that department, people went away. They went on sabbatical. They studied. There were no courses for me to take. I was going to take one course a semester until I finished. If it took twenty years, I didn't care. They said they don't give part-time PhDs. At that point, I got afraid. I said, "Well, what are we going to do?" My advisor said, "All right. Take two courses a semester, plus an independent study. Then you have three courses and

that's a full load." They consider that a full load. That's what I did. I was always the oldest. At that point, I was in my forties, and people were coming from the MA to the PhD and they were in their twenties, early thirties. I was the old lady in the room. I enjoyed it. A lot of stuff I had already read. The degree is African American Studies. I had read the books, I had taught the topics to my kids, so a lot of the things weren't new, but I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it. I was very quiet. One of the professors called me out one night. She said, "Rosalind." She was from South Africa. "You don't talk." I had taught all day at Shabazz. I was tired. Then you drive an hour and forty-five minutes. I figured, just let me listen. I said, "Well, I really don't have anything to say." I said, "Oh, I messed up here." One of the other students told me, "Now, this is what you do." "When you go in, be the first one to raise your hand. Whatever the book is, you read the first chapter." [laughter] He had it down pat. He said, "Read the first chapter or the last chapter and raise your hand first. Then you'll have something to say." I decided I wasn't playing that game. I did my work and wrote a paper, I think, on an African author. I can't remember who it was. I think it was Wole Soyinke. She read the paper and then invited me to Ghana to deliver the paper at a conference. I was quiet, but I wasn't stupid. She assumed quiet meant I didn't know what was going on. After that, she left me alone. She left me alone. I enjoyed Temple, but it was tiring. I was very tired going. I can't think of too much else that happened. Well, a lot happened politically at Temple with the department chair there was a problem. They had a problem with him, Molefi Asante. He lost the position. Someone else came in. A lot of things were going on. When I was doing my dissertation, I asked this one woman to help me and she said, "Well, they can't see us talking because they had sides." Some people on the Molefi Asante's side, some people on somebody else's side. It sounds amazing, but it was very political. She had to sneak and help me because she didn't want people to see her helping. I don't know who's side I was on. I was just trying to do a dissertation, write my paper. I wasn't on sides, because I had a life. See, they were on campus. I had a life outside. The only thing that gave me a problem that I was afraid of--I don't know if they still do it--but you had to have a language. You had to do that language requirement if you do the PhD. I told you about the German, just two years, and then the Spanish two years. Then they had tutoring for the language, but I was teaching and I couldn't do that. I said, "Is this going to be the end?" What my advisor, what we decided to do--you know hieroglyphics?

SI: Yes.

RC: The people called it Medu Neter. In the '80s, I took a class on Medu Neter hieroglyphics. I would take it in New York. I took it for about a year or two. It just so happened, a professor, Theophile Obenga, came to Temple who was an expert in Medu Neter, hieroglyphics. So a couple of students and I got together and said, "Can this be our language?" [laughter] They said, "Yes." They agreed. For me to get certification in a language, I had to do research and write a paper. I chose a paper on some of the temples in Egypt and analyzing the script, the Medu Neter that appeared on and in the temples. I was able to do that. That was fun because I enjoyed that. I liked the Medu Neter part. I doubt they do that now, but we were able. We were able. There were about four of us who had taken Medu Neter in New York. We were able to do that. There was a young

woman out of Chicago who taught it, Sister Rkhty Amen. She taught it. It was called “A Community University.” We would just go and we would give them five dollars and they would teach us. It came in handy. Ten years later, I was able to use that knowledge at Temple. Yes. That was good. I enjoyed my time, but it was tiring. Looking back on it, I don’t know how I did it. I had a class that met at six, and I think, believe it or not, a class that met at nine at night. So I was coming back to Elizabeth at eleven, twelve o’clock at night. Then I had to get up to teach the next day. It got to a point where I was thinking about quitting because it was so much. The only reason I didn’t quit—one of my coworkers at Shabazz—I hadn’t told anyone I was doing the PhD. One of my coworkers had told her students, who told my students. So you can’t quit. You can’t quit because they knew. [laughter] I tell them to stay the course. I had to continue. It took me ten years. It took seven years coursework and in the three, you’re doing the dissertation, you’re doing the research, then the writing of the dissertation. It took ten years. I did it.

SI: What was your dissertation on?

RC: It was on using young adult literature to teach historical--using African American young adult literature to teach historical consciousness and family values. I enjoyed it. You read the books. I loved to read, but then you have to analyze the books and make connections. I got it done. But it was rough. That was my life for ten years. I didn’t do anything else, but teach and go to Temple. Teach and go to the Temple. I finished in 2000. Finished in 2000. Doesn’t seem like it, but [inaudible]. Then you finish, and then they say, “Well, what you going to do?” I said, “Nothing. I just wanted to do it.” [laughter] Because I’m a perpetual student. I just wanted to do it. I just wanted to do it. After you do it, they thought I would leave and go to university. No. That’s not what I wanted to do. I wanted to teach kids. That’s what I did.

SI: You wrote on your survey you were involved in some grassroots organizations in Newark.

RC: Yes. People's Organization for Progress. Yes. I started that in the ‘80s. They’re a political action group. If anything happens in the city, like a shooting or a firing or whatever, they would band together and kind of deal with it. The reason I got involved was because of a young man named Larry Hamm. He was a student who was the first--when he was seventeen he was the first student on the Newark Board of Education. Then he went to Princeton. How we hooked up--after he got out of Princeton, we just met. Someone introduced us. He had this organization. He was a young man. I just started going to the meetings. He knew I was at Shabazz, so I would do programs, African American programs at Shabazz. One was--was it Malcolm? It could have been Malcolm X or Martin Luther King, Jr. I had a contest where we had a hundred questions. This is before the proliferation of the Internet. You had to really pick up a book and find an answer. I had a hundred questions on Malcolm or either--I think it was Malcolm. He wanted to work with us on that to provide the prizes for the kids. Everybody got a set of questions and they were looking for the answers. I had ten winners. Larry's group provided the books, *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and something else. His organization did that. We were able to have a contest and we got newspaper coverage. It was really

good. After then, I started going to the meetings and became part of the group. We would do various things. I don't know how I became a speaker. I would speak at the meetings and things. His name is Larry Hamm, and I guess Larry--I'm sixty-four. He's probably about sixty now. He's still involved. He's still involved in the organization and they do various things. Like with the shootings with the police and all, they'll do a protest or various things like that and commemorations. But when I was involved, he used me for school related things. If the organization wanted to do something in the school, I was the contact and we would do that. It was a good thing. We had a lot of nice programs. We had academic contests. I would make up academic contests and the kids would have to answer questions like on *Jeopardy*. I would do stuff like that and they would provide the prizes. We did a lot of things. It was always school oriented, academic. That's what I did. Now, he was involved in other political activities that I would go to and support him because he supported me. That's what we did. I left the organization, I think, in '88. That could have been the second divorce because I had to get out of dodge for a minute. [laughter]

SI: You've also been involved in groups that deal with, I guess, education related to ancient Africa and Egypt.

RC: Yes. There's an organization called ASCAC, Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization. ASCAC. I became involved with them in about '84 and we went on a few trips to Egypt. It was all about studying Egyptian culture and that's how I got into Medu Neter and started studying the language and traveling. They too still have the organization today. They still exist today. But those are the kinds of things I did. I enjoyed ASCAC and I did a lot of interpretation, of the Medu Neter. I couldn't do it today to save my life, but during then, I was able to interpret the writings and share it with others. We did things like that. We had committees. Everybody was on a different committee to study different things. My thing was the language. I did the language. We would meet in New York at a church. We would meet on Thursdays. I think it was Thursdays at a church, where we would do various things. It was in Harlem. I enjoyed that too. I guess I was active. [laughter]

SI: Other questions? Everybody, think of one more question. This is how I train. [laughter] Going back to Douglass, the lunchroom protest. Were there other protests that you remember that was a public display or taking over an office or a building or anything?

RC: I don't remember. That was at Rutgers. But at Douglass, we did not--maybe we did. I can't remember. Now that you said that, something could have happened, but I really can't remember. I can't remember. Because something happened a year or two later where the Black students, the women were upset about something and they wanted to do the same kind of thing. I was trying to talk them out of it. I remember that. I was saying something like, "Times have changed. Let's do it another way." I think I was deposed. [laughter] I think they got rid of me. But I just didn't think that it should be done that way. Now that you mention a building, it could have been, but I can't remember. I can't remember. Yes, I can't remember. We did have--we were able to get

what we called “The Black House.” We were able to get a house where Black women lived. I don’t know if that still exists today, but we did get a house. I think Douglass didn’t want any controversy. They didn’t want any publicity. Pretty much what we asked for, which was not much, they said, just go ahead. I think we got it. But it wasn’t—even though we had a group, it was just about one or two or three women who did the actual strategizing and talking to the dean. We never went en masse to challenge or anything. We didn’t operate like that. She just talked. There was a sister named Maxene Summey. I know she spoke to the dean and a couple more. We just put everything in their hands. When I became president, I don’t remember having any kind of conversation with the dean. Like I said, I can’t remember a takeover, but something happened.

SI: You mentioned the one poet you brought in. Were there other speakers or artists that you brought to campus?

RC: Probably, but I can’t remember. Because it could not have just been he. So there probably were other people who came in too, but I can’t remember. I just remember that Black Arts [Movement] weekend. I don’t remember having anything else like that. I think everything else that happened was at Rutgers and later on at Livingston. I really think that’s what happened, because there was a group called the Last Poets. I remember their being at Livingston. I think the reigns were taken to Rutgers and Livingston to do a lot of cultural activities because at Livingston, I think there were two poets there, Nikki Giovanni and I don’t know if Sonia Sanchez was there or not, but they had a creative pool at Livingston. [Editor’s Note: Sonia Sanchez taught at Livingston College in the late 1960s and early 1970s.] So we would go there. We spent a lot of time at Livingston with their programs. At Douglass, I don’t think we did anything else after what we did with the Black Arts weekend. That could have been my first or second year. We kind of gave the reigns to them. I think so. I can’t remember too much else at Douglass. Got through it. [laughter] But I liked it. It’s funny. I talked to some friends who graduated with me, who couldn’t stand it. I just couldn’t see it. I enjoyed my time, but a lot of them said no they didn’t. I guess they had different experiences and different personalities. I enjoyed it because of the Black women that I made the association with. Just recently at “Black on the Banks,” we met again after twenty-five, thirty, forty years. I’ve seen these women again. It was good to see them. The program was wonderful. I was glad to be there. I’m glad Doug organized it.

SI: I forgot the question I was going to ask. Do you one of you guys want to jump in?

RC: [laughter] Say one last question.

RA: I had a question. You wrote on the survey about African American studies and African American spirituality. I just wanted to know a little bit more about that. When did you discover it? Is it still a part of your life today?

RC: Yes. It really is because being in the South, you’re generally raised in the church. For some reason, with my grandparents I was, but not with my mom. So I’m not really church-affiliated, but you need—I felt that I needed that spirituality to exist in this world.

So I wanted to do African spirituality and so I would go online and read a lot of books on different cultural things from Africa that I would study. Mainly just read. I never joined a group. For a minute I was close to doing something, but I'm not a joiner like that. I never joined, but I would read. The tenets that I would read in terms of African spirituality, I would just follow. Then I did Buddhism. I was very interested in Buddhism. I would study that. I found this Black woman who was a Buddhist. I don't know if you call them priestesses--but she was involved. Anything that helps me center myself and deal with what's going on in the world, I'm interested in. I chose African spirituality because my ancestors are African. I chose that, but then I branched out. Branched out simply means I read and study and try to apply the tenets to my life. That's how I deal with that to this day. I'm steady looking for things that can help me because it's rough. I think either religion, organized religion or spirituality is necessary. For me, I didn't go the organized religion route, but I think something is necessary to kind of fill us up so we can anchor ourselves because the world is rough and I think you need that anchor. So that's what I do.

RA: Do you feel people are able to practice both?

RC: Yes. I really do. I really do. I don't like the people who [say], "It's my way or no way." There are some people in my family like that. "What are you talking about? Buddhism? African spiritualism?" But I accept them. I don't try to pull them to me, because I have no real thing. I just pick and choose. But I don't denigrate whatever they do because whatever they do is for them. My mother is a staunch Christian. Every time I go home, I go to church. That's just it. You go to church. But then I read. She's been trying to get me to join a church, but that's not what I want to do. I just want to try to be a good person. I think if you read the tenets of all religions, that's the basis. Try to be a good person. So that's what I do. Anybody else? [laughter]

SRK: You mention that you've been selling the books, but you also said that you [inaudible] keep yourself busy now.

RC: Well, I have a newsletter. I'm doing a newsletter and it's called "Sister's Books." I started out every month, trying to put it out, but it's rough because it's six pages, just like this. For me, I have to read all these books. I can't just go online and get a blurb. You can't recommend a book unless you've read the book. So it took a while. I'm kind of stopped on that. What I want to do now, what I'm working on now is going through all my paperwork from when I was teaching and all the projects that I did. I'm trying to consolidate some things and make little booklets. Like, I did a thing on Malcolm, the questions. Even though it's not the same, because you can just go online for answers, but at least they'll get the information. I want to publish those booklets, not anything big. Something really small, so when I go to Essex County, I'll sell it for a dollar. It's all about the knowledge. That's what I'm doing now. looking at my papers from Temple. I wrote a lot of papers at Temple and maybe I'll make little booklets out of them. Let me tell you a little story about a Temple paper. My mother was a book collector and she would get these catalogs. She opened up one catalog and she called me. "There's someone with your name and they're selling a book. It says 'Rosalind Carmichael.'" I

said, "What?" I said, "Read the rest of it." It said, "Rosalind Carmichael, *The Literary Development of Imamu Amiri Baraka*." I like Imamu. I said, "Really?" Then it said, "A 1971 paper from Douglass College." From Douglass College. [laughter] From my undergraduate days. I must have been nineteen. I said, "Ma, I think that's me." She said, "What?" She said, "Order it. Order it." I didn't want to order it, because I said it's probably bad. You're nineteen. I said, "It's probably bad." I didn't want to order it. But I did go online and sure enough, there it was--the professor I said I liked, that we sent for, A.B. Spellman, when he, I guess, retired--I didn't know they sold students papers. Obviously, he sold my paper to somebody and it's for sale online. It's not illegal because my name is there. They bought it, so it's theirs. They're selling it. But one thing that tickled me, when it first came online it was thirty dollars. Now it's fifteen. I said, "Oh." [laughter] I said, "Nobody's buying my paper." But I'm scared to buy it because I'll be embarrassed. Because at nineteen, twenty, I don't think I wrote that well. But I got the idea from that. I said, "Now, I became better as I got older. So let me take some of the papers that I've written and just publish them. Someone could use the information. I guess I should copyright it because I'm going to use it and maybe try to do something with it. But I just want the information out there because I did a lot of interesting topics, and some on African spirituality. I did a couple papers on some writers, like Gloria Naylor. She did a thing called *Mama Day* and that was just wonderful. I did a couple things on that. A lot of the writers--I can't remember now, but a lot of these people I've read and I did a lot of papers. I said, "They're just sitting there. Let's share them with somebody." That's my project right now. It's easier now because of the computer. I can just type it up and go to Staples and do whatever and get it out. That's what I'm doing besides selling books. That's it. Another reason I started the books is because I'm sixty-four and you don't know how long you have. I said, "Now, when I go away from here, people may not be as respectful of books." I said, "They may throw them away or whatever. So let me get them out to people who really want them now." That's pretty much what I'm doing. When I go to Essex County College, the professors and the kids buy the books and they're saying, "Two dollars. Three dollars? Why are you doing this?" I said, "Do you want me to charge ten? Take it." That's why I'm doing it. Because if I charge ten, they won't buy the books. But they'll buy a two-dollar book. They'll buy a two dollar book. That's what I'm doing right now. I don't know if I'll do anything else. I have a goddaughter at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She had a pretty poor upbringing academically and socially, so I kind of attached myself to her. She's my cousin's granddaughter. I'm helping her. She's a freshman now. I spend a lot of time trying to guide her. I do that. That's my life. That's it. Okay?

SI: Do you have any other questions? Is there any part of your life that we skipped over or you want to talk about?

RC: Let me see. I can't think of anything. No. Only thing, for a few years, I did try to have children. I wasn't able to have children. That was disappointing, but then I had the kids at school. Then, I had read something by Toni Morrison where she said that most women, whether they have children or not, need to nurture. You can nurture in so many ways. I can nurture. I nurtured the students, and through my writing when people read certain things, that's like a nurturing. That made me feel a little better. Then I read

somewhere that everybody shouldn't have children, which is true. That was a problem when I was in my 20s, because I wanted to be a mom. I always said I wanted ten children because my mother just had me. I wanted ten. But you never know. Your life is where you end up when you're getting there. This is where I've ended up, and I'm fine. At first it was a problem, but with my goddaughter, I try to nurture her and at Shabazz, I had hundreds of children that I worked with, and at Technology. I was able to nurture new teachers. That's about it. That's about it.

SI: Well, thank you very much. We appreciate it.

RC: You're welcome. You're welcome. Brought back memories. I didn't know I remembered so much.

SI: Let me just say this concludes the interview and thank you very much.

RC: You're welcome.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Rosalind Carmichael 4/26/2016

Reviewed by Molly Graham 4/26/2016