INTERVIEW: Algea Harrison
INTERVIEWER: Sarah Arvey
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Interviewer: **Okay the first things we wanted to talk to you about were your biographical information, such as when you were born, where you were born, and if you could describe your family upbringing.**

A. Harrison: Okay, I was in born Winona, West Virginia, February 14, 1936 on my dad's birthday. When I was born, my mother presented me to my dad and said "Happy birthday." So, I was my dad's baby and we had a very special relationship. I think that accounts a lot for how I am, because he felt that I could do just about anything. My dad was so supportive and it wasn't until I went out into the real world that I realized a lot of people felt women should not have different positions in life. In fact it was when I went away to college because my father was always a buffer to the world saying, "Oh yes my baby can do that." I grew up in a family with a very supportive father and mother and there were four of us children. I had an older sister and two younger brothers. My parents were very progressive. It was always assumed we were going to finish college and I always wanted to have my Ph.D., to be a professor. And friends used to call me Doc, teasing me. But that was always my ambition. I just did not feel the barriers at the time I was forming my identity and what I wanted to be. I didn't realize it was going to be so difficult. I just was not prepared for that.

All of us are college educated. My mother had completed two years. She did sewing and a number of other things. In today's vernacular she would be considered an entrepreneur. So, I had a typical Black Appalachian upbringing of strength and support in the church and the extended family. I grew up in an extended family. On my dad's side there were two aunts who were career women. They were married, but career women and by choice did not have children rather they pursued careers. One aunt traveled all over the world and she had a World Health Organization scholarship back in the early 40's and unusual accomplishment for a Black female at that time. So I was exposed to very ambitious women, and then there was also my mother who was a traditional homemaker but who worked out of the home.

Interviewer: **And you say that's a typical Black Appalachian upbringing, or do you think that's exceptional?**

A. Harrison: Yes, I think now that I look at it, it probably was unusual. Well, we didn't think we were that different, but I think my parents realized it but we were just made to think it was matter of course that you would achieve, that you would do the best that you could do. One of the most interesting things that we always laugh

about is all four of us go to different churches. We visit each other's churches however. We always say it's because we each always want to be in charge and one would try to take over from the other if we were in the same Church. It would be a laugh because all the fighting in Church would be between us. One minister says all of us in one Church would just be too much star power. We were just brought up that way; to be the very best you could be and to always give something back to your community. When I was twelve, I organized a number of programs for the younger people in my community and I was just twelve and not even a teenager. So, I've always been an activist and my father was an activist. We're all activists.

Interviewer: **So do you think those were formative years for your feminist activism later?**

A. Harrison: Right, because it was a barrier. It wasn't a barrier in my mind. It was a barrier in others' mind.

Interviewer: **What sort of activism did you organize when you were twelve? What were you fighting for?**

A. Harrison: I was so presumptuous I guess. One of the things I organized was tea parties and have an older adult come and talk to them. I also organized a young group of majorettes and taught them different dance step to recorded music. I would carry them around the state to perform in different towns. So I would have tea parties, go on hikes, to the movies and other activities with the young people. I was trying to provide them with different organized activities so they could learn how to go forward in the world. They could be somebody. I loved it.

Interviewer: **And do you think that was political in any way in getting these people together? Did you sense any political aspect to that?**

A. Harrison: Not at that time. I lived near Charleston, West Virginia. The major newspaper had a teen of the week program and my little community, which was about a hundred people, well not a hundred people, but a hundred houses, insisted that I be nominated as a teen of the week. All of the winners were white and I was Black. But my community insisted that I should be selected. The newspapers finally said yes because of my work with young people. The newspaper said, "Okay, well we'll take a picture of her." So, a photographer came up to take the picture and the whole community turned out to see the picture being made. And then they decided to just put my picture in, but anyway the photographer made lots of money because every house in the community purchased a picture and displayed it in their living room. So, that was as political as it got, the community insisting that my accomplishments be recognized by the newspaper just as they had recognized white teenagers. It wasn't until I went away to college that I realized that not all communities were supportive of the achievements of women.

Interviewer: **Where did you go?**

A. Harrison: I went to Bluefield State College, which was a small Black college in West Virginia, then I began to realize that people felt that certain positions, like president of the student council, should be held by just males. During the election campaign, the male students and fraternities had rallied around the male candidate and said women should not be President, but if anything a woman could be Vice-President. The awareness of the meaning of what was going on came during a student council meeting. I had been elected Vice President and the President was a male. The members of the Council, who had been against my candidacy, said, "Well we basically know Algea would be the one to get things done, but we had to have a male as President." I got a severe migraine headache during the meeting and that's when I really realized that there were barriers for women. And it was just an eye opening for me. So it wasn't until I was in college that I became aware of negative attitudes about women and their social and professional goals. It probably was around me, but I was such a happy camper that I didn't notice. It hit me right in the face when I was in college.

Interviewer: **What did you study in college?**

A. Harrison: I wanted to be a teacher, get a teaching position, and continue my education for a Ph.D. I loved working with children and I do love teaching and I still love teaching.

Interviewer: **Did you get married or have a partner and have children?**

A. Harrison: I got married in 1960. I got divorced in 1981. I had two children. My son is deceased; he died at the age of thirty-five. I have a daughter and she's around forty. All of that happened after I came to Michigan and started teaching in the Detroit public school system. I got my Masters degree from the University of Michigan and then I married.

Interviewer: **And you moved to Detroit for the jobs?**

A. Harrison: For the jobs, absolutely.

Interviewer: **What was different about Detroit than West Virginia for you?**

A. Harrison: Well, my mother's people were here, that's why we came. I felt it was more racism in Michigan then I had been confronted with in West Virginia. As I said it was probably because I was living in my own world. I was brought up in a very protective family and community. Racism was all around, but I was not confronted with it as much as I was when I came to Michigan. It is just blatant here and much more of it than it is in West Virginia.

Interviewer: **And this is legal racism as far as put into laws, or is this every day on the street kind of?**

A. Harrison: Every day on the street understanding, sort of an "everyone understands" kind of phenomenon. I think you have empirical data that notes Michigan as one of the most segregated places in the United States. People assume because it is in the north that it is more integrated, but it is not. In West Virginia it was segregated, and there are still pockets of segregation. Yet there has been change. For example, when the Supreme Court said that you had to integrate the schools in 1954 a big change happened. We had two Black colleges in West Virginia and they were overrun with whites the same year integration occurred. Today those Black colleges are just 13% Black, the rest of the students are white. Whites just poured into those Black colleges in the fifties. And you have more integrated marriages in West Virginia, with white male and Black female and Black male and white female. There is more of mixing of the races in social situations in West Virginia than it is here.

One of my most interesting stories is that when we grew up in West Virginia, we had an all Black 4-H camp. My aunt was a nutritionist at the camp. At the same time there was this resort area in West Virginia called Glade Springs where Blacks could not go. Well, a couple of years ago we had a big family reunion, well it was not really all blood members of the family reunion, it was like a community reunion. The event was at Glade Springs, the former all white resort. My siblings and I rode over to see the camp where our aunt had worked. There was a big white family reunion going on and the people were camping in the former all Black camp. This scenario was a little different than when I was growing up. So, it's really different. The whites were in the Black area where they could not go before and the Blacks were in the white area where they could not go before. And there were Black and white people at both events. I do not think you would find a similar situation in Michigan.

Interviewer: **And you chose to stay in Michigan?**

A. Harrison: Yes, once I got married and had children. It was very difficult. My area is developmental psychology and I know it is very difficult to move children. I had come to Michigan because of family and I wanted to rear my children in an extended family. All of my siblings are here and my mother's people, so my children have a big extended family. My children are just used to big family gatherings, family members traveling together, and going to events together. It would have been difficult to take them out of the family environment. Plus I like that type of environment for them because that was the way I was brought up.

Interviewer: **So what was your career exactly? You got a Masters in developmental psychology.**

A. Harrison: I got a Masters and then a Ph.D. at the University of Michigan, in the joint program of education and psychology. And then I went to Oakland University and started teaching because Oakland was close to my children. My children were enrolled in Roeper School, a private school for gifted children. I so wanted to work close to where they were going to school. Oakland was close and once you get tenure you have security. Meanwhile I had obtained a divorce so I needed a secure financial base for them. It quickly became time to send them to college. So, you just end up staying where you are. It was more by accident that I stumbled up here. Not accident I guess because I came here because of family, but it's just the personal constraints that go along with being a female. When you have children and feel a deep sense of responsibility for them, you really face a number of constraints. I had choices, but I have not regretted one moment the decisions I made for the benefit of my children.

Interviewer: Let's move on to talk a little about your activist involvement and roles. What lead you into the feminist movement?

A. Harrison: My concern for childcare. Because developmental psychology was my major and one of the focus of the field is on the needs of children.

Interviewer: I'll get that.

[Pause]

Interviewer: Okay you were talking about your concern for childcare lead you into the feminist movement?

A. Harrison: Yes, because developmental psychology is my major. And this was in the late 60's when a lot of research was showing the importance of early environment. This was around the Head Start legislation and the importance of the early years for development. A number of women were beginning to enter the labor market and society was not open or receptive to what the implications were of such a large social force. And that is if you have a lot of women with young children going into the labor market, someone needs to look into childcare, and the only group that was concerned was National Organization of Women (NOW) or the women that began that formed NOW. Joan Israel was someone that I met and Marj Levin and Lillian Troll. Lillian was a developmental psychologist and it was from there that I became involved and worked with women that had the similar interests. Childcare was of interest to us and of course Marj and Pat [Burnett] began to form the NOW movement and I said, "Count me in."

Interviewer: And the NOW movement had already been formed and solidified on the coasts—and was Michigan or the Midwest come in to it later or was it forming about the same time?

A. Harrison: I'm not sure. I am just not sure. I was not national in my outlook. I was very focused on childcare availability in the immediate geographical area. That is how I entered into the movement. I was aware of Betty Friedan and other women like Gloria Steinem who were discussed in the news. However, their approach was broader, my approach was very focused and eventually it became a broader issue for me. In the beginning my interest was just focused on how this movement of women into the labor market was impacting children. The fact that women had choices and could work if that was their desire. Society should be supportive and provide childcare.

Interviewer: Was there ever a 'click' moment? Like a moment of surprise when you realized I need to—you know, "I have this job, I have my family, but I need to also do this"?

A. Harrison: Well, I was always "also having to do this." From my background you can see my father was an activist and it just went along with growing up. The issue was not if you were going to be an activist, rather where would you focus your energies in becoming active. I just assume that everyone should work to make the community a better place. I mean you really should try to make the world a better place for children. The quality of life for women to realize their potential is so important. Society being supportive of women will only happen if you're working at providing the environment.

Interviewer: So exact—around what year did you first get involved?

A. Harrison: It was the late 60's, '68, '69 something like that. '70 I finished my degree, and then I went to work at Oakland. During my first year, I'm almost sure I was involved my first year because of the things I noticed when I was in Michigan. I noticed how much money was spent in providing places for students to park their cars and yet very little was provided for a place for your children. My children were 18 months and 3 years old when I went back to work on my Ph.D. The push for childcare for students was just beginning and there were no childcare provisions at Oakland. Well, also Oakland was not an activist campus. University of Michigan has always been an activist campus. I just was stunned at the lack of involvement in issues when I came to Oakland. And you know you can stand out as a flaming radical just depending on the background. Also majority of the men on campus had stay at home wives.

Interviewer: And do you think that also having a professional career in academia where most of your colleagues were male and had wives who helped them with their family also made you…

A. Harrison: Yes, well I didn't interact that much with them. It was just a little too slow; I had to go where the action was. So, majority of my social activism was in the city. Oakland was just too slow—they were just not up to speed for me. I just looked like a flaming radical and I just didn't need that in my life, I wanted to

be around like-minded people and NOW offered that opportunity. Just about all the women I interacted with in NOW had careers. Joan Israel and a number of others had careers and they were trying to manage a career and a family. So, you had people who were similar and that was very important to me.

Interviewer: **What kind of organizational roles did you take on? What kind of formal roles did you play between the late 60's and the 80's, mid 80's?**

A. Harrison: Let's see I was in NOW. I was on the Childcare Committee. I was involved with New Detroit.

Interviewer: **What's that?**

A. Harrison: That's the urban coalition formed after Detroit had the riots. The Governor of Michigan formed an urban coalition of representatives of business, labor, the community and what they are now call stakeholders. Stakeholders was not the word then, it's a new buzzword. It means all segments of the society that have a stake in the quality of life in the city. The labor movement was involved also. We wanted the labor movement to consider women's issues as part of their bargaining issues. We thought it would help if the labor movement would help in establishing childcare centers. I can remember when a group of us from the Childcare Committee went to visit businesses in downtown Detroit and tried to talk to them about having childcare located on the premises. They probably thought we were from Mars. Where did these wild-eyed women come from? That was the general reaction we received. But now of course there's childcare all over downtown and on the premises. I mean the changes are amazing, that was basically thirty years ago.

Interviewer: **And you were targeting businesses not county or…**

A. Harrison: No. We were working the businesses and the utility especially. We were focused on the utilities. And of course they thought we were from Mars. You know Detroit Edison, the gas companies, the labor unions, UAW, etc. Establishments where a lot of women were employed or involved. It was some interesting times—some of them were not sympathetic, some of them were in terms of childcare being a bargaining issue.

Interviewer: **Why did you think the private businesses would be sympathetic to you as opposed to bigger political organizations such as the state government or the county?**

A. Harrison: Well, because it was important for the work force, to keep their work force happy. The attendance issue, women not able to come to work because of lack of childcare. High absentee figures bothered businesses and one reason for women would be the lack of childcare. That is still a big issue for women. It's a big issue for women in terms of when they come to work to know that their

children are safe. I look at my niece and nephews now, and she works downtown and they have a childcare center. Childcare centers downtown where they can take their children, but that was not so thirty years ago. You just did not have those kinds of places available. So, workers' satisfaction was the approach we used for businesses.

Interviewer: **And it was a fairly large urban work force industrial area of Detroit at that time?**

A. Harrison: Right at that time, yes.

Interviewer: **Do you recall any significant events in connection with these issues? What are some moments or big breakthrough moments that you can remember?**

A. Harrison: That we made in terms of…

Interviewer: **Yeah, what kind of changes were you able to make?**

A. Harrison: Well, I think the change came gradually. I think one of the changes that I have seen, I'm not saying I'm responsible for it, but I think it was because of the feminist movement. It was quite controversial being a Black female in the feminist movement at that particular time because people felt it diluted the civil rights movement; plus this writer, Cynthia Epstein I think was her name, had come out with the idea that you had "double whammy" or two positives if you were Black and female. You were female and Black so the employer could get two statistics for the government for one person. So, Black females were supposed to be in a favorable position, which was not true. There was no statistics to support this position, but this was the myth that was going around and it was very divisive in the Black community. To confront that and show that Black women were just as handicapped as Black men and white women at that particular time it created a lot of controversy in the Black community.

And I remember writing a chapter on Black women for a book and quoting the comments of a Black female administrator at a Black school in the south. She was quoted as saying, "If a Black woman was offered a promotion and if they did not hire a Black male she should in essence decline the position. Black females should be willing to give up their promotions in order for Black males to get hired." Now I do not think you will find that today among young Black women. I don't think any of them would say anything like that. But that was the milieu of the times that Black women were so favored that they should make willing sacrifices for Black males This was simply not true. There were very few writings or studies of Black women and I wrote one however, my professional area focuses on children. Now there are a number of young women who do the research on Black women. The research I conducted examined the interrole conflicts between all of the roles women assume, wife, mother, and worker. The lifestyle is quite demanding and a number of women at that time,

especially white women had not worked. But like a lot of other Black women, I had always worked. It was difficult with a lot of conflicts. It is on those types of issues that I have seen changes in thirty years, there fewer conflicts around whether women should work.

Interviewer: **Now were you saying that it was more difficult for you to be involved in the feminist movement because there was some sort of resentment that you weren't involved in the civil rights movement instead, or do you consider your work in the feminist movement a part of?**

A. Harrison: Well, I was involved in both. So, it wasn't a conflict for me but a lot of people saw it as a conflict, you should not devote your time to the feminist movement. I thought a person should work for the bigger, the larger good, which would be both Blacks and women. There was a lot of sexual discrimination and sexism in the civil rights movement that I think Black women have confronted and since then overcome. You don't have those issues like you used to in the past.

Interviewer: **How would you try to say that to people who would try to bring up this conflict?**

A. Harrison: Well, I would say that basically there are issues that are relevant for the Black community that were undertaken by the feminist movement, they were top priorities. Change on these issues would ultimately benefit the Black community, for example childcare. A number of Black women were working but had nowhere to leave their children. Plus the sexism in promotion and etc.—a number of Black women were female heads of households. If they had promotions or could begin to work in semi-skilled jobs that paid very good money this would increase their family income and ultimately benefit the Black community. There would be more money circulating benefiting children and the community. Those were two issues that were primary for the feminist movement that were not peak concerns in the civil rights movement.

Interviewer: **Were you able to convince Black women and men to work for the feminist movement?**

A. Harrison: Well, I don't think I did personally, but I just think that in the course of things a number of people became enlightened. Right, I really do, especially men. I tell you in my generation a lot of men that would argue with me about feminist issues when their daughters went off to school and they had to pay $20,000 a year for an education, did they change their tunes. That is what changed their minds more so than one-on-one dialogue was just what happened to them personally and in terms of their daughters. You know if you can recall the Tailhook issue when women were assaulted—one was an admiral's daughter. The men were officers in the service and their daughters in the service had made them aware of the sexism. I think it is those kinds of pushes that come about. And I tell you, when Black fathers start paying those heavy dollars for

their daughters and some husband says that she has to sit home and wait on them and he thinks, "I spent over $60,000 for her education, oh no." I think that made a feminist of a lot of men.

Interviewer: **Very interesting. Were there any especially dramatic or funny moments that you remember?**

A. Harrison: Funny moments let me see. Well I guess we were always pretty intense.

Interviewer: **Always serious?**

A. Harrison: Always pretty intense. I guess the thing that we laughed the most about was the response that we got when we were interviewing businesses downtown about setting up childcare centers. I can't, I'm trying to recall some of them you know but that was over thirty years ago. I think that was the funniest, just the look on their face when you try to explain the importance of childcare. But we were pretty intense and pretty serious.

Interviewer: **Who were your personal and organizational allies? Who was especially important to you in your feminist activism?**

A. Harrison: You mean other than the group the people I associated with?

Interviewer: **Other than your NOW friends or your...**

A. Harrison: The NOW group. Well, I think my professional group, Society for Research on Child Development, there are a lot of strong feminist women in the organization and a lot of feminist psychologists. And I think that group is where I had a lot of allies. So, when I went away for professional conferences I got a lot of support for what I was doing.

Interviewer: **And did you have any opponents anyone who would try to make you stop directing your energy?**

A. Harrison: Oh, other than the ex-husband? No, as I said that was the only person. Of course my father, my family, they were very supportive you know because that just went along with their being good parents and supporting their child. I think it was in my professional life that I found the most support.

Interviewer: **What do you consider your main achievements were?**

A. Harrison: In the feminist movement? I really like what we did with childcare, of raising people's awareness to the childcare issues. I mean the childcare now, it is just accepted that you will be able to find childcare, but the establishment of standards and what you should look for in a center are still issues. The Childcare Committee wrote a pamphlet that said, "What you should look for in

Child Care Centers." Those kinds of activities have now been taken over by governmental agencies and etc. But at the time we got started no one was doing that.

Interviewer: **Did you get funding to help you do this or were you doing it on your own?**

A. Harrison: We were more or less on our own time, but as I said we all had such a sense of purpose you know and so intense about what we were doing. So, I think that's where we began. In the course of history things changed and I think the feminist movement had a lot to do with the change. Like I said before, things began to happen to people personally. Women could no longer afford to sit home, which was the ultimate goal was to sit home and not work, for economic reasons. A number of women began to testify in articles and magazines about the satisfaction that they got from working. So, just being a part of those social forces was very exciting to me.

Interviewer: **Do you consider anything a failure? Anything you tried to do that didn't work—is there anything that you might—**

A. Harrison: In terms of the group or individually?

Interviewer: **Either one.**

A. Harrison: Well, I think the ERA, the whole issue of the ERA and the whole abortion issue. I think what bothers me is this whole push back in terms of abortions, the misinformation that is out there so young women make faulty decisions based on misinformation. When we were coming along the whole abortion issue was so unfair. I can recall that when I was in college, young women were just desperate when they accidentally became pregnant and had to go to butchers. Today a lot of women cannot have children because of those poorly performed procedures. I can recall when young women died from trying to get abortions and so I was just determined to change the situation. I remember carrying petitions and I'd have my two children on tricycles following with me to be part of it because I thought and I still feel that it was so important for women to have a choice. I came up when women were dying and all like that and when I joined NOW and listened to those women talk, they talked about going to the doctor's office, the hospital and getting an abortion. I asked, "Who gave you permission? Who can give you an abortion?" And they had prescriptions, or some flew over to Europe, so you know the whole abortion issue is a class low-income woman's issue. I think the whole point has been diluted, because women with money will always be able to get abortions. What you are talking about are poor women. And women that go that are desperate, they have six children, they have poor health, they can't afford another child, etc. I mean it's all those kinds of issues that have been lost in this big organized campaign to be against abortions. So I think that's that whole issue to me has been very disappointing and it just seems like they are getting to the point of Roe and

Wade. It's just absolutely appalling to me that they would take away a women's right to choose like that. It's the control of her reproductive organs that is just as important to the feminist movement as vote is for the civil rights movement. So I think the organized mean-spirited emphasis, that simple-minded emphasis, is so appalling. A lot of anti-abortionists are such hypocrites—you hear a lot of how [anti-abortion] activists, they had a daughter or wife or someone who was able to get an abortion. Now they have all these poor women running around talking about no abortions because it is murder. To me the whole scenario is quite disappointing.

Interviewer: **The next few questions basically are reflections upon the second wave of feminism. What is your definition of feminism?**

A. Harrison: I think that is the broader definition, but remember I came along in the era where it was just a stupid comment, "Oh they burn their bras." I don't think anyone ever burned their bra, you know. But, that just one of the urban legends, the urban legend phenomenon. I think a lot of people have moved, I hope, past the urban legend in terms of what a feminist is. It is to me those whose are focused on the rights of women and the positions and the issues that are very relevant for women. So men can be feminist, women and a number of other people. I like the whole idea how it's become an academic area, women's studies, is exciting. It's become an academic subject, how women's health issues are very important and someone should be concerned with women's health issue. Now my daughter is very concerned, that is the area where she works, women's health issues. Now whereas when I was a feminist coming along, it was you know getting out and getting you know childcare and hitting the beats and hitting the streets, demonstrating, you know things like that. So I think things have changed and the whole issue of feminism, the term has broadened and a lot of people are feminist without being aware of it. They think of the old stereotype of bra burning, but that's an urban myth.

Interviewer: **And thinking broadly not just about your activism but the feminist movement in general during the 60's through the 80's, what do you think the main achievements were?**

A. Harrison: Oh I think raising the country's awareness of the discrimination against women. I don't think that a lot of people thought about it even gave it a second thought that women could not get certain jobs. I don't think they thought it was even an issue or the whole issue of Title IX in terms of women's sports, you know that females would quote-unquote "sweat." And I remember asking the question to my college students, "If you played tennis would you let your boyfriend beat you?" and how the answers have changed over the years. Back then, "Oh yes", but now "Oh now I'd whip his socks off." You know the attitude has just really changed. I think the increased awareness about issues surrounding women, those international conferences, how there's a unity of women around the world—I think, oh, that has been very important.

Interviewer: **You talked about the failures of ERA and abortion—is there anything else you would consider a failure?**

A. Harrison: I think those are the two most important issues. I think we have the discrimination laws. I think the affirmative action issue coming down is going to be really very important. I don't think a lot of people are aware, rest of the population as a whole, that affirmative action really benefited white women. They were the ones that got a lot of benefits from affirmative action, but they still hit glass ceilings, I think that's what it's called. But they had the resources to establish their own business and etc. Well, it's gonna be interesting to see what the Supreme Court does and its impact on women, you see because when they vote they have to consider that whole issue and I don't think that's been in their political minds before. Some women want to vote solely on the issue of abortion but I think that it's going to be a big awakening for a lot of women as to how much they are dependent on the legal laws of affirmative action and how in a tight job market and this failing economy, discrimination rears its ugly head again for them.

Interviewer: **You've talked a little bit about this but I wonder if you would want to say anything else. Some analysts of the second wave feminism have described it as overwhelming middle class in it's concerns, racist, a bunch of bored house wives, what do you think about these statements and do the women that you worked with fit these profiles?**

A. Harrison: Well, I think those are the same words and phrases that were tossed around thirty years ago. It's no different. I think it's baiting to say that that's all that it is but—and the issues as I viewed it then, as I view it now, still have broad implications for women of different income classes. They may not have the time or the energy to be part of an organization. You have to have a certain amount of discretionary time in order to get out and organize but I think if you look at the history of social forces they've always been the middle or the upper class are whatever of the group are the ones who are organizing. Look at *Les Miserables*—what about the French Revolution, who was on the front line? It was students, intelligentsia I think is what they called themselves, of France. I mean that it was that movement that was the precursor of the American Revolution. So I do not think that the social forces for the feminist movement are any different from the social forces of other historical movements.

Interviewer: **And the women you worked with, were there concerns in line with yours as far as the race issue goes?**

A. Harrison: Well, I don't think, I think they were aware of it but I don't think they were as concerned about the race issue as I was. I was just broader, it's like when I was with the civil rights and activist issues they weren't as concerned about the feminists' issues as I was. And when I'm with the feminist group they aren't as

concerned about the racial issues as I was. So, you know, it just depends on where I was, but I was quite comfortable being in both camps. It did not bother me because the issues—I could see the overlap of the issues and I could see how it was very important that women have childcare available. I can remember men that would argue with me—but when we had the opportunity to deduct it from their taxes, men would say, "Well I'm so glad you all had that issue, I really appreciate it." You know what I'm saying? So, you know, you have to stick with your principles in terms of what you think is right and probably bring others along. As I said the sheer economics of it all brought a lot of men along.

Interviewer: **Now do you think that now more people are seeing this overlap between class and race and gender and make their activist efforts address more of these concerns these days?**

A. Harrison: Well, I think there is still a group of people who take the overall broader view of it all, but I think it's still the same people in some groups who are just focused on their issues. For example, if you're into the labor movement and as a byproduct of your involvement women get better opportunities. Women got a chance to hold some well-paying semi-skilled jobs as a result of the labor movement and the labor movement did retraining, etc. There are a lot of benefits that came from women working in the labor movement, opened their eyes, the men's eyes to issues that benefited women generally. They have retraining programs, childcare, etc., and the same thing about the feminist movement. I think there are a lot of issue that were resolved that benefited women, Blacks and etc. But, I still think there is a group, say a third, who see the overall picture and dabble in all the movements.

Interviewer: **Are you still involved in feminist activism?**

A. Harrison: Well, we're getting geared again because I guess we're all in advanced years but the whole abortion issue, how it's been shaped and the distortions that are out there is just appalling but it's so difficult getting your views heard. The media is so controlled that it's difficult to get the messages through. So, it's going to be a challenge. The challenge is just as great today as yesterday.

Interviewer: **How are you going to approach this? You talked about the media—what other ways do you make inroads in changing?**

A. Harrison: I don't know, we have to get together and brainstorm. I'll tell you that in some ways it's more difficult because the message, the counter-message is so organized and it pushes guilt buttons, you know, for people and it's so organized. I think they have a head start. Like I said, I think I heard young women say they do not see the pressing needs for the Roe and Wade issue the way we did because we were in an age group where people were going to butchers. We will see, they have had abortions available so long they do not

realize what happens or how they are impacted when it's not there.

Interviewer: **What kind of issues do you see younger feminists, this next generation of feminists addressing and do you think they are in line with what you were?**

A. Harrison: No, I think they're more concerned with economic opportunities. I think they are more concerned about networking. I think the whole generation has a little different approach and that's to be expected because their experiences were different. I mean they didn't come out of the context that we came out of. So, you have to have some one being deprived of abortions and not having the affirmative action in place, etc. and been were we were. But I think their concerns are going to be more economic.

Interviewer: **What advice would you give them?**

A. Harrison: To please get involved, I mean, and preserve the advances that were made because there is a reason that women fought hard for those issues. The messages may be distorted now but there was a reason that people took to the streets to get the right to vote, took to the streets about abortion, and they need to look into them in-depth about why women made those big sacrifices to get those issues in place and keep them in place. They have got to be politically astute.

Interviewer: **Is there anything else that you want to add about your experiences or any questions that we didn't ask that you could address?**

A. Harrison: I don't think that in terms of questions no, in issues no. I think it's going to be very interesting when all the legal avenues are shut off—if we don't persevere them now and keep them open. Of course I won't be around probably, before the implications, but there are going to be terrible implications for women if they don't have those same avenues—but then who knows with the medical technology and breakthroughs there may be just a few pills that you swallow for abortions, and etc. Maybe something like that will get on market and maybe the whole issue will just not be that important, but who knows what's going to happen in the future? But, I think that they should be involved I really do.

Interviewer: **Well that's all the—**

A. Harrison: Is that it?

Interviewer: **I know that was fast. You're welcome to talk more—we've got ten more minutes of tape.**

A. Harrison: No, that's fine. I'm sitting here twisting my hands and whatever. But I don't know whether the camera catches me twisting my hands.

Interviewer: **No hands.**

A. Harrison: No hand twisting?

Interviewer: **Just from here.**

A. Harrison: Yeah but it's—I just really feel that women, young women are more into self rather than the collective good and the ramifications for them will be tremendous, and so the same discriminations and counter forces that brought us together to organize will be operating again. And they will have to come and I don't know what they are going to look like or be, but they will have to be.

Interviewer: **Can I ask you a little bit more about your earlier years as going to school, deciding to become a professor and you know were there—was that particularly difficult to do as a Black women in that time?**

A. Harrison: Well you know, not really because you did have Black women professors, you see, in your colleges. You must remember I lived in a very segregated world and women—they did have women professors and I did have women teachers. I guess of course everyone did and I was just expected to succeed. It was just expected of me that I would do. You know because of the females in my family. I had two career women as aunts that I was very close to and so it was just expected that I just assume that this world was open to me. It was when I got in the world that I realized that it wasn't. I didn't think, "What are these barriers that women don't do this? My dad never said to me that I couldn't do. So it wasn't difficult. The thing is, I think if I had chosen different career it might have been. I don't think what I chose to study was threatening because I was studying children, you see, that may have been what it was. I may have been hampered in that respect in terms of I didn't look beyond what was basically traditional interests. I was getting a Ph.D. but it was in studying children and that's not threatening. So I think that is where you begin to see the difference, you know if I wanted to be a nuclear physicist or something like that it might have. My aunts were successful but they were successful in areas of traditional women's issues. My aunt was a nurse and she worked with midwifes, and my other aunt was a nutritionist, so that's cooking, nursing, and nurturing all those were accepted areas.

[END]