

Oral History with Dr. Thelma Bivins Dillard

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Interviewers: Tahitia Butler, Rachel Griffin, and Mike Pradella

Tahitia: What was your family's initial reaction to the integration of Bibb County schools and how did you feel about it? How old were you and how did your family take it? Were you all scared?

Thelma: When you ask me how did we take it, first of all, with my family initiating the integration of the school system, I think my mother was really kind of sick and tired of being oppressed, and sick and tired of unequal and unfair treatment. And it was like there was no law to protect us. Even then in 1954, *Brown vs. Board of Education* had come about in the United States. Here we are talking about in 1963, there was still no integration of schools in Bibb County. In 1964 is when the integration actually started. So, my brother, Bert Bivins, in 1963, enrolled in school—Dudley Hughes Vocational School. He went to enroll. He had gotten out of the army and he was a janitor at Robins Air Force Base, and he really wanted to move up from being a janitor. [He was] very smart and wanted to move up from being a janitor. So, he took a test on the base. And the test he took on the base, he scored very high, real high. Matter of fact, he was the only black to pass the test. So, he decided to, they told him that he had, in order to get the position he wanted, in electronics, he had to take a class. The problem was, the class was segregated. When he went to Dudley Hughes Vocational School which was downtown, on Cotton and Forsyth Street—whichever where they join together there—right there where the Medical Center Ambulatory Center is. Now it has Lanier on it [and] it is used as a doctor's office now. But when he went to school there, he thought they said go to school there so that is where he went, [but] they said he couldn't [go there] because he was black. How did he feel? He felt hurt. But being the person he is, he was determined that, "I'm not going to allow them to tell me I can't come in this school. I passed the test, I want to move up and I'm not going to accept this."

So, the civil rights movement had just begun. So, the pioneer of the civil rights movement said to him, "Well, Burt don't try to do that now," and [Bert] said, "I need to improve myself." Now this was an African American [and] he said, "I need to improve myself." So [Bert] wrote a letter to Robert Kennedy, who was at that time the attorney general for the president of the United States, who was [John F.] Kennedy at that time. He wrote the letter and gave it to the person who was over the civil rights movement and asked him to mail it. He finally felt ready to do this now. [Bert] said, "I need you to mail this now because I want to go to that class." At that time my brother was like 20. "I want you to mail it because I want to go to school. I want to upgrade myself." My brother never heard anything from him.

After a period of time had passed, [Bert] wrote the letter again, himself, and he mailed it himself. He had a quick response from the justice department, that the school system—and I have all these articles. They told the school system that "if you don't admit him, we're going to remove all your federal funds." All these things were going on and [Dudley Hughes] still denied

him and they wouldn't allow him to go in. So it became very controversial in the newspaper. The justice department had to continue to threaten the system [and] threaten to remove their funds. Nobody wants funds removed. So, therefore, the justice department kept contact with my brother and with my family, and finally after the persuasion from the Justice Department, [Dudley Hughes] decided to allow [Bert] to enter. And he was escorted to class through Justice Department. They got him to school. That was the first time integration started and that was in 1963. And Bert Bivins was the first black to integrate the school system actually. That's my oldest brother, who is now a County Commissioner, a retired teacher, [and] retired from the [Warner] Robins Air Force Base. [He is] very smart. [He] graduated summa cum laude from Fort Valley State College. He graduated with the highest average.

Also, when he graduated from the school he went to, he was the only black in the class—and I always like for him to tell the story, and I plan to tape him because I'm going to do the book. He's not going to do it, and he's the writer [in the family]. But he told a story of one day that when he went to class, he was always isolated [and] the only person he had to talk to was a janitor. A black janitor, and that is who he would talk to. And this janitor was deaf. So he would have to talk to a deaf [person]. So you're really just talking! But that was the only person he had to communicate with. Because [the other students] wouldn't associate with him. In class, some of the students would tell him that African Americans' brains were inferior to whites. He went through all this humiliation and put-downs. And here he is, as smart as he is, [and] they were saying things to him like that. And you know, this is what's happening in our generation. This is how we are being treated. But, I'll get back to that later; let me get to this. That's so unfortunate that he was told that, and he was seen in the room with all these students. And how about he graduated with the highest average in the program. They said that blacks' brains were smaller than whites' brains and therefore he was not as smart. And he went through all this humiliation and insults and all this bit and graduated with the highest average. Then, went to graduate college with the highest average—summa cum laude. Matter of fact, the person who was director of that school at that time was Mr. Raymond Kelly. Mr. Raymond Kelly was the one who denied him entrance into the school. Mr. Raymond Kelly did it because the system was segregated so he had to follow the system's segregation and wouldn't allow [Bert] in. Mr. Kelly went on to go to classes at Mercer, I understand, later. He's deceased now. And he wrote his paper about what took place and talked about Bert Bivins and what happened with Bert Bivins and how he entered the school. Different people talk about Bert and his entering the school but that was actually the beginning of the integration of schools—when he entered [and] that was 1961. In 1963, my mother, Hester Bivins, signed the original suit to integrate the school system. And that suit was *Shirley Bivins v. The Bibb Board of Education*. My maiden name is Bivins. *Shirley Bivins v. The Bibb Board of Education*.

Then the civil rights movement was really moving. Remember, even though there was the *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, we are all the way down to 1963 before the suit, here, was actually filed. Integration should have been all over the country, by now. But it wasn't because we were still segregated here [in Bibb County] in education. There were black schools and white schools even after Bert integrated. So my mother was just so tired of separate education. Actually the only black school was Ballard Hudson High School—an excellent school.

I graduated from there. [They had] outstanding teachers—some of the best in the country. Some [of the teachers] went on to be college professors, administrators in schools, and presidents of colleges and stuff. So we had the top. We had great teachers. But, we had unequal education in terms of facilities. Facilities were all decayed. We had second hand books from the white schools. We had chairs from the white schools. We had almost no lab equipment. Everything was just secondhand and used. So that was second-class education. It wasn't first class education.

But my mother was only able to go to the eighth grade because of segregated schools. She grew up in Cathleen, Georgia. Cathleen, Georgia, was segregated as well. And schools were 12 miles away. And even if she could have gone, she couldn't walk that far. But the buses picked up white students and blacks were not allowed in schools. My mother could only go through eighth grade and had classes in one room from elementary all the way up to 8th grade. This was a person who was very brilliant—very smart. She was so hungry for education [and] she wanted to learn so badly. She could play piano by ear. She was an artist. She made clothes—my clothes as a girl were made by hand. She taught us, her children, algebra. She taught us how to read, she taught us reading, she taught us phonics, how to pronounce words, she taught us how to sit properly, she taught us social etiquette, all of that. So here is a lady who in her genes—genetically—she was born to be a princess or a queen and [she] passed it on to her children. But she wanted education so bad [and] she loved it so much, this is how she felt. So when civil rights started, my mother was ripe and ready to take action.

But before that happened, there was a bus boycott. And the bus boycott was big in Macon. The bus boycott actually shut down the system of transportation. But what really triggered her was one day on the bus. My grandmother lived in Cathleen, Georgia, [she was] a sharecropper. My father had left us, seven children. My mother had to raise us alone. So my grandmother would come up here with boxes of food where they killed hogs, and all the vegetables, the canned goods she did, she would bring all that up to us on the bus. On this particular day, [and] my mother took me every place with her, she wouldn't leave her girl alone. I understand now with society like it is. I was on the bus with my mother, and as we got on the bus my mother went to the back to sit with some of the bags because my grandmother came on the greyhound, and we were getting on the city bus. And before my grandma could sit—she had all these boxes that was behind her—the bus driver said, "Hurry up and sit down old woman! Hurry up and sit down!" And he was shouting at her. My grandmother was so humble and Christ-like. And she was fumbling [and] trying to get the money in the machine behind her. He jerked the bus and made her fall, and all of her food and stuff and her boxes—not all of it—some of it fell. Bottles were rolling on the floor and she was steady trying to pick it up and he just knocked her on down to the floor. I felt so bad for my grandmother because you know we have to sit in the back and she had to go all the way to the back. And I felt so bad. At this time I'm young. I don't know if I'm ten [or] eleven or whatever I was at that time, but I felt bad for my grandmother. By the time we got to the back of the bus, my mother had tears rolling down her cheek. And my grandmother, with her humble self, said—and I will never forget—she said to my mother, "It's okay. I'm used to it." That was one of the most piercing, and I get emotional every time I say it

because to think that they had lived that life for so long and had been abused so long, [and] had been mistreated for so long, that was piercing to me. That changed my life forever. That changed my mother's life forever because my grandmother was so humble. She said [those] word[s]: "I've had pain so long, that pain don't bother me." And that's when I felt this was a time for action.

The movement was going on. My mother had been going to meetings every now and then. But she took her children. And we went to the meetings. We got involved in the boycotting of stores—picketing of stores. We got so actively involved. And when that time came to integrate the schools, when they were talking about it, that's when my mother decide[d], "I'm going to sign this to integrate the school system. I'm tired of it. We've had enough." With my brother that wasn't even enough and it happened with him. And then now here we go going through these things. During that process, my brother was arrested for going to the YMCA. That's [the] Young Men's Christian Association. He was arrested for going in there. So the same one who wasn't allowed in the school was also the one who [was] arrested. The Young Men's *Christian* Association was segregated and wouldn't allow him in. But, anyway, it ended up my mom signed the suit. She was a maid. She only made just a little money a week and she didn't want welfare so she had no assistance. But, she lost her job because she signed the suit to integrate schools. It was very controversial. And her boss lady saw it and she said, "If you sign that suit then you wont be able to work here anymore." My mother wasn't bluffed by that. She signed it, not knowing where our living was going to come from. She didn't make that much money—20 dollars or 30 dollars a week—it was not very much money. Then it was money. But she had to raise all of us, she had to take care of all of us. But she did it in spite of the threat to fire her. And she was fired. But from that point on, we moved into changing the school system. The system changed. It didn't change immediately, it wasn't a rapid change. But when it first occurred, when integration of the schools came about, Judge Bootle was the judge, and he told the Board of Education that no longer will you be able to have a segregated school. Before he ruled to integrate the schools from the suit—the suit was filed by Tom Jackson.

This now is the integration of schools with Tom Jackson filing the suit. My mother signed the suit, and the suit was filed. Judge Bootle had told the Board of Education—he gave them a chance—to integrate the schools without having to have court intervention. But they met, and they decided—there was a unanimous decision—that the schools would remain segregated. And so at that time, that's when everything came about. [My mother] signed the suit, the *Shirley Bivins v. Board of Education*. And schools became integrated with the lawsuit. "No longer," Judge Bootle said, "will you have segregated schools."

But he allowed them to start the integration themselves. The school system felt that it would better to let the seniors integrate first, so seniors integrated first, and the first integrated class was in 1964. They were seniors. They were juniors, and they would be seniors at the end of that year. Those were the ones who were on exhibit at the Tubman Museum. They were the first girls. So they started with Miller High School. Miller had the most [amount of students they could take], [and] they couldn't take anymore so they started integration of another school, the

Lasseter and the McEvoy. And that's where you had all the first girls that integrated and they went their senior year. The senior year—[the school system] thought—those girls could adapt better than starting in the elementary grades. So they started in the high school. Now, boys integrated as well. The total integration of schools started with the senior year. And from that point on it was a gradual process. Some of the students went to the schools, but they left later because they couldn't compete, it was difficult. They couldn't compete, and they were afraid of failure. Plus they were put down, [and] they were talked about.

Right now, after I did this exhibit, my sister-in-law called me, and told me she heard about it, but she couldn't be there. She is the principal of Alexander II, and she told me that we need to do a healing because she still has a lot of hostility inside of her from the way she was treated and talked to. And she said as they were driving, going on trips and stuff, [how] the white kids would talk about them [the black students], [and] told her how black she was and how ugly she was, called them [the black students] all kinds of names. She said they told her she looked like a monkey. They were put down, and she said it really hurt her self-esteem. Now, she went on to get her doctorate, and [she is now] a principal of a school. She is about to retire. [She is] very successful and that sort of thing. But it still hurts inside now. And I told her next time I will do a healing. And my sister, she hated [integrating] so much. She tried to get kicked out of school. The teachers treated them bad as well. They were still treated like second-class citizens [and] they were still mistreated.

And so, that was the beginning of integration. And it was a gradual, gradual, gradual process. And almost every suit that comes up now dealing with the school system refers to the *Bivins v. Board of Education*. Another suit came up several years later. About five years ago, after the integration of the school—the reason for the government being involved [was] so there would be a monitoring process for the school system. And about five years ago, I was president of the NAACP, and during the time my daughter was president of the NAACP. There should almost be a monitoring process when the judge orders something. And there was a monitoring process from the Justice Department during the time Tom Jackson was living. He died about 5 or 6 years ago and my brother was his pallbearer, and I spoke on the program at Tom Jackson's funeral. The Board of Education went to court to ask them to remove the oversight of the Justice Department. This was about 5 years ago. The lady who was over the department, who was kicked out now, wanted to remove the oversights. Why do you want to remove the oversights when schools are now resegregated? And with the resegregation of schools that's the time you need oversights from the Justice Department to make sure everything runs smoothly for at least 4 or 5 years. We still want a tool in place to make sure that everyone is treated fairly. I went to speak on behalf of my family. So, Judge Owens, who died a couple of years ago, was judging at that time. The superintendent was there [and] the assistant superintendents were there. I guess that's why they won't give me an apprenticeship now. I'm more qualified than people who interview me.

We are back to where we were. The superintendent asked me, "Are you going to get up and speak?" And I said, "Well, I'm not sure," and she said, "You should because of your mother." And I got up and said to the judge that my mother's intent when she signed the original suit to

integrate the school system was for fair and equal treatment under the law [and] fair and equal education under the law. So that was the purpose of having the Justice Department monitor the system. There's a monitoring system in place and since our schools have been resegregated now, this isn't the time to pull the rug from underneath the school system. There needs to be something in place to continue to monitor the system. About two weeks later he ruled in favor of the Board of Education. [The] school system now, in Bibb County, is predominantly black. We are back where we were. We have resegregated the schools, and I think this is all over the country. When the schools were integrated there was a white flight. The white people moved to the suburbs—they get out of Macon quick because they didn't want their children to go to school with our children. This is why my sister and others suffered so much.

By the way, during the time of integration I founded the Lambda Phi Teenage Sorority. The reason I founded the sorority, I never heard about it before, because I was a member of a sorority when I was in college and I knew the Greek alphabet so I put the letters together so the girls would have a sorority because they weren't allowed to be members of the sorority. These were very smart girls, [and] I wanted them to have an opportunity to achieve. And I had organized Lambda Phi Teenage Sorority so that they could be a part of things like other girls. We would meet at the Booker T. Washington Center on Saturdays, and I would teach them how to walk, to give them self-esteem. I would teach them how to walk, how to sit, how to talk. And at that time, they thought I was so pretty, and I dressed real nice, and they just wanted to be like me and that was good. So I had people teach them to do their hair. All these types of grooming. Wesleyan College got involved with us so they could help the girls go on trips, sponsor things, and that sort of thing. But I founded that sorority to help them to achieve. They all graduated—my girls graduated—and went on to have very prosperous lives. They were also honored on March 4th and they are also on exhibit. The purpose was to help them to achieve because they were left out there on their own, hoping that they would leave and hoping that they wouldn't achieve, but it just so happened the girls were courageous and the exhibit was called "The Girls of Courage." They did have courage, you must think how fearful they must be [and] how frightened they must be to go into a situation where they are not wanted. Nobody knows what it does to a person. What I do realize is how fragile they are even today. They are fragile.

My sister went into a depression later years in her life. She attributes much of it to being in that school and how she was treated. And even though she was real, real smart deep down in. You wonder, "How does someone get depressed all of a sudden?" Depression is a very strange kind of disease, where it sits inside of you, a feeling can sit inside of you for a long period of time and it starts blossoming and blooming. And it is an ugly situation. And my sister is dealing with some depression and it has been coming gradually. She attributes it to the way she was treated. My sister-in-law, who's a doctor of education [and] one of the finest principals in the system. I couldn't believe it when she said to me, "You need to do something with the healing because I was treated so badly." She will start talking kind of angry.

Look what it has done. You all don't know. You all are babies. Nobody should ever suffer desegregation and humiliation. That's why we shouldn't judge people. Young people judge,

characterize people—[it means] nothing [when it's] based on the color of their skin, or where they live, or their handicap. To discriminate against them, and to abuse and mistreat them—whatever a man soweth, that he shall reap. We must never abuse anyone and mistreat people because of the color of their skin—no matter who it is. And just because white people did that to us doesn't mean we go around and abuse them or be angry at everybody just because of whites [or] just because of what happened in the past. We have to judge a person based on their character as [Reverend] King said and not the color of their skin. We can't base him on what people did when they were lynching and hanging our fore parents years ago. A person who is crippled and can't move around good and we start judging him and characterizing him. So, we all live here together. And if Michael tries to keep you down, he's keeping himself down too because he got to hold you down. And he got to plan and scheme and work on it so his mind is always suppressing you. But he's suppressing himself.

We must work to be a unit [and] to be united in this country. We can see it everyday what's happening. I don't have to tell you all. You all are smart, bright. I'm into politics, I'm in to human rights, [and] I have been all my life—a fighter for justice and equality. [I was] honored back about five years ago for the twenty-first century Harriet Tubman for all the work that I've done in human rights because that's important. We must never teach hate, we must never be negative, we must never put anybody down because the things you do—when I was working back on my job, if there is a person at my job who is white, and they're not friendly and not talking to me or something and turn their head the opposite way walking down the hall, that's who I'm going to befriend. Tell them what my name is. "I notice that I pass by you several times and spoke to you, and you didn't speak to me, you turned your head and I was just wondering, did I do anything to you?" I hug them, just grab them. You just grab them. This establishes, a lot of times these hardcore, hateful people just need a little attention and a little love. I've met some hardcores. You can't change them but you can let them know what it's like to love even though you hate it. You can spread love. People are mean and cruel to you don't be as they are, don't act like they act, don't give it back. I tell young people jerking your head and snapping at them—just cool it, just chill. You don't have to be mean, evil, and hateful. Just smile them to death. This is what we have to do, just melt them with that. Even in y'all's relationships with people you know and that you're around all the time. Don't be a hate player; don't be mad even if they hurt you. I hurt a lot. They wouldn't move me up in positions, [but would] bring people out of town. Racial discrimination against me right now, where I am with all my degrees and all the community stuff. [I'm a] leader. I ran for mayor [and] chairman of county commission—all this bit.

A couple years back, Channel 13 honored me as one of the influential women in Macon for the work I have done in civil rights and the community. Channel 24, a few years after that, also honored me. The Georgia Informer also honored me as one of the most 50 influential woman of the state of Georgia. All the work I've done in the community, all of my degrees, all of my work. They still won't hire me in an administrative position for the Board of Education. I do workshops, seminars, and all these things, [but,] they still won't hire me. You have to wonder why, when you are more qualified than the people interviewing you. You have to wonder why. I

wonder why. But underneath it all you know the answers. You go in and prepare yourself for all the best, you've spent all this money, you do all these things. I was even in the leadership program for the Board of Education. I was elected—outside people selected me. [After] two years, almost everybody in that program got administrative positions except me. You have to look at that when you are more qualified than those qualified. You have to be qualified as a leader in the community, a leader in civil rights, a leader on my job, highly respected by my peers, my principals have written all these wonderful letters about me even reference letters, my former principals. So you say, "What's the problem? Why didn't you hire me?" They would ask me for advice—different people asked for advice in education—but yet, everybody got a position except me. People who interviewed me are less qualified than I am. So, you have to wonder why. Speaking out against injustice, is that the reason? Standing up for the right? But why?

But anyway, I have a place. and my place is to do what is right, be the voice, and I have almost all of my life. I went to the March on Washington when I was very young. I never knew what impact that would have on the life of America. And it has actually changed America. The experiences that I have, if I were in a high place, I would want to be. I was appointed by one of the presidents to serve at large on a Democratic State Committee because I wasn't selected and I had done a lot of work in politics. So I've been a leader of politics, a leader in civil rights, a leader in education. Yet you don't want me. And then my district, all of the twenty years as a council member, I know the parents, I know the community, I have resources, all of this. Even offered myself to my new principal when he came in. And I know the mic is on. What I'm saying, I'm saying it. I'm telling the truth. I gave him my resume, I sat down with him because I had with all of my principals and I told him I would love to help him, too. I went before school started and he looked at it, "Impressive." And that's all he said. He never ever used me for anything, like he was avoiding me. I would send emails about the problems with the school, and I've been there all these years. He just came, and I'm qualified to lead a school. I saw the problems, and I outlined the problems. I gave solutions to the problems and then I offered to chair a committee to help form a committee so we could help make changes. I never received a response.

We got a lot of problems in education now. And they are bringing in people that are not qualified, in my opinion, who cannot effectively run our system. Now we're going to improve the system, we're going to have to have diversity in the schools, we're going to have to teach it. Because what's happening, a lot of times, in my case, where we got the teachers, but many, 89% of the students are black, and all your teachers are white. You got a principal who only hires white teachers. I'm not saying [it's] discriminat[ion], what I am saying is the children need to see some of their culture. And often times some of those teachers don't understand our culture, that's why I want to teach diversity, they don't understand our culture, so they don't understand the children, and they don't know how to interact with them. That's where the problem comes. I've seen them sitting over here allowing them to sleep, they do not have high expectations of them. I'm tough. I have high expectations. I was looking at letters today that students have written in the past and one student wrote, "You are the strictest, nicest teacher I have ever had." He said please write me back. I was looking at the letters, students said, "Look

what she taught me how to do. She's tough on us, and if she hadn't been tough I never would have done this." Yes, my expectations are high. I love so deeply and I'm very stern about learning and education. I'm that way with students. This is what I expect. But they can sleep in the classes—its not allowed—[but there aren't] high expectations. And I see it all the time because, "You know, I really don't care I just want them to be quiet, let them sleep." Kids are just tearing up everything and they are smart and bright and they got ability. But we got to have some teachers who understand the culture, both cultures, understand, so you know how to work with them. And the most important thing, no matter what culture, is to have high expectations. You have 89% of the students, then you have 99% of the students in ISS are black [and] low graduation rates.

The school that I'm in now, in the past two years that's when they changed and got this new principal from the outside, who doesn't live here, who has no interest in our community, they brought in someone. We have dropped down to "School Needs Improvement": eighty-nine percent black school. Smart kids, bright kids, but the expectations are low. Dropout rate is high, school suspension is high, ISS is high, attendance rates are low, graduation rates are low. Why? We can do better. We integrated schools, we came here, we are here now. Everybody has to pitch in to make a difference. So why are all these good teachers over here are not reaching these African American children? Majority of them are white. Why are they not reaching out to the American children? We got to find a way to reach them—everybody has to do it. We can't keep saying they bad and keep kicking them out of school. School is for learning.

And then everybody makes excuses about the parents. Well the parents, yes they have a role, parents ought to raise their children rights, that's the truth. They need to raise their children right, they're not parenting. We cannot keep making these types of excuses. We know parents aren't doing their jobs. We know it's their job, first, to raise their children. We know that. But, now this is a new day, we're going to have to grab the children we got and turn them around [and] educate them. How are we going to do that? We already integrated schools now. We got good schools now.

One of our problems was we didn't have equal and quality education. We didn't have adequate books and facilities [but] we got that now. Why do we have high dropout rates, low graduation rates, high in school suspensions and out of school suspensions, and they are almost all African American, about 99%? So why is that happening? We got to look at what's happening, why it's there, and what we [are] going to do about it. Schools are integrated, people often times say, African Americans, integration was the worst thing that could of happened to white people. I've heard that many times. I know why they are saying it. Because we got all these changes made, we got all these opportunities, and we have all these kids exceeding then that had little. Our kids graduated from Ballard Hudson, they were smart and bright and then went on to be doctors and lawyers and great scholars and did well in their lives. But we got all these little smart kids now and that's not happening. What's the problem? We need somebody in the system to come in now. We have Dr. Dallemand and I'm expecting great things from him. I think we need to give him a chance to do something to the schools, give him a chance. I don't want people to start criticizing him now—that's not fair. He just got here. You didn't do that to

the other superintendents when they first came. Dr. Dallemand is black. [People have] already started these racial comments and stuff. Give him a chance, we give everybody a chance, the other superintendent we gave her a chance. And the system was turned upside down and nobody found the problem until it got too late, in the last two years. Let's give him a chance. He has to come in first and assess. The first thing when you come in a new situation, you don't go in and make changes rapidly. It's a gradual process. You first walk in and assess. In every situation we go into we want to assess [and] evaluate. Evaluate every situation before you move into it and you think through it. He just came in February. He's only been here two months and I hear folks say, "Well, he didn't have a meeting over here." He's been to all the schools, he's tried to listen to the community, that's what you do. He's taking the right steps. One drastic change was to remove everybody at the Board of Education. Good move, good move. Now, you're going to hear the parents. When he comes in the schools, like in my school, they placed up there certain people to talk to him. And then they will say what they want to say.

I always want people to be honest [and] be candid. You cannot heal a situation or change a situation when you stack it up with people who are going to agree with you and rubber stamp you. If you have a cancer and you keep putting a band-aid on it so you can hide it, you're covering it up [and] you're not treating it. It's going to get worse. That's where our education system is now in Bibb County; a band-aid has been put on it for a long time. It has erupted now; radiation almost won't even treat it anymore because it has gotten so bad. You're almost at the point of death. Hopefully, this is an opportunity to turn it around. I believe in him, I trust him, I respect him, and I want to give him a chance to do his job. Hopefully, he will be able to turn things around, but he can't do it by himself. He's going to need help from parents, and students, and the community, everybody to help him to turn this system around. It didn't get this way over night, and it's not going to be fixed overnight. He has just been here two months; we have lived with this cancer for all these years. And you all haven't said a word. So why are you wanting him to do so much in two months when you have been here all these years and haven't said a word? You have allowed this cancer to erupt.

Rachel: Besides your mother getting fired from her job, did you all experience any other backlash from your brother integrating?

Dr. Dillard: The backlash from my mother's job was one of the worst things that could happen. What they said to my brother, how my brother was treated, all kinds of things. But, you know you ask an interesting question. When you asked the question about the backlash, I'm still getting it now [by] not being hired by the Board of Education, and I'm probably one of the most qualified people to oversee education in the state of Georgia. I feel that, that's my opinion, and I haven't been hired as an administrator. Matter of fact, I'm about to retire because of the way I am being treated. After awhile you get tired of being beaten down. You keep applying, keep applying, and keep applying and [you're] not hired. You have all this education and all this training and all the experience in the community—I consider that a backlash. A backlash for going to court and saying that we need an oversighter with the school system. I feel these are the reasons that I'm not being hired. And that's a big backlash. I spent a lot of money educating

myself. But, no, they won't give me a position. I'm not asking for anything. I'm asking you to place me where my qualifications are. I've never ask for anything. I never ask for special treatment. I don't want any. Because if you give me special treatment, that's a rubber stamp so you can get me to do what you want me to do [and] I don't want to do that. I want to be hired based on my merits [and] based on what I can do, and you won't hire me, and you have people less qualified than me. That's a backlash for me. My daughter is going to suffer the same backlash [as me] because she is well known because of my family. She ran for city council. It's a backlash because we are who we are and we are a humble, kind, and loving family. My brother is a county commissioner, the first one to integrate. One of my youngest brothers is chief of fire prevention for the city of Macon. We all have done wonderful things in the community as a service. So we are young, but the backlash continues and continues on down the generation seven against my daughter.

Mike: What year is your daughter at Mercer?

Dr. Dillard: This is her first year. She went there once before, but became very ill. The reason is she was as Talladega at first but became very ill. [She had] meningitis [and a] staph infection. [It] surged about five times, [and she was] near death about four times. Hopefully now those things have ended, and she's back at Mercer again. I pray to God that she will be able to get through. She is having difficulties with her math, but this is her first year.

Tahitia: When you talked about Bert, when he first integrated, and you said you were maybe ten or eleven, did you realize what was going on around you, or did your mom keep it separate from your home life?

Dr. Dillard: I wasn't actually ten at the time of integration. We all knew about it. [Bert] talked to my mother about it; he shared things with my mother. It didn't affect the home life because when you have seven children and your mom raised everybody and your dad has left you and everybody is working together. And my brothers have always gotten jobs for us and always helped us find jobs. We were just really a close family. We love each other. It hurt me to see the paper—we didn't have one—but you heard people talking about it. It hurt me the way my mother was treated [and] it hurt me the way my grandmother was treated—it hurt our whole family. Everything that happened affected us. And I felt so bad for my brother, but I was so proud of it because he was stirring, and he is the same way now. He was stirring and courageous. It became a way of life.

When you have stress, even though you are human, you are able to handle things. It inspired me to think like Shirley Chisholm: unbought and unbossed. You cannot buy me. It strengthened me to be the woman that I am, and to fight as hard as I fight, and to believe in people. And to love people because I want to be the opposite of what I have seen. That's why I give so much love to young people. That's what it made out of me. It made me a monster of love. I'm determined that nothing negative is ever going to keep me from being successful. Even the ones keeping me from a position, they can't stop me. Because I believe in a high power, and the high power supersedes anything on this earth. I believe in that, and I was raised that way, and I

believe in myself because of the power that I believe in. And also whatever a man soweth that he shall also reap. I believe that. And I won't let nothing stop me, nothing negative. If you tell me I can't do something, I'll work so hard to do it—tell me I can't do it. Tell me I can't do it.