

## **Demetria Tucker Interview Summary**

Interviewee: Demetria Tucker

Interviewer(s): Natalie Bennett and Maggie Spencer-Pick

Interview date: October 20, 2021

Location: Christopher Newport University, Newport News, Virginia (virtual)

Length: 1:18:24

**THE INTERVIEWEE:** Ms. Demetria Tucker was a military child born in Greenville, North Carolina on January 31, 1950. She spent time with her family in Japan during her father's military tour, after which the Tucker family relocated with orders to Langley Airforce Base in Hampton, Virginia. When she arrived, Ms. Tucker was 13 years old and attended Y.H. Thomas Junior High School in 1963. She then later attended Hampton High School under the Freedom of Choice ruling. She participated in activism for civil rights during high school, and later in college at North Carolina A&T. She then attended UNC Chapel Hill, where she ultimately graduated with a Master's degree in Library Science. After this, worked in the Roanoke and Hampton Roads area as a librarian.

**THE INTERVIEWERS:** Natalie Bennett is a senior majoring in Political Science at Christopher Newport University. Maggie Spencer-Pick is a junior majoring in Environmental Studies at Christopher Newport University.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW:** This interview was conducted as part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project through Christopher Newport University. It was conducted under the direction of Dr. Laura Puaca, in conjunction with her course, History 341: "The Long Civil Rights Movement." The interviewers aimed to establish a timeline of Tucker's life and to place her experiences within the context of the greater civil rights movement. Around the four minute marker, the internet connection was lost, and there was a lag in recording. All participants joined the call from their homes.

Tucker's reflection on her experience growing up, both during times of segregation and integration, showed her immense love of her family and parents, as well as the strength of herself and her fellow students that were among the first to integrate in Hampton City Schools. Because of her involvement in the Freedom of Choice ruling, a large portion of the interview is spent focusing on her experiences in Hampton Roads, as well as incorporating elements of housing segregation, materials disparities, and military racial treatment during the 1960s and 1970s.

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### **START OF INTERVIEW**

Natalie Bennett: Okay so, my name is Natalie Bennett and my partner is Maggie Spencer-Pick and today is October 20th, 2021, and we are interviewing Miss Demetria Tucker, and this interview is being carried out as part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project at Christopher Newport University. So, good afternoon, Miss. Tucker.

Demetria Tucker: Good afternoon.

NB: We're taking out what is called a "life history" and would like to begin our interview with a few questions about your childhood. So, where and when were you born?

DT: I was born January 31, or 31st, 1950, in Greenville, North Carolina, which is part of Pitt County.

Maggie Spencer-Pick: Okay, what did your parents do for a living?

DT: My dad was in the military and my mom was a homemaker, but she worked part-time at the tobacco factory in Greenville. Tobacco was a big part of the industry in Eastern Carolina.

MP: Could you just state and spell their names, just so we have them?

DT: My father, what a wonderful gentleman. He has since passed, this year. His name was William Alfred Tucker and my mother, Helen Louise Tucker.

MP: Thank you.

NB: And what were the race relations like in Greenville, North Carolina, if you can remember anything from that when you were young?

DT: I was very young and, I guess, sheltered from any form of racism. Or I really didn't notice that much because it was a tight-knit African-American community, where I was, that I remember. You know, the neighborhood, the homes, the people. But I did attend a Catholic school.

MP: What was the name of the Catholic school? Do you remember?

DT: Saint Gabriel Catholic School. And we were the only school—I found out later, as an adult—it was the only school in Pitt County, via Black or white, that had a playground. And we remember seeing kids when we would go out to play—it was fenced—and they would be peeking in at the fence, [laughter] watching us play, [go] down the slides, the swings, and one of those spinning wheel-type-things that you could sit on and play on. And Father Morris was the, I guess like, the principal of the school. I do remember Sister DePaul and Sister Irma, and I do remember one Black nun. We had an African-American nun that was there. Their convent wasn't far from the school—where they lived, the nuns.

MP: Was this primarily for Black children? Were there Black and white children together or—?

DT: No, they were separate, because I was looking information up about Catholicism in North Carolina, and they were talking about it in North Carolina. In particular, they did all the schools, and it was the first—. When I went to school in '56, they had just opened that school and there's a book about both African-American and caucasian Catholic schools in North Carolina. [And my

school, St. Gabriel Catholic] [recording freezes (4:05-4:07)] school was in there, and there's a picture of me and my [sister in our classroom.] [recording freezes (4:10-4:29)]

MP: Miss Tucker, are you still there? I think we've lost you.

DT: There's also my [sister] [recording freezes (4:40-4:42)] next to me. We're in the [classroom] picture. The church was open [to Blacks], but my mother said she remembers the church [offering clothes shipped down from New York or Boston]. It was open but– [recording freezes (4:57-5:57)]

NB: Miss Tucker, can you hear us?

MP: We cannot hear or see you. I think it got disconnected.

DT: I don't know what happened. It was like all of a sudden. Okay. All right.

MP: Okay.

DT: Okay.

MP: So let's go ahead and pick up on–

DT: Natalie.

NB: Yes.

MP: Okay let's go ahead and pick up some time of your life–

DT: Sorry, I don't know what happened.

MP: No, it's okay, it's a struggle online. But let's go ahead and pick up the time of your life when you moved away from Greenville.

DT: Okay.

MP: When and where did you move to?

DT: Okay, okay. Like I said, my dad joined the Air Force. But he had been, you know, like, traveling. He was in Germany and different places, but he was stationed at Fort Bragg—not Fort Bragg. Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. And so then my father got papers to move to overseas, and so we left in 1959 for Japan.

NB: And what was it like for you as an African-American girl, as a military child, in Japan? Did you encounter any racism abroad or were you, you know, faced with any of that?

DT: [pause] Yes, because the—. When we moved overseas, of course, everything was changed. And so, at that time, military families lived outside of the military base—they called it “the Paddies”—until you were able to get housing on base. So we lived out in the community, amongst [the Japanese and other Americans off base]. It was Americans, and it was still secure—but we lived closer to the people, you know, in Japan. Different culture of course, wear and tear. Just like the mask. Mask is no surprise to me, because we saw masks in 1959 when we moved there. I mean, everyone wore masks that [were] school children. Plus, school children attended school on Saturdays. Kids that were military, of course, it was Monday through Friday. But Japanese kids wore uniforms, and they attended school on Saturdays. There was a form of racism. They looked at us Black people as strange because they told us [so]. I know our Japanese maid told us that soldiers had told them that we came from the monkeys, and they would look for tails. They thought we [had tails]. They would circle around you. We would wonder why, when we would go to the market or whatever, they would be looking at us. I guess they thought we were going to whip out a tail or something like that [laughter]. They thought we did have them. But once they got to see that we did not have tails—. But that's true. I mean that, that's what happened, [what] I recall in Japan. But once they got to—. And it was strange, you know, they wanted to touch your

skin. You know, they all gathered and started, you know, speaking in Japanese. You knew it was different. But in our home—a lot of military families had maids—and so we had a Japanese maid. And so she, you know, was befriended to us.

NB: And at your school in Japan, was that segregated or was that integrated?

DT: No, that was a military school, no segregation. A matter of fact, I was looking at my passport record, and I noticed I was not identified as a “negro,” [or] “Black.” I was identified as an American. When we were in Hawaii—I was looking at our [records on Ancestry and I found our passport records]—you had to have those records. My mother had them but then, you know, when you can go on Ancestry now and you can look [that information up]. And it had not “negro,” “negroid,” “colored.” It was “American,” [that] is what it had. Going to Japan, we came and we landed halfway. Going to Japan, we landed in Hawaii. And then coming back, when we came back, it was through Alaska. But it was a military school. Church was the same way. There was no Black church. It was Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, and we went to a Protestant church on base.

MP: And so, at what point did your family move back to the U.S, and did you move directly back to Hampton, or—.. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

DT: Yes, well, what happened in 1963, my father got orders. It was the summer of 1963. We received orders—he received orders—to move. He was stationed at Langley Air Force Base. And so, of course, we traveled, landed in San Francisco. And my father drove across the United States, so we had a chance to tour, you know, different states from California to North Carolina. And we arrived in North Carolina, my father and mother's home state. And from there my father found out it wasn't, maybe, about two hours or three hours max from Greenville, North Carolina

to Hampton, Virginia, and so he was stationed there. And he bought a home. Matter of fact, my father bought a home. We lived on base, but we didn't live in housing, base housing. My father bought a house, as an enlisted soldier. So we lived in a very nice community and house in Japan. And that was a mixed neighborhood again, too. We had all sorts of friends. I mean, Girl Scouts—I was a member of the Girl Scouts, Brownies.

NB: So do you think your moving around a lot kind of affected the way that you integrated, in kind of a community sense?

DT: I think the exposure had a lot to do with it. I would also have to say the upbringing of my parents, teaching me about and educating me about who I [am], and to be proud of who I was. And then, like I said, living there you can't avoid it. I saw racism overseas, don't get me wrong, I did see racism there. But, being on a military base, you had some people, and most of them were from the deep south, that had, you know, [the attitude of] “What are you doing here?”, “Why are you sitting here?” But that was like a no-no in the military. I had a right to ride the bus, you know, go where I wanted to, go to the swimming pool. I went to the swimming pool where it wasn't even allowed in the United States, you know, during the summer, summer camps, you know, that were over there. It was more of segregation through ranks. [laughter] Let me put [it that way]. You know, enlisted, compared to the higher ranked, you know, soldiers.

MP: So would you say that the transition was fairly smooth for you? Did you notice any large differences between how you were treated in Japan versus here?

DT: When I got to the United States, yes, because my father—when he arrived in Hampton—he had to move to a segregated neighborhood. He was trying to move closer to the base, and they were denied housing in that area in Hampton. And so my father moved to the Aberdeen section

of Hampton. He bought a house in the Aberdeen section, and then I had to go to a segregated school, which was Y.H Thomas. I came back to the United States when I was 13 years old.

MP: Was Aberdeen—. Was it Aberdeen Gardens at the time, or was it just near Aberdeen Road?

DT: It was off of—. It was Mercury Boulevard, off of Aberdeen—. It was off of Aberdeen Road.

The neighborhood that they were building was a new neighborhood that was establishing, and so that's where—. It wasn't in the old Aberdeen Gardens, but in the area of Aberdeen. It is still called Aberdeen section, but not Aberdeen Gardens.

MP: And I'm assuming this was like a primarily—. Maybe not. Or it might have been strictly enforced, like a segregated community? Or was this just a primarily Black community, or was it integrated, or—?

DT: Well, no. Where we lived, you could see Aberdeen, and then it was a Black section, or African-American section. And then bordering was the white neighborhood. You know, bordering. It wasn't like a street over or anything like that. It was just, you know, back to back, you know, with the neighborhood. But it was a new development. In the new development, it was primarily a lot of military families, you know, that were moving to the area, that were living in this new development behind Aberdeen Gardens. That's where it was. A military, shipyard— [community].

NB: And you said that your father lived in Aberdeen, did you live—. I'm assuming you lived with him as well or were you somewhere--[Tucker nods yes] Okay.

DT: Yes yeah, he—. In other words, when we came back [from] Japan, my father had to settle. And so he would go back and forth [overseas], because he had to report to the base, and so he



was looking for a home for us, you know, for the family to move to. And that's when he saw the new neighborhood that was coming up in new homes, and my father purchased a home.

NB: And in terms of public facilities in Hampton, did you ever personally experience racism, or did you notice any racism in public facilities?

DT: [pause] You know, I was going to say—. I think because my parents sheltered us quite a bit, we didn't use the library, the public library. We used the library on base. And I know that my parents did, like grocery shopping, they did it primarily on the base. I noticed it, of course, when I went to school, and especially after my eighth grade [year] and going to eighth, ninth grade—going from middle school to high school. It was a choice at that time. It was beginning of desegregation and so I had a choice to—it was called Freedom of Choice—and I had a choice to go to Phenix High School, which was the only African-American high school in Hampton, or Hampton High, and I chose to go to Hampton High. I know my sister, Cynthia Tucker, chose to go to Phenix.

MP: We just also want to talk a little bit more about your junior high school experience.. So this a segregated school, correct? Like that was a Black school only?

DT: Mhm, Y.H. Thomas. Y.H. Thomas Junior High School.

MP: Okay, do you know how it compared at all to any of like the local white schools? Like in quality, or anything like that? Or, do you remember any teachers that were especially influential?

DT: Yes, Ms. Urquhart. I remember Ms. Urquhart. And I'm trying to think of teachers now and I can't think of their names, I apologize. I was used to going to, again high school—I mean middle school and elementary school. Well, I had experienced both, to be honest with you, because going to an all-Black Catholic school, and then going to a mixed, diverse group of students in

[elementary and middle school]. I had begged my mother that I didn't want to go [to Catholic school in Japan]. My brothers were sent to Catholic school in Japan, but we begged her not to let us go. Nuns don't play. Whatever the stories you heard about the nuns—. I mean, they provided an excellent education, but [they were] very, very strict. So we went to public school. My sister and I went to public school, but my brothers went to a Catholic school over in Japan, an international Catholic school over there. But coming to middle school, we adjusted because we had cousins that also lived [here]—their father was stationed in Hampton and they grew up in Hampton and lived here. So it was okay adjusting to that. And so, when it was time to make a decision to go to high school—I'm the oldest in our family—and I've said, “Well, I've been in school with white kids before,” you know, when I lived overseas. But it was a different type of atmosphere to me in high school at Hampton High School. It was rough.

NB: So, shifting back to kind of like, you're choosing to go to Hampton High School. So, was it a predominantly white institution, in terms of the students and the faculty?

DT: Yes, yes.

MP: And so—oh, you go ahead Natalie.

NB: Right. I was just going to mention that we did find like digital yearbooks of Hampton High School and we did find your—I think it was junior and senior year yearbook pictures. And we noticed that, even in the yearbooks, it was predominantly white students, even predominantly white faculty. And we did, I think, maybe was it your cousin with you, who also had the last name Tucker? We didn't know if there was any relation with that.

DT: My cousin, she didn't come until after I had graduated. Cynthia Tucker. Cynthia Ann Tucker.

MP: So, we also noticed as we were looking through the yearbooks, they had some photos of extracurricular activities and the proms and all. Did you attend any of those, or, what were the conditions around those activities?

DT: Yes, I did attend the prom, I did attend the prom. I'm trying to remember, I thought I belonged to the—. Was it the newspaper? God it's—. Or the German club? I'm trying to remember which clubs I belonged to [laughter]. I remember it was called—. Going to school was rough, in the mornings. And you were talking about the disparities of materials. I didn't see the disparity of materials, and I'm trying to remember at Y.H. Thomas. I do remember my father going to the Hampton School Board to protest about the school books of my brothers at Aberdeen Elementary School, because they had been written in. At that time, students at African-American schools got the hand-me-downs from white schools. And so the books—the covers were halfway off, they were written in, pages ripped, and my father was not about to tolerate it, at all. So, he went and protested, and, from what I understand, they changed the books. But I didn't see that at my middle school. I don't recall seeing that at my middle school. I do remember seeing, like I said, the books were secondhand where someone had already had that book and written in it. But then when I went to Hampton High School, totally different. I do know that we were active. I know when Martin Luther King [Jr.] died, which was my last year, my senior year, all of the Black students—. And I'm trying to remember Wright's first name. She was like the leader. I want to say—. It wasn't. I don't want to call the wrong name. But anyway, I remember her going in and telling the principal, (Mr. O.E. Ware? 25:50), that we were going to do—. The students, all of the African-American students, we walked outside near the flagpole, and we kneeled in memory of Martin Luther King [Jr.] in April, the passing, when we found out that he was assassinated. I

remember that there was an incident, where I was told from students that lived in Copeland—it was like a housing area for lower class caucasians in Hampton. I dreaded having to go there through that neighborhood, because our bus would pick us up and then we'd have to go through there, and we knew we were going to be taunted daily, you know, by these kids that—. We were new, freedom of choice, you know, going to Hampton High. But we all stuck together, and the families—the African-Americans' families—stuck together, and were behind, you know, us. So we knew that was, you know, we were on the right road to go. And I felt that I could achieve just as much as anybody else, because I had, again, like I said, done so, when I was overseas, in Japan.

NB: So, when you were kind of doing those like kneeling in front of the flag to honor Dr. King, were there, African-American faculty kind of backing you guys up as well?

DT: I don't recall that. I don't recall, right now. It was the students, I remember the students. And her last name was Wright, but I cannot think of-her first name right now. But it was—. We all were in agreement. It was discussed, and we were all in agreement that we were going to go out in front and, you know, kneel around, in front of the school. It was near the flag post at Hampton High.

MP: Were there any other demonstrations?

DT: Not that I can recall right now. Again, a lot of the kids that I—. Some of the kids that I remember also were military kids, or young adults, whose fathers—. And they had experience going to school at an integrated school because of the base. And then you had local, you know, Hamptonians that were there too, as well. I do remember there was an incident, and my father got involved with that because I was told, like I said, from someone from the Copeland area, I forgot what the neighborhood was. But it was in Copeland, that they call that area in Aberdeen,

lower end of Aberdeen. And someone had told me to [sit not up front but] sit in the back, you know, and I refused to sit in the back of the bus, because I knew that I didn't have to sit in the back of the school bus. So, I told my father about it, and so, of course, my father went, and he protested, you know, about what went on and we didn't have another incident.

NB: So did you ever—. How were you treated by your teachers? Did you notice kind of like, a distinction, between teachers treating you differently, versus teachers treating white students differently?

DT: Yeah, I remember my typing teacher. I could not stand her. She was hateful, she was mean, she was racist. I hate to say it, but it was horrible. I would raise my hand and others in the class, we would [raise our hands]. And she would just walk right past, you know. And I remember my parents buying me a typewriter so I could—. I wanted to learn how to type. I was in typing, and I failed. It was like typing, because I would raise my hand and she would walk right past, and I don't even remember her name. I remember what she looks like, but I don't even remember her name because—. She just made me feel so bad as a human being, just to completely ignore—not only me, it was others who were in the class, African Americans, that we were just ignored.

There were some teachers, and I cannot, again [remember]. I guess it's age, aging. I can't remember. I remember my government teacher. And, oh God, I'm trying to think of our English teacher. I loved her because I loved Keats, Shelley, the way she was so [interesting]. She would do a Shakespearean theater. She brought in a replica of the theater. She was just very interesting and [I] loved how she taught. And also the history teacher, U.S. history. I loved history, and especially U.S. history. And it was another one of my former classmates, who was white, we would challenge each other, answering the questions in history. And U.S. government, I enjoyed,

you know, those classes, too, as well, and I'm trying to think--. I think it was Mr. Simpson. He was African-American. And I'm trying to think if Mr. Simpson taught science. But he was an African-American teacher there. I remember Mr. Simpson. But it was the typing teaching, the majority--. Oh, Coach! How can I forget the football coach? He taught me driver's ed. He said I almost drove him over James River Bridge [laughter]. He was scared of my driving but I--. Mr. Palmer, Johnny Palmer, he was the football coach, and he also--. I took another class under Mr. Palmer. But he was very nice too, as well.

NB: Do you remember, either in locker rooms, or even restrooms, in the high school, experiencing anything from other students?

DT: Not really because we had our own little clubs, little cliques that--. [pause] I guess I felt protected around the students that were there. They were smart, [laughter] you know, smart kids. And we were about, I guess, proving that we were just as good and just as smart, and we were determined. Most of the students that I know that were there, we were planning on going to college. It wasn't that we were going to be secretaries or go into--. What was the other classes that--? We were in college prep [courses]. That's what it was called at that time. The majority of us were in college prep classes.

NB: And did you experience any racism by your fellow white students in your high school?

DT: Yeah there were some, but the majority of them, you know, we told them off and kept going, you know, moving. There was some, yeah. But again, I'm trying to recall the students. I guess because we were so close-knit--. And then some of the students, I think--. Because that was also the same year, I think the year that we graduated, Bobby Kennedy passed also. It was the day of our graduation. He was assassinated and he had passed. You could see a change because I

remember the school—. The seniors would have like a senior picnic, and it was at Newport News Park, if I'm not mistaken. And it was Black and white kids. We were going to the picnic together, a group of us so it was like—. [pause] It was there, but then again, it was some that was trying to move forth. But if you wanted to come to be a part of us it was lik—. We were just such a tight knit group of students, of African-American students, like I said, that were determined to succeed and to stick together at whatever cost.

MP: Do you remember, either living in the area—because I think you graduated a little bit before busing started in the area. Do you remember any—. I know you talked about a little bit of the issues with busing. But do you remember any issues with busing in general in the community?

DT: Just the incident, like I told you that we were having when freedom of choice first started, and we had to go in this neighborhood [laughter] and we knew we were going to be taunted, because the bus would be crowded. And that's all that I remember, because the majority of the places that we went to were primarily in our community, in the Aberdeen community. Either I was walked or—. Again, because my father was in the military, he was gone most of the time. And my mother was learning, you know, how to drive and she started driving. But again, kids were not allowed out like kids travel today. They can go in and everywhere, we weren't—. We knew where to go, where it was safe, and again, my mother and father used the military base as a means, you know, to shop, to go to the library, you know, if I needed to to use the library.

NB: I know you've mentioned freedom of choice before. Was this just applied to African American students or were—. Was it applied to white students as well?

NB: You know, that's a good question. I think it was primarily—. I don't really know because, you know, I've been looking online trying to find information about desegregation of schools in

Hampton and they were talking about how quietly it was done, and with cooperation, and how they—how the school board and the City of Hampton government—got together and tried to work out a plan, and it was a choice. I know that they were saying that if white kids did not want to go to Black schools—and I think that was more when it was forced desegregation—they had a voucher where they could go somewhere else or to another school. But freedom of choice, I don't know if it was offered to white students or not. But I do know it was offered to students who attended African-Americans schools, high school[s].

MP: So it looks like the year before you graduated, Hampton School Board like formally integrated all schools in 1967. In the following year, Phenix was actually renamed Pembroke. With the formal integration, do you remember any conflict or any opposition to that?

DT: I don't recall any, and my sister—when you were saying it was Pembroke—my sister was in the last totally Black class. And then she was in the first class of integration at Pembroke, when it was changed to Pembroke High School. I remember her talking about, you know, the changes. But at Hampton, [pause] at that time, you know, in the beginning, like I said, it was a lot of taunting when we first came in. But then by the end, in '68, the taunting wasn't as aggressive as it was when I came there in '65.

NB: So what did the Hampton community kind of respond to the first integration? Do you remember any—like even the African-American community. Were there any backlash for the integration of the high schools in Hampton at all?

DT: From what I remember with Phenix, it was like losing its identity, the school losing its heritage. That I remember: the talk, hearing the talk. The adults, you know, talking about it. And some students for that matter. [pause] It was like at Hampton High, I would say, when it came to



the prom, I remember there being a prom committee but again-. Decoration committee, students were asked to participate, but then when there's the minority, you don't get-. There's not a lot of choices, let me put it in that sense. It was not a lot of choices for African-American students.

MP: Alrighty, is there anything else you wanted to tell us about your high school experience, or do you want to move to after high school?

DT: I think that was it. Again, I just still have to say, the students that I went to school with, I mean, they were fighters, they were leaders. We stuck together. I mean, we just stuck together and we got through, you know. And we noticed-. We heard the following year that it was, you know, there were changes. And then that one [was selected] princess. And I can't remember for sure that [it was] at Hampton High that, "Boy they're really moving." They're selecting, you know, an African American. And we knew in sports that-you know, like Foley Jones, he was good in basketball and a couple of the guys that were in football, you know-that they were, you know, moving along. But, like I said, progressively from '65 to '68-. By the time of '68, the taunting was not as aggressive, and then we could see more-a couple of more-African-American teachers, you know, like coming in. And then the teachers had gotten used to-saw that, you know, we were serious about getting our education as well.

MP: I did just want to ask, because you know, we know, from the information you gave us that you do end up becoming a librarian, which I love. But I just want to know if there were any Black librarians at your school or was it any high school library or anything that motivated you?

DT: No.

MP: Or you just love books like me? I totally understand [laughter].

DT: And I used the library, you know, a lot. And the librarian—I can't think of her name. She was nice. The school librarian at Hampton was nice. But I would say in college, it was more so, yeah.

NB: Okay, well then that can delve into kind of your college experience. So, could you tell us a little bit more about where you attended college, kind of like, what motivated you to become a librarian?

DT: Mmm okay. I guess, I attended North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State—well, it was College at that time. And then in 1970, it became University. [It] was part of the North Carolina university system. But it was North Carolina A&T State University. Our mascot is the Aggie dog, and it is now the number—. It was the number one HBCU in the nation. We have the highest number of engineering graduates of a HBCU. And we are the largest HBCU in the nation.

MP: What was it like to—

DT: Oh, it was awesome, going to North Carolina A&T at that time. Again, the civil rights movement was going on, so it was a lot happening on campus. Changes, marches, we did a lot of marching to try to [make changes on campus]. I remember the governor because, at that time, my senior year, matter of fact, it was an unrest that was done and a student was murdered. Willie Grimes, and I remember him, and his—. Even to this day, it is still an unsolved murder of what happened, who shot and killed Willie on campus. A matter of fact, I was there when the National Guard came on campus. Our campus was like a battlefield with tanks rolling on campus, National Guard on campus, bullet holes in the dorm. At that time, Scott Hall was the largest male dorm on the East coast and it was horrible trying to get off campus. We had trunks and UPS, at that time, would deliver our—my sister and I—our trunks. She wasn't there, but I was there and,

just trying to get off campus and to get back home, to Hampton, was rough in itself. But again, it was a lot of unrest.

NB: So was the community around that college, was it primarily integrated or was it segregated?

DT: It was segregated, but we were—. Where our campus was [located], we could walk downtown to, matter of fact, to Woolworths, where the [1960] sit-ins [occurred]. You know, the first noted sit-in was in Greensboro. The Greensboro Four was there and Reverend Jesse Jackson, was a graduate of North Carolina A&T. I went to school—I was in a class behind Ron McNair, the astronaut who was killed. He has a fraternal twin brother, Carl, who was also a graduate of North Carolina A&T. They were in the class of '71 or '70—two classes or a class ahead of me at A&T.

MP: Would you say overall that it was a good experience? Or how would you reflect on your decision to go there?

DT: It was an excellent experience. It really prepared me. Dr. Will Scott, I will never forget him, he was department head for Sociology, and I knew I didn't want to go into social work. I wanted to do—. I enjoyed sociological theory and research and that. Again, part of [the work at the] library [is] reading books. But also I enjoyed doing research because, at one time, I thought about being an anthropologist. But I ended up having my major in Sociology, a minor in African-American history and English. And, again, books, books, reading books, going in libraries, doing, you know, research, I enjoyed that. Dr. Scott was a professor that you were interviewed [by] before you actually got in his department. He challenged you. I was challenged by a lot of my professors at A&T. That nothing is given to you, you got to work for it, and it was, “Why are you thinking this way? Go into thought.” The students at A&T, I remember when I

first—when I was in school—protested, because African-American history wasn't really taught. And so, you know, it was world history. And so that was one of the other protests [laughter]that the students—. It was like every year. I think we protest[ed] every year. The school was almost shut down three years in a row. I didn't take a final exam until my senior year. I remember going to Raleigh. All the students that attended HBCUs in the state of North Carolina, I think it was a total of thirteen. Some of the schools are closed, like Barber-Scotia. They were smaller schools. But we went to Raleigh because we were protesting—. The governor wanted to shut our schools down, or combine them with, like, UNC-[Greensboro] or North Carolina State, and we weren't going to have it. And so we met at Shaw, in Raleigh, North Carolina. But all the students, it was buses of students that went to Raleigh. That's what I remember. My years in college at North Carolina A&T: protest. You know, protest for this, protest for rights of students, protests for teachers to teach, because we had like a lack of teachers for some class. We were like the largest, one of the largest classes. I remember my graduation included a total of 700. We were one of the largest graduating classes in 1972.

MP: So with your minor in African-American—

DT: And at that time—

MP: Oh, go ahead Miss Tucker. You can go ahead and finish.

DT: Oh, I was going say, at that time, too, on campus, it was a lot of interesting—. We had Miriam Makeba, Stokely Carmichael, James Farmer, and, of course, Jesse Jackson, because he had graduated from A&T. H. Rap Brown, stars like Stevie Wonder, you know, the old school, James Brown, Mahalia Jackson, Nina Simone, who came, you know, on our campuses.

MP: I was just going to ask, because I know you said you have the minor in African-American history, were you—? I'm not quite sure how to phrase this. Were there a lot of things that you learned new that you were not taught in high school history? Like, was there an obvious discrepancy between the history that you were taught in high school in Hampton and what you learned in college or—.

DT: Well, let me say this, and I listened to people talk about critical [race] theory and all of this. Nobody cared about how I felt when I was in school, in middle school or— . Well, let me say middle school and high school, when it came to be, you know, people would talk about slavery. And I guess that was another thing too. John Kennedy passed, and I remember the reaction of students when John F. Kennedy was assassinated in school. Some kids laughed, and I didn't think it was funny that he was assassinated. But nobody cared about how I felt when they talked about, you know, slaves. It was laughing, it was teasing about my feelings, you know, about my ancestors being enslaved. But one of the things that I have to say: there was no choice about how history was taught. There was very little. All I remember was mainly about [how] we were [told that we were] brought over here like savages. No knowledge, uneducated, animalistic. Nothing positive. Only what I learned about my history was from my mother and my father, what they were taught in school. I didn't know there was a Negro National Anthem until my parents told me about the Negro National Anthem and about—besides George Washington Carver—you know, explaining to me about my history. I learned more about African history and African-American history, like I said, when I went to North Carolina A&T. It opened up the floodgates for me. And that's when I started doing and getting involved with the library more and more because to me, reading books—it brings knowledge to you. That's where you find a lot of hidden gems—are in

libraries—that people don't realize. And then, a library's where immigrants first went to learn English, to learn about America, going to the public libraries because it was open to the public. But again, some African Americans didn't have access. Again, they weren't given, you know, library cards to do that. But in our community, and I do remember growing up, too, there was a library for African Americans in Greenville, North Carolina that you could go to. Raggedy books, but it was still access to books.

NB: I know you mentioned that you did go to UNC-Chapel Hill to get your masters. And was it fairly, you would say, like integrated at that time? Or were there still more predominantly white students than there were African-American students?

DT: It was still predominantly more white students. Matter of fact, I was the only African American in my class. In my class, at the time, I was the only one. And then the following semester—because at that time you could get your master's degree in a year program and—. I can't think of a young lady, she followed me. She was [in] the next following group for their MLS after me. But, yeah, I was the only one in my class. I had some students—. I was challenged, too, by some professors. But I do remember Dr. Kingsbury and Dr. (Steinfirst? 58:03) because I wanted to—. I was already working for a library system, and decided to go ahead and get my master's degree. You know, go back to school and get my master's degree in library science. I knew that's where I wanted to be, because I could use those skills that I was taught—my sociological research and theory skills, and when I took statistics at North Carolina A&T. I could use those skills for research and those are the primary skills that I used as a librarian, you know, keeping statistics, turning in reports and things that I had to do. But I've always enjoyed doing research.

MP: Working within the library system, how was that for you? Either, you know, during—. Before your masters or after? Just how is that career path for you as an African-American woman?

DT: Well, you know, I have to say, Nancy Hines was the director of the library system in Roanoke, Virginia. And, at that time—. I'm trying to think of what that system that they called where they allowed African Americans [to work] with city government. Oh God, I can't think of the name of the term that I was able to get in, get a job using my college degree. But I'm going to jump back to, if you don't mind, going back to UNC at Chapel Hill. I was the only African American in my class. Sometimes, I was challenged by my classmates, because they were going—or professors (1:00:03) [stating incorrect statements. For example,] “Who doesn't, you know, who don't read?” And I remember a classmate turned to me and saying, “But we don't consider you like them.” And I was like, “What do you mean you don't consider me like them?” Like they don't read, they do this, you know. In other words, people of color and my—. I stood up in my class. Again, I was the only one. And my response was, “Excuse me. African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, Native Americans will read materials, when materials are written about them and for them.” And, you know, it's like we don't—. [I asked,] “Where are you getting your statistics?” “Oh, they're on welfare. Well you know, it's more African-Americans on welfare than it is—.” [I asked again,] “Where are you getting your statistics from?” You know, things like that would be thrown out. My master's thesis was dealing with the occupational roles of people—the occupational roles of African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans in children's picture books. Because at that time—that was under the Carter administration, [which] had started changing how government looked and was hiring, you know, more African Americans and more people of color, trying to change the diversity situation. So,

then I was comparing the images. And that's why imagery is so important in what you see on television, but also what you see in books—besides the wording in books, too. But imagery is also important. And, so, that was what I was doing my theory on, to prove that it had improved. At that time, when I was in graduate school, it had improved. I was using the Carter administration, starting from that administration, from the back. And how many African Americans you saw it in a profession besides being a maid or, you know, working in a factory, you know, things of that sort, and Native Americans as well.

NB: So, in terms of, like, after graduating, and then you getting back into the library system, do you ever think that you were, like, discriminated against because you were an African American woman? Or, did you ever face personal experience of racism in the workplace?

DT: Yes, I have. Let me—. Let's see. Library patrons, I would get library patrons—. Number one, salesmen that would come in and especially when I—. I had a coworker, matter of fact, to challenge, because I had been working in the library system—both of us had our master's degrees—and I had done a lot of programs, received recognition from those programs through city council and all. And then I was promoted to coordinator of library services, of youth and teen services for the system. And so I was challenged by a coworker that felt that I didn't deserve the position, and I won outright. I was very proud of the City of Roanoke, and Jim Ritchie was the assistant director of human resources for the City of Roanoke that supported me. Miss Himes supported me, and Miss. Keyser also supported me in the city giving me that position as coordinator of youth services. We had seven libraries in our system. But I would be challenged by salesmen that would come to the office, in my office. And in the joint office, I had library assistants that assisted me in service and they would be—. I had one African-American, another



was caucasian, love her to this day. We still communicate with one another. But salesmen would come in looking for Demetria Tucker and I guess like-. Someone told me one time, that the person told me one time-. He said he thought, because my name was Demetria, that I was Greek. So I'm in the office, the salesman comes in and he says "I'm looking [for Demetria Tucker]." No, he comes and I said, "May I help you?" He shook his hand at me and told me, "No." He pointed to my assistant and he says, "I want to talk to her." So then he began to proceed in this conversation and she said, "Oh no." She said, "I'm not department head. That's Demetria over there." So then he looks at me and then he, you know, he's like, "Oh, oh, oh, I'm sorry". So I took-. You know what I did? I just turned around and I told him, I said, "You can leave now." I said, "I'm not buying any materials from you. Nothing from you." And I said, "Because you were rude. I was trying to--. When you came in I asked you 'Can I help you?' You shook your head and told me, 'No,'" and I said, "in a very rude fashion." And so, what I did was, he didn't get that sale because-. Normally, when salesmen would come sometimes at our library, because I was responsible for ordering for [a large library] system sometimes, it would be between five thousand to ten thousand dollars that we could order materials for the entire system. Which, at that time, I guess it was good for a salesman to come in and to receive that. But he wasn't the only one I would get, you know. I even had a Catholic priest that thought, like I said, he thought I was Greek on the on the phone, you know, and he goes "You're Black!" and I went, "Been like that all my life!" [laughter] You know, I mean things like that, that I would have a challenge. I did an exhibit on African-American scientists, actors, performers, sports, heroes. And we ended up having tours to come in--the Tuskegee Airmen. I had a gentleman that was a Tuskegee Airman, and he came. And so, people would call, "Oh, I don't believe that." It was on

African-American inventors. And so, with the exhibit and display, we had props and different displays. The post office participated, as well as the Red Cross, because of Daniel Hale with blood plasma. And I would get calls of being challenged. But I have to say, on a whole, the children were all—. I dealt with a lot of children and kids, to this day, it didn't matter. I shared culture, everyone's culture, with children with all of the programs that we would have at the library because I believed that it was very important for me as an educator and as a librarian to share the love of reading, but also to introduce different cultures. Positive things about everyone of humanity, to young people, to start changing, and so they could see, "Oh, I like this," or, you know, "I like that" or "I don't see any difference." And that's the way I treated young people. I love working with kids.

MP: Okay, so, is there anything else that you would like to say about your time in Roanoke?

DT: I was active with the NAACP, and other organizations in the community. [pause] Let me see. I'm trying to think of what else that—. Roanoke did a lot of—. And I'm trying to think of the name of the—. Because Pearl Fu was, she was very instrumental, as far as carrying out diversity in Roanoke. [She] started a festival—international festival—[of diversity] there in Roanoke. So I would be active in trying to promote diversity through the library, but also working in the community.

NB: I just want to say that what you did, as your time as a librarian is amazing, and I feel like we need that at CNU, so come talk to us [laughter].

MP: Yeah! Yes please.

NB: Just all your experiences and everything you've done, it's amazing. And, sadly, our time is coming to a close, but if there's anything else you want to add, please feel free to add it.

DT: You know what: I am just so thankful for my parents and especially again, my dad. Like I said, losing him—. But I thank them for giving me the foundation to appreciate life, but also mankind, and in a loving way. And I can say my parents didn't teach me to be a racist. They taught me to love myself and to love who I am, but also to love my culture, my race. And I feel that once you can appreciate who you are, you can appreciate others. And that's the way I have always tried to be an example in life and give children hope. That's what I loved about, I guess, my job as a librarian, you know, because people go, “Oh, you know, isn't it boring?” No, it's not. It's not boring. It was something new every day, and being in a library, it challenges you to open up [and] expose yourself. Not only exposing yourself, but to give an opportunity to share with others. That's why libraries, to me, are so detrimental [beneficial] and important, as an important part of city government. That was one of the things that I used to have to fight for, when I would go to city council, the importance in letting citizens know that your dollars—these are your public dollars. [It] is very important that you use that resource. You have a voice about your libraries as well: what type of services you want and what type of materials that you want there. I think that's really important in opening up for people to read on their own. You can go there, just like my professors used to challenge us, you know: we're going to teach you about the African history, the Greek history and then you can compare those histories, and then you formulate your opinion from that.

MP: I just wanted to ask a few more questions to round us out here, so—.

DT: Okay.

MP: When and why did you end up moving back to the Hampton Roads area?

DT: Because my father was having early signs of dementia, and so I had basically retired from the public library, and then I was called by the superintendent of Roanoke City Schools to ask me, "Could you come and be a school librarian?" And then that's when I really realized I have a lot of respect for teachers, the hard work and the hours that they put in, that people don't give them the respect that they are due or the money that they are due. And lack of resources, too, that are not given in school libraries. So that was the reason why I moved back to the area, was my parents were aging. I'm the oldest and I lived closer than my other siblings.

MP: I really appreciate you sharing all of this information with us. As just the last thing, we just wanted to know that like, from your perspective, what do you think the most important accomplishments or movements of the civil rights movement was, and then, what do you think the most pressing problems that African Americans face today are, or anything that you would like to say?

DT: The most important, I think, is voting. My vote is my voice, and I think that is the most important thing that we can do. And more evidence was in the 2020 election. Getting out there and voting and now you see that [voter] suppression is trying to raise its ugly head to shut me down, my voice. What I think is the most important during the civil rights--voting rights. And you ask me, others. I think, housing, education--equal education. And when I say that, I think inner city schools suffer. And then also within inner city schools, it's divided up where kids that are in Governor's School have more exposure than kids in regular school. And when I mean that, they don't get to go out, or they don't get to have the executive of a company or of an organization or of a foundation to come in and talk to them where these kids, kids that are in

honors or whatever, I think it should be open where everybody is exposed. And economics, health is another thing that's concerning to me as well.

MP: [pause] You can go ahead Natalie.

NB: Yeah, I just wanted to say thank you so much for doing this. We really appreciate it, and like Maggie said, we appreciate you sharing your experiences, and I just think everything you've done to help the community and everyone, and especially the children, is amazing, so thank you so much for your time.

DT: Thank you, I appreciate it.

MP: Yeah and just exactly what Natalie said. Thank you so much for helping us, and, we'll definitely, you know, keep in touch and update you. If you would like to see any of our final project materials or anything like that, feel free to just reach out to us. We'll be here just working on it and transcribing and all, but we really really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us and share with us.

DT: Thank you.

MP: Thank you. Alright, is there anything else you would like to say, Miss Tucker, or are we all set?

DT: I think we're all set.

MP: All set, okay. I hope you have a good rest of your day and again thank you very very much.

DT: And thank you for your patience too in getting, trying to get in contact with me, too, in the beginning. Appreciate that.

MP: Hey, I understand.

DT: Thank you.

MP: Technology is not so fun sometimes, but we figured it out and we got through it. We're good. [laughter] Alright.

DT: Yes. [laughter]

MP: We'll talk to you soon Miss Tucker. [laughter] Alright bye.

DT: Okay bye-bye.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

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