

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

***HISTORY OF THE COBB COUNTY BRANCH OF THE NAACP AND CIVIL RIGHTS
ACTIVITIES IN COBB COUNTY, GEORGIA***

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INTERVIEW WITH VICKI TRAMMELL CUTHBERT

COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 13

CONDUCTED BY D. CLAY ANDERSON

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 13
Interview with Vicki Trammell Cuthbert
Conducted by D. Clay Anderson
Thursday, 15 October 2009
Location: Cobb County Juvenile Court, Marietta, Georgia

CA: Ms. Cuthbert, if I may begin, do you mind telling me where and when you were born and a little bit about you family?

VC: I was born in West Point, Georgia in 1952. My mother, one sister and a brother-in-law still live in West Point. They are the only family that is left there, everybody else has moved away. I'm here in Marietta, Cobb County and I have a sister in Covington and a brother in LaGrange, Georgia, which is still part of Troup County, which is where West Point is located. I moved to Marietta in March of 1987 when I married a person who was born, raised here and still live here and that's what brought me to Cobb County.

CA: Do you mind telling me a little bit about what it was like growing up in West Point?

VC: West Point was a small town when I was growing up and still is—with respect to direction from Marietta you would go 85 South toward the Alabama line and it's the last Georgia town as you enter into Alabama going down 85 South, whereas Columbus, Georgia, if you go I-185 south would be the last Georgia city that you leave as you enter into Phoenix City, Alabama. West Point is not that far from Pine Mountain, Georgia which is where Callaway Gardens is located. It's a small town so I grew up there and as I said I was born in '52 so that meant I grew up in the '50's and '60's, I graduated from high school in 1970 and I was part of the last all African American high school class that graduated from Harrison High School. After that the high school became the middle school and these schools were at that time completely integrated. Before then, a few years earlier, it had been by choice, if African Americans wanted to go to the white high school they could go. I suppose if the whites had wanted to come to the African American high school they might have been allowed to come but when you talk integration you are usually speaking the opposite way, African Americans going to the white high school.

CA: So your class wasn't given the option, you were the last all African-American class?

VC: No, I think my class, I really don't remember. I think we probably could have made the selection and the majority of the members in my class chose not to. Now, there was one of two people I think from my class that did choose to go down to West Point High School. My sister who is two or three years behind me class did not have the option. By that time it was fully integrated.

CA: How was the African-American community? Was it very strong, was it grouped together and was there a strong relationship?

VC: Not really. Unfortunately for me, and I say unfortunately because when I moved from West Point I came to Atlanta to attend Morris Brown College, a historic black college and therefore was disappointed to find out I was not as knowledgeable of the black movement as some of my other classmates were. West Point, we always felt was a unique town in the sense that it was progressive. I guess it was something we accepted and took for granted, accepted it as it was that there was a division of the races but there were not really problems with that. Some of that had to do with the fact that, quite frankly, West Point had about sixteen to eighteen millionaires because of West Point-Pepperell so therefore the African Americans there had a relatively decent lifestyle. So for that reason there wasn't a lot of animosity. Now my class did have a march, so to speak, because my high school principal, Dr. Betty Smith informed us that if we wanted to protest to let the leadership know of our displeasure with the decision to integrate and more so to close our school—it wasn't so much the integration, our high school building was the newest of the schools and we felt if integration was going to occur that was fine but we felt our school should have been the only high school, not West Point High. That building should have been torn down and so we protested and she allowed us to actually leave school to do so, to march down to the white high school to protest. I can remember one of the older African American leaders came down and told us we should go home and we should be ashamed of ourselves. But it was peaceful, the police wasn't called or anything, we were just expressing our constitutional rights to protest. Until that happened I had never heard about the movement, I never knew about protesting, was not keeping up with all the protests that were going on in other cities in Georgia such as Albany where black people were being beaten by police officers. I really was not aware of all that.

CA: Did all the townspeople come out to watch the march or was it just you?

VC: No, because it was spontaneous. It wasn't something that had been preplanned so our parents didn't know we were going to do it, no one knew we were going to do it, other than, I don't know if it was the student government president who mentioned it to our principal what we would like to do and she explained to us, that yes, if that was what we were wanted to do as long as it was going to be peaceful that we had the Constitutional right to do so and we did.

CA: Were you afraid that there might have been some kind of confrontation?

VC: No, because here again, like I said, small town, we wasn't really aware of what was going on in the rest of the cities in the state and really to a certain extent the other part of the country so it never occurred to me. I can remember when we were down at the high school, the white high school, as the white parents were coming to pick up their students, some of them shouted some things and said, "get out of the way, you all are in the way," type things, but other than that and other than, as I said, this older African Leader of the community coming down and saying we all should go home that was it. So for however long it took us to march from the African American high school down to the white high school, our being down at the white high school, maybe thirty minutes, we might be talking a total of an hour and a half for our protest.

CA: When you went off to college did many of your classmates go to college with you?

VC: Again because of my high school principal and because it was going to be the last African American high school class, Dr. Smith encouraged as many of us as possible to go to college. Now you've got to remember this is a small town so you're talking a high school graduating class of I think 52 people, so out of those 52 people I think 16 to 18 of us went to college. I know myself and I think, I'm sorry I'm just not remembering all this; it was either three or four others attended Morris Brown. Then there was I know one student who attended Moorehouse, one went to—now it's called Clark Atlanta University but at the time it was Clark College—and then the others went to Ft. Valley, Albany State and to Savannah State. Oh, and to Texas, quite a few went out to school in Tyler, Texas. I'm trying to think, I can't remember if the name of the college was Tyler College but I know it was in Tyler, Texas. So about seven or eight students went out there.

CA: That's a long way. I know that when I went off to school I was scared of just being away from home. How was your reaction of being away from home?

VC: I was frightened, I cried. I remember when my mother and everybody left me in the dormitory that night I cried because that was truly the first time I had been away from home on my own, expecting to fend for myself, to know what to do on a day to day basis for myself. I had never done that because in terms of going away from home just to visit, I had only done that once before and that was to visit an aunt that lived in Chattanooga, Tennessee, so my sister next to me and I, along with a male cousin from my paternal uncle, two brother's children, we had ridden the bus and gone up to Chattanooga to visit our aunt. Other than that I had never, ever gone away from home, except for when you go spend the summer with your grandmother, or Christmas holidays and things like that. As I said, I grew up on the Alabama line so my paternal grandmother lived in what was called Shawmutt, Alabama which is just going across the line. That's where I would basically spend the summers and the Christmas holidays and Thanksgiving and things like that.

CA: Was it a shock going from West Point to Atlanta, a big shock, not only being away but the racial atmosphere, was it different?

VC: I suppose it should have been but I guess because I was so naïve and young and the whole world was a stage and it was just exciting and all that I guess I just never thought about it as being a shock, it was just, I was looking forward to it. I just knew I wanted to get out of West Point. I knew I was one of those people; some people want to move back to their hometowns, I was never one of them. My whole goal was to hold on until I could graduate from high school and once I graduated from high school, other than to come back to visit my family I would not be returning to West Point. In black families you were taught that your way out was to get a college education that was the way to improve your life, you got a college education, you got training so that you can support yourself, support a family. Thus, I viewed Atlanta as my way out.

CA: Did you have a scholarship or were you parents helping you or did you work your way through school?

VC: I had a Ford Foundation scholarship, academic scholarship for the entire four years.

CA: You said that you were kind of naïve about the black power movement that was growing in Atlanta. How was your first reaction to it when you first came upon it?

VC: You have to remember now; Atlanta was unique in the sense of the movement as opposed to some other southern cities. It wasn't a lot of riots in Atlanta either so by the time I arrived in Atlanta in 1974 most of the active part of the movement was already over with; because, well, some of my college professors had been people who had been part of the student movement, so it was basically over with when I got to Atlanta the flower children movement was going on, the last of the hippie part was dying down. Underground Atlanta was in its heyday in terms of clubs and everything and I'm trying to remember was it down Peachtree Street or was it down Fourteenth Street or where ever, you would ride down and then you would see the hippies and all of that. So all of that was just interesting to me so here again I just thought that's the way Atlanta always was. I didn't know any difference because they talked about the black power structure; you talked about the Cascade Road area, the Ben Hill area where blacks who had degrees, I mean, education and nice positions and money lived. I had an aunt and uncle who had moved from one of the housing project area and had bought a home out in Cascade so I didn't know about all the undercurrents of the past. When I got there that was happening so I didn't know about the difference and didn't learn to appreciate it until later on.

CA: I'm going to backtrack to 1968. How did you feel when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated?

VC: I didn't understand the significance of it. It just—let me explain something to you—I grew up in a poor family, my family was considered poor, not Welfare poor, my mama was a domestic, she worked as a domestic when I was in high school growing up. Now by the time I went off to college she was a cook working for the elementary school, so her income had increased and by the time I had graduated from college she was working for West Point-Pepperell in the mills. We didn't have a TV for a long time. I can't remember when we actually got a TV in my house. When I would look at TV, I would go up to my girlfriend house which was four houses up to look at TV or over to my maternal grandmother and maternal aunt's house to look at TV; so I think that that maybe part of the problem is that in my individual home with my mom we didn't have a TV so I wasn't aware of a lot of current events. I don't think we got the newspaper either, so whatever would have been printed in the newspaper I didn't read; my mother didn't talk about it and my grandmother and aunt didn't really talk about it either. That's why I'm saying I didn't really, really know anything about it. What little bit I did occurred in 1970 when I was a senior in high school and Dr. Smith sort of explained it to us.

CA: Now, you said that later on you began to understand and appreciate the significance of the civil rights movement, the black power movement, when was that and how did you feel about it? How and when did it all come about?

VC: It probably came about because I was a political science major in college and when I started taking courses, because in the Atlanta University Center, even though you are admitted and accepted into one of the schools you could take classes at all of them, so I took a lot of classes over at Morehouse which is the college that Dr. King attended, I took classes at Spellman and I took classes at Clark College, now Clark AU, it's hard for me to keep saying that. It was through those classes that things started to come more to the forefront because that was during the years I believe, because Spelman College used to get a lot of their endowment from the Rockefellers I think and they actually, the students protested and rejected the money, rejected them coming on campus. So like I said, I'm coming in at the tail end of all of these movements, so just hearing about it and you know, going wow and learning.

CA: This is unrelated but I think it's interesting. Which school did you like best? Morehouse, Spelman or Clark Atlanta?

VC: Morehouse I couldn't go to since it was an all male school, it was just a joy in the sense of being able to take classes over there, I don't know, I guess knowing about the history of the AU Center in terms of the standing of the schools in the overall national community I know that I probably should say that I should have gone to Spelman which is the all female school because it still exists. My college, Morris Brown almost doesn't exist any more. It was always the one that was known for accepting students and giving them an opportunity that even other black schools probably would not have accepted, regardless as to whether white schools would accept them or not. After saying that though, I was the type of student from what I understand who could have gotten into any black school but I went to Morris Brown because we were poor, because that's where I had the full scholarship to. I say I could have gone to Howard or Fisk but Howard and Fisk weren't offering me a full scholarship.

CA: When did you decide that you wanted to become a lawyer?

VC: When I was in the fifth grade watching Perry Mason. I think it was the fifth grade, I know it was elementary school, watching Perry Mason. I can't even say that it was a black lawyer who was my role model, it was not, it was Perry Mason. I loved Perry Mason because you know your teachers talked about you should consider what you wanted to do in life. Back then the way for African Americans was primarily teaching or nursing; I didn't want to do nursing because I don't like looking at blood and body parts so that was out, and I didn't necessarily want to teach. Oh, there was some private investigator TV show that used to come on back then, I kind of wanted to be a private investigator or an attorney. But then I thought, hmm, I'm kind of the scary type, I don't want to be a private investigator because that's dangerous and I looked at lawyers as helping people.

CA: What year were you accepted and where did you go when you went to law school?

VC: I went to the University of Georgia Law School, so I attended the University of Georgia from 1980 to 1983.

CA: How did you like your time at UGA?

VC: Unfortunately you said this stuff is going to be recorded and I'm surrounded in a building with other UGA graduates and alums who are true Bulldog fans. I'm not. It's not that I'm knocking the school because I understand it is one of the top universities in the country so that's not it. I went to UGA for a purpose and that purpose was to get a law degree so that I could support myself. It was a means to an end for me. I think the experience between your attending UGA as a graduate student or a professional student, is different from attending it as an undergrad because there's more freedom. I spent all of my time, unfortunately in the law library studying when I wasn't in class. And when you were allowed to, you got four to six hours to sleep and eat, you know! [laughter] But I took my son, I have a son, who is a senior in college at the University of Michigan and who is planning and hoping to attend law school next year so I took him before he went back to school this year down to tour the University of Georgia law school so I recognize that it is one of the top law schools in the country and definitely in the state and that you can't go wrong with getting an education there. But I will say this about my experience at UGA from 1980 to 1983, you would think that things would have been different given how long it had been since African American students had been accepted there but we actually had a white student to openly say in class that they thought that the only reason why we as African American students were there was because of a quota and that we were therefore taking a spot from someone white who could have gotten into the school and that even after we got in there we were given special attention to help us to stay there. I will say about my other white classmates, before any African American could say anything or respond to him, the other white students jumped on him as well as the professor, to say that was truly an ignorant statement that was made. What he was talking about is and it still exists everywhere at all law schools today, if there are black students there, there is a black law student association and what they would do would be to have us do practice exams and then have the professors to look them over to give us pointers. These are third year law students who are arranging for the first year students to take these practice exams not the professors. So what those students said in response is just because they are doing it as an organization doesn't mean we can't do the same thing. All you have to do is go the law library because all the old exams are there, get those exams, form a study group and you do the same thing, so how is that given them (African Americans) extra advantage or privilege because they happen to have an organization that arranges and encourages them to do it. So when you have comments like that and you attend school with people making those types comments, —I guess that's true in any society or organization or whatever, you have to be very careful about who you pick as your friends.

CA: You always have that one idiot.

VC: Well, he was just speaking how he felt, I don't so much call him an idiot because I appreciate people like him. I would much rather know what you are thinking than not to know if you have thoughts like that.

CA: Very true.

VC: So I'm used to it. I've encountered it all of my life, the majority of the time where I have been the only African American that's been involved in a situation in a predominant white environment. I've gotten used to it. And because I am used to it, I think my son is also. What I mean by that is when I graduated from law school my first legal position was to take a position down in Macon, Georgia with Georgia Legal Services where you circuit rode as an attorney. What that means is that the regional office was located in Macon, Bibb County, but the regional office handled, I can't even remember how many counties surrounding it, so two of my counties were Crawford County and Twiggs County, I can't think of some of the rest of them now, so you went to those different counties to encounter your clients and to go to court there. I had people who basically asked me, "Well, how do you know that when you are representing people that they are not a member of the Klan?" I actually had a client who told me he was a former Klansman. The behavior of the judges for the most part it had been suggested to me that my going to that part of the state was going to be very difficult for me as a black attorney even more so as a female attorney and especially as an African American female attorney. I didn't necessarily find that. What I found was that initially they might have been cautious about me but once they saw my performance in the courtroom, saw that I was there to be professional, I never really had any problems. I just didn't. I didn't have any problems.

CA: You said that you moved here in '87 when you met your husband.

VC: When I married my husband. I met him in Macon through a mutual friend and then we got married and when I moved here in '87 I opened my own practice because my husband kept saying and his family kept saying that they needed, they felt this town and Cobb County but specifically Marietta, needed an African American attorney to actually not only live in Cobb but to have an office in Cobb. Back then you had African American attorneys who came to work in Cobb but they lived in Atlanta and would take cases here and then leave and go back to home. Or if you had African American attorneys who lived in Cobb they worked in Atlanta or DeKalb or where ever but did not have an office in Cobb. From what I have been told the person before me who had an office actually in Cobb County, in Marietta was Justice Bob Benham and I know that because he used to rent office space from my father-in-law; my former husband and he were close. That's not to say that you didn't have other African American attorneys between Justice Benham and my coming to Cobb County in 1987, perhaps with offices but they weren't hanging their own shingle out, so to speak, they didn't have their own practice. They might have worked for Allstate or Blue Cross & Blue Shield whose offices are actually down in the Cumberland Mall area so that is an Atlanta address but within Cobb County.

CA: What kind of cases did you take when you opened your own law office in the beginning?

VC: What walked through the door, to a certain extent. I handled a lot of domestic relations cases, I did some bankruptcies and I did personal injury cases. Initially I did not handle criminal cases because when I opened my office in March of '87 by February of '88 I had been appointed as a part-time magistrate court judge so I could not handle criminal work in this county. Now I could have practiced criminal law and taken cases in other counties but one of the reasons why I didn't mind becoming a magistrate court judge and handling criminal issues that way was because I really didn't want to practice criminal law anyway. The whole irony of it is that I now handled more criminal law cases twenty-six years later than I did when I first started out because I didn't want to do it when I first started out.

CA: When you were appointed to the magistrate's office, was that when you were the first African-American judge?

VC: Correct. Judge James Bodiford appointed me; there is a picture of me actually over there as a judge. Oh, as a matter of fact, I've got pictures over there of me with Judge Bodiford, we had a bar function and then, hmm, where is the picture? Oh, there it is. He's a superior court judge now but at the time he was the chief magistrate and so I served under him from 1987 until 1992 when he went to the superior court. My understanding is that one of his campaign promises to the African American leadership in Cobb County was that if he had the opportunity he would employ qualified African Americans in the court in whatever position, as a clerk, as a judge, if anybody applied.

CA: Was there a lot of fanfare about it or was it just like, oh, you know.

VC: No, no, none whatsoever. Now at the time that he made the promise, I don't necessarily know that Judge Bodiford had any suspicions that I was going to show up on the scene a year later because at the time, remember, there weren't any African Americans with any offices in Marietta, in Cobb County. As I said, by my marrying my husband and his father was very active politically in the community, he was the chairman of the Marietta Civil Service board that hired and fired the firemen and police officers. When I came here and found out that there were not any African-American judges, I was encouraged to apply.

CA: How many other people applied, do you know?

VC: I do not know because at the time that I became the first African-American judge, Judge Bodiford also hired a white female judge and I'm not sure Christine was the first, I don't think she was the first white female, I think they had another one who had not stayed long, but we basically sort of integrated I guess the male-dominated bench at the same time. I stayed, I served under Judge Bodiford for five years until he went to superior court and then I stayed another five years under Judge Vick Reynolds and then I resigned. I had been doing it for ten years, I had hit the glass ceiling, so to speak, and I did not believe that no matter how many years I stayed I was ever going to become a full-time

magistrate because they are appointed positions. Only the chief magistrate runs and is elected by the people, all the other magistrate court judgeships are appointed by the chief magistrate with the approval of the superior court judges. I didn't think I was going to advance any further.

CA: When you first opened your law office in Cobb County, did you mainly take African-Americans? Of course, you would have accepted any one but what was your main clientele?

VC: To be truthful with you that first year in 1987 I didn't get a lot of clients period. At one point in time and a lot of people might not like what I'm about to say, but I think I had more white clients than I did black clients initially. African Americans were sitting back watching me, let's see how she does, let's see if she survives, that's how I felt. I didn't get a lot of African Americans clients immediately, initially. I will have to say my clients early on, the majority of them were white.

CA: When did the African-Americans start coming into your office? How long did it take for them to see that you were surviving?

VC: Well, my very first client was African American, but I'm just talking about in terms of the majority but like I said, the longer I was here and after I became a magistrate judge, my African American clientele increased; however, my becoming a magistrate confused people. A lot of people thought that when they found that out that I was a judge that meant then I could not have clients. They didn't understand, no, I actually have an office, I'm still in private practice, I can still take on clients it's just that I've got to be careful about what type of client, meaning that I couldn't handle criminal cases, and yes, I'm a part-time judge not a full-time judge so therefore I can still practice. Gradually I would say maybe two years out I started getting more African American clients.

CA: What year was it that you retired from the judgeship?

VC: I didn't retire, I quit because Cobb County as a part-time employee would not allow me to participate in their retirement system. Yes, that's one of my beef with them so I didn't retire I just resigned and stopped working there. I actually gave my resignation June 1, 1998. The picture you see over there with, there's a lot of us, that is where the judges, yeah, that is where they, oh you know what, that's one of them but the one I'm thinking about is in my scrapbook. They actually gave me a going away luncheon and they gave me the plaque there, you see, they gave me that plaque that shows the years that I worked there. I enjoyed it. I don't regret the fact that I served in the position, I don't have any regrets. I think I stayed too long and by that I mean I think I should have left after five or maybe six years. I should not have stayed ten years because it ended up in the long run I think hurting my professional career, not helping it.

CA: So once you retired did you jump back into your private practice? When did you come and start taking, working with the juvenile court?

VC: Remember, it wasn't a matter of jumping back in to my private practice because it was going on all along but that's when I went really full time because that was then my only source of income because I had given up the magistrate court position. My only source of income was going to have to come from the practice itself so from 1998 until 2004, I worked the practice exclusively. October of 2004 is when I came to work out here at the Cobb County Juvenile Court as an attorney/advocate. I gave up my practice really for health reasons. I had developed health issues when working for the Cobb County Magistrate Court. The stress of it and as a part-time employee I didn't have benefits from the county, didn't have health insurance, didn't have paid sick leave or vacations, it became a work environment that was causing problems. The position was creating additional stress in my life. You see, when Judge Bodiford appointed me to the bench, the one thing he said to me and asked me was did I think I would be able to handle it and he said, "Vicki, I'm going to tell you, you are not going to have as much of a problem about your being black as you are going to have being female." I do believe that he was correct.

CA: Do you have an example?

VC: You have to remember the legal environment is still predominately male even in 2009 and to be in that position when—remember, I was the first—to be in the position to wear the black robe, and when the police officers all came to see us in magistrate court it's not like what people see on TV, we only see the judge when they have the black robe on the bench. In magistrate court, it's like the emergency room of the court system so police officers encounter the judges just as I'm talking to you now, sitting in my clothes in my office asking me for an arrest or search warrant. So that's the difference. So they had to be reminded that just because I didn't have that robe on I am nevertheless a judge, that is why you have to come to me to ask me to approve of that arrest you just made a few hours ago. So it was a thing about male police officers accepting orders or whatever from a female because, you've got to remember there wasn't a lot of female police officers either, we're talking the late 1980's so things have changed, things that people take for granted now, when they look up and see a female officer or whatever, all that was different.

CA: I hope this isn't too painful to think back upon but juvenile, I can only think about working in the juvenile court system how it must be really painful, you know, to see—what's the, not painful but really the hardest experience you've had in dealing with the juvenile court system?

VC: Remember I told you I became an attorney because I wanted to help people, that is my overall goal. My background between undergrad school and law school, because I didn't go straight into law school is that I worked for the Atlanta University Graduate School of Social Work as a research associate and I taught at—now it's called Atlanta Community College, then it was called Atlanta Junior College. My whole goal and whole purpose was about helping people, being in a social work type environment. When I went to law school I went to law school initially not to practice law, I was going to go back into academia, it was after I went to law school that I changed my mind and said, no, try

practicing. I decided I didn't want to be the social worker I wanted to be the attorney that basically was fighting the social workers. That's how I ended up out here at juvenile court, it has come full circle. By the time you get to adults in the state court system or the superior court system, you can still help some adults, you can reform some, but if you want to try to save people, I thought you should try to work for juvenile court. I still believe that most juveniles can be saved but there are still some juveniles that are so far gone that you have to accept that they are going to end up in the adult criminal system. That has been the hardest thing that I've had to learn and accept about working out here because it has been five years now and it took me, I guess, probably about two years before I finally accepted that. That sort of, it hurts my heart because that's not who I am, the person that I really am still wants to help. My son and some of my friends and family shake their heads about my desire but it's still, after all these years and when I should know better my overall goal in life to want to help.

CA: That's a wonderful thing.

VC: You have to learn that you did not create the problems and you can offer people solutions but you cannot force them to accept it in order for you to be able to go home and sleep at night.

CA: I think the last number of the African-American population in Cobb County was either twenty-one or twenty-seven percent. It's a shame that its' a much higher legal concept, that African - Americans end up in court, much higher than—well, not much higher than the population but how can Cobb county reverse that?

VC: Which court are you talking about? Are you talking about juvenile court or are you talking superior court and state court? And I'm saying that because I'm not sure those statistics are correct. I would have to, I have never really ever seen the statistics here so I don't really know but from what I see, just a visual, walking these halls, going into the four courtrooms, I don't necessarily see more blacks than I do whites, I really don't. People say that and again, I don't know what the statistics will bear out but when I walk—and today is “day away” so that's why the courthouse is not as crowded today, but when I go into the courtroom this afternoon at two o'clock, on some days I see more African-Americans and Hispanics than I do whites. Other days its more whites so that's why I'm saying I really have never just eye-balled the statistics but just from a . . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

CA: This is another question. How can we cut down on juveniles who come through the court system and who get in trouble? In what ways can Cobb County better the situation for Hispanic, African-American, whites?

VC: More mentoring programs and that would have to come from the community; it can't come from the courts. Maybe the community in the sense that the communities or the

colleges or the universities can write some grants and provide some more mentoring programs because that's what we need out here and what I see the most is that sometimes when you have troubled teens you need a positive outside influence, because it's contrary to what people think, there are a lot of two parent households with children that come into the juvenile court system, or even if they're not in two parent households in the sense that they live together but they're still very active in their children's lives even though they may not be married or maybe divorced or whatever. But mentoring would help. I mean, things haven't changed. I'll be fifty-seven in December and things haven't changed. You listen to your peers more than you necessarily listen to your parents. Now you start listening to your parents the older you get because you realize that oh, they were wise and correct after all. But mentoring that would need to start in the schools because one of the thing with this zero tolerance policy, which I disagree with, I think has created more people coming into the juvenile court system than is necessary. What happens when you get into trouble at school is they suspend you and then they take out charges against you out here (in Juvenile Court) and once you get started in this system out here and you're placed on probation then they come to the school and they check and if you're skipping class or whatever, then you've got a probation violation. Now you're spending more time in the YDC and you are steadily building up your record. Now that's not for everybody, that's not true of everybody, some young people just like with adults, they make one mistake and then you never, ever see them again. Yes I think mentoring would help, I think a lot of time with some situations you look and you just go, if we could provide these young people with someone to mentor them I think that that would work wonders because a lot of times they feel they don't have anyone to turn to because the parents are out here working two or three jobs, some of them, some of the parents are not working at all . . . [phone ringing—tape off]

CA: One side of the tape is forty-five minutes so we've run a little over. We've been talking about Cobb County, now, we have had a historic presidential election with President Barack Obama, how do you think in all that race relations have changed in the United States if any or if there are still problems with racism or do you think—in Cobb County too, I mean . . .

VC: I think there is still racism; I think there will always be racism. The difference is that you can't change the whole world at one time, it would be nice but you can't, so what you have to do as individuals is create or try to change that circle that you travel in on a daily and weekly basis. When you hear something that is spoken that is racist or that's incorrect or prejudicial or harmful, try to correct that if you can without being emotional, an also by the way you live your own life, by interacting. If I as an African American person do not interact with whites or do not have whites as friends then how can I think that things are ever going to get any better? That's one of the things I do like about my son's generation, your generation, because my son started out from kindergarten on attending school with whites so to me it would be ridiculous to think that he does not have white friends. I would be very saddened by that if he didn't have white friends, Hispanic friends, Asian friends, whatever because why then should he be at school with them so many hours a day and then come home at the end of the day and have no further interaction with them. At least I can say for my son, he would tell us older people that he

thinks we are ridiculous if we think that they are not going to be friends. So that's what I think you have to do, I think you have to start small and hopefully it will build. There will be some that you're just not going to be able to reach and that's why the other thing which of course, they say you don't mix politics and religion, but that's where I think prayer to God comes in, that ultimately God has to touch the hearts of people to kind of help change them. But in the meantime we can at least, as I said, as individuals, we can speak out. It would be just like if I'm leaving here and I see somebody black attacking somebody white. Am I supposed to turn and walk away? No, I'm not going to do so anymore than I would hope that if somebody white walked out seeing people attacking somebody black. All I'm saying is until the silent majority starts to speak out things are not going to change and I do think that's a problem. That's what I'm really disappointed with, even with the election of President Obama, I think the silent majority is letting the vocal minority control and that's on whatever the issue is. I think that's what's wrong. We need to speak up, we need to speak out.

CA: Last question. Cobb County, if you could go back in time and have moved anywhere else would you have or do you like it in Cobb?

VC: Actually I like Cobb now. I'm not going to say I wouldn't like to see more diversity here because I would and there is a difference from what I understand talking to my black friends who live in Fulton or live in Clayton or live in DeKalb that there is a difference, but the one thing that my girlfriends and I talk about all the time, when you get to be a certain age you're looking for quiet, you're looking for things to work, Cobb County has a wonderful government in the sense of providing services. If something goes wrong and you call them, it's not going to be next week when they're going to come out and repair it, they will be there, if not that day, sometime during that week to repair if something goes wrong with the streets or the lights or the garbage truck didn't come pick up your garbage, if you call them, they're going to come back out that night or that next day and do it. It works. Things work here and that becomes important to you. For that reason I like Cobb, I like the area, I like the area that I live in because I can come out my subdivision and go down the street and there are grocery stores, there are restaurants, there is shopping. Now I like it because of my age. My son on the other hand, says that if he moves back here after graduation he's not going to live in Cobb, he wants to live in Atlanta because he's looking for excitement. He thinks that this is for old fogies out here. He thinks it's great when you're ready to raise your family, for your children growing up, but when you become a young adult he doesn't think that Cobb has anything really to offer.

CA: Well, I'd like to say thank you so much from not only me but from Dr. Scott as well for allowing me to interview you.

VC: You're quite welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

INDEX

- Benham, Robert (Bob) (Justice), 7
Bodiford, James (Judge), 8, 10
- Cascade Road, Atlanta, 4
Clark Atlanta University, 3, 5
Cuthbert, Vicki Trammell
 Background 1-4
 On division of races in West Point, Georgia, 2
 On protesting to keep an African American high school from closing, 2
 On leaving West Point, Georgia, 3
 On the importance of education to African Americans, 3
 Explaining her youthful naiveté, 4
 Describing the role of her mother during her childhood, 4
 On course flexibility at Morris Brown, 5
 Motivation to enter law school, 5
 Debunking the myth of a racial “quota” in law schools, 6
 On working in a predominantly white industry, 7
 As a circuit attorney, 7
 Marriage of, 7
 Opening private practice in Marietta, Georgia, 7-8, 9
 On being appointed to the Cobb County Magistrate’s office, 8
 On becoming the first African American judge in Cobb County, 8
 Resigns from Magistrate’s Office, 9
 On her time working for Cobb County and its effect on her professional career, 9
 Describing the problems of being a part-time magistrate, 10
 Advice from Judge Bodiford on being a female magistrate, 10
 Describing the differences between a Superior Court Judge and a magistrate, 10
 Discussing misogyny in Cobb County public service departments, 10
 Working as a social worker before entering law school, 10
 Teaching at Atlanta Junior College, 10
 Discussing the challenges of working in the juvenile court system, 11
 On the racial composition of those in the criminal justice system, 11
 On ways to prevent children from entering the criminal justice system, 11-12
 On combating racism, 13
 Discussing differences between Cobb County and other counties in Georgia, 13
- Fisk University, 5
Ford Foundation Scholarship, 4
Freedom of Choice in school systems, 1
- Harrison High School (West Point, Georgia)
 Last all African American graduating class (1970), 1
 Protesting to keep open, 2

Students graduating and going on to college (1970), 3
Howard University, 5

Morehouse College, 3, 5
Morris Brown College, 2, 3, 5

Obama, Barack (President), 13

Reynolds, Vick (Judge), 8

Smith, Betty (Dr.), 2, 3, 4

University of Georgia Law School
Attending, 6
Racism at, 6

West Point, Georgia
Location of, 1
Segregated schools in, 1
Period of integration in school system of, 1
Division of races in, 2
Protests to keep the African American school open, 2
As an isolated small town, 2

Zero Tolerance Program in school systems, 12

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