

Dr. Roslyn Dr. Pope Interview Transcript

POI: Roslyn Dr. Pope

Primary Interviewer: Alan Emerson

Secondary Interviewers: Dean Baker; Dr. Karshiek Sims-Alvarado

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Interview Begins:

Emerson: Again, My name is Alan Emerson. Thank you for being here, I really enjoyed your presentation. I am glad that you're sitting down with me having this conversation. And can I just for the record get your correct name and spelling?

Dr. Pope: Doctor Roslyn Dr. Pope. R-O-S-L-Y-N P-O-P-E

Emerson: Alright well um. So at the beginning of your conversation you spoke about the colleges you chose to go to and how you really wanted to go to Oberlin [1]?

Dr. Pope: Yes

Emerson: And you ended up going to Spelman [2] um instead. Can you kind of fill me in on the thought process that made you decide to switch over to Spelman as opposed to Oberlin?

Dr. Pope: I didn't really have a thought process. It was my parent's thought process. Haha.

They...it would have been much more difficult to support me in Ohio. Up the street and around the corner, I was close to Spelman and um and familiar with um many of the faculty members

and had been on the campus a lot for concerts and art exhibits and those kinds of things, and uh they knew what I would experience at Spelman. They just weren't ready to finance my going far away to a place that they didn't know. The thing about Oberlin was well at that time, and I'm sure even now, the music department is...is quite renowned. And that's why I wanted to go, but uh it was just as good at Spelman so...

Emerson: And that's great and uh so did you have any kind of...Once you arrived at Spelman did you have any kind of regrets about switching over? Or were you content?

Dr. Pope: I never had any regrets it seemed as if I was home, you know? I was supposed to be at Spelman. I know many Spelman people you know as I grew up uh, so it felt quite natural. And I didn't have any regrets.

Emerson: Okay and I and you, you talk about being a Merrill scholar and um being one of the first great accomplishment to be able to go over there and study in Europe, and I actually went and saw one of the documentaries that you were in based on the movements that you were a part of, and you noted that you were in a kind of like a cohort of other Americans as well and when you were over there in Europe did you have ...you said that you really enjoyed it over there...like you were a lot... there was not the segregation like we have here in America. But the Americans that you were with, did they bring over that kind of that American attitude that kind of affected the way that you lived in Europe? Or was it more...?

Dr. Pope: It was just uh people who had an opportunity to go and study in Europe didn't really bring their prejudices with them you know? Haha uh it was all very natural, and I don't know how it might have been if I had encountered them here in Atlanta, but in Europe, there was no problem.

Emerson: And could you explain or kind of give some insight on to how you kind of adjusted back to the way American life and society was like as opposed to how it was back in Europe, which was much different?

Dr. Pope: I never adjusted. You just don't want to adjust to uh discrimination and um being treated as less than, so I didn't adjust. Fortunately, the movement came...the one I had been praying for and wondering where would I find it, and it came right there to, to the campus so uh you, you once you have experienced a life of freedom you don't really I think adjust to having that taken away.

Emerson: And um upon arrival or the time spent back, what was the kind of deciding factor or the lead up that made you go and write this amazing "appeal for human rights"? what made you decide that is what I need to do to?

Dr. Pope: Well, it was actually assigned to me you know once the college presidents asked us to write a document, the student leaders, the people who were going to be leading the protest, once they asked us to do that I was just the chosen one. I didn't volunteer hahaha, but uh I uh was a music major, but I minored in English and French, and uh so apparently they thought it would be able to, to do it.

Emerson: And could you tell me about your experience of the process of writing the appeal?

Dr. Pope: I remember that it was uh done quite quickly. The presidents wanted to get it published as soon as possible because the students were ready to move out into the community as soon as possible to start the protest. So I didn't have a lot of time um, but I was full of things to say, and I had strong feelings about uh about our lives uh in Atlanta and how nice it would be if people could live together and uh and not have this superior/inferior relationship built into society. So I

uh...it just sort of poured out. Now, there are statistics in there that tell how many policeman there were, how many beds in the hospital, and you know, so that came from the Urban League, and I just transposed the information in to my own words. So what the appeal is, is really the beginning and the end with the complaints, with the grievances in the middle, and uh then once it was written and it was approved by the college presidents then each of us had to present it to our student bodies because we were writing it on behalf of the students of Spelman and Morehouse Clark, Morris Brown, and Atlanta University. So all of them had to hear it and approve it before it was published.

Emerson: Okay, and with that you released the appeal, and the response from the governor of Georgia uh Vandiver [3]

Dr. Pope: Vandiver

Emerson: What was your thought process going forward after he made that statement going out towards the mass media? Like what was your thought process in the progress towards the Civil Rights Movement ?

Dr. Pope: Well, my thought process was uh... this is wonderful. This is exactly what we were talking about. He, he you know he gave support to our complaints by the way that he responded, uh by the way he didn't even want to give credit to the fact that it was written you know by a student, by the fact that he uh brought communism in to it, and that then said that we had done it for nefarious reasons trying to sew discord and discontent, and all of it that was the purpose all of which was totally contrary to the spirit of the of the appeal, you know? Uh I have understood that he later on apologized or recanted, but I've never heard anything specifically that he said.

Emerson: And as opposed to what he said and there was the reverse kind of opposite spectrum of it of uh, Mayor Hartsfield [4] and what was your kind of opinions on his approach statement and statements in regards to your appeal?

Dr. Pope: Well, I was a fan of Mayor Hartsfield, but I don't recall actually the statement that he made. The thing that stands out to me is what governor Vandiver said hahaha oh, but I'll look that up and recall it I'm sure he was much more um sympathetic than um the governor.

Emerson: And um with your sit ins, as you know there was any risk that came with the civil rights movement, did you um...what was your mentality going in to it? Did you know the risks that would be coming with it?

Dr. Pope: Well we knew that there were risks, and um at one point, Lonnie king had acid thrown in his face uh; one of the Spelman girls, as we were marching, as they were marching, I was not marching, I was staying behind ugh trying to make things go smoothly, uh one of the klans man came and put his cigarette out on her wrist. uh We also had a Klans man who um rolled a bowling ball into the into the march into the procession in order to cause harm, so we knew that um it was not the safest undertaking that we were venturing into, but people were willing at that point to, to risk it.

Emerson: I think I'm running low in questions.

Mr. Baker: That's fine ill just lead into you for a second. Can you um... I know you mentioned the drug store, um where everybody hung out, so um can you give us some sense of what um Atlanta University Center, the area was like then and how the students sort of interrelated to each other on a regular basis? That cause...that's something that I don't think is, is captured very

well. Is everybody knows it's there, people go there, but um what was the student life like?
What was it like for you um on campus ?

Dr. Pope: Well, at Spelman, it was quite strict you know this is in the uh fifties and uh early sixties and um, so life at Spelman was quite regimented. When we get together now, those of us who were at Spelman back during the earlier days, not earlier for the college, but earlier than now, there were lots of rules, and um we had to be at chapel at eight o'clock every morning. When we went downtown, we couldn't go alone, you know at least two. We had to had to have on our white gloves uh you know, the dress was uh... they wanted us to look nice not to uh give any reason for us to be criticized um, but it was warm, and um the students were close knit, and we um you know we accepted the rules and tried our best to abide by them, but we did have to have a uh a committee to handle disciplinary issues, so there ya know there was that, and I uh became president of the class during the second semester of the freshman year, and uh I was vice president before that, but then I was president of the sophomore and the junior classes, and then I went to Europe um and became president of the student body while I was gone, so I was very much involved in in campus politics haha and uh grievances and uh complaints you know those kinds of things, but there was nothing uh, I can't recall anything that was that was negative not that there weren't problems. There were mechanisms to, to iron them out so, so Spelman was the strictest of the campuses you know. Morehouse was all male. Uh Clark and Morris Brown were coed uh, but there was a great effort to protect the Spelman students so.

Mr. Baker: I can imagine. How about the drug store, what was that like?

Dr. Pope: The drug store was uh Yates and Milton. They uh...they were two businessman they had uh a drug store over on auburn avenue where a lot of the black businesses were, and then the one at the corner sort of where Spelman and Morehouse and Clark intersected there was a

drugstore called Yates and Milton which was quite nice; uh good hot dogs and such. That's where people went particularly people who were not on campus you know that's where that's where we gathered. Although, I was on campus most of the time that I was there, that's where you go in-between classes for your coffee and sodas and such ,and so very uh very friendly kind of place.

Dr. Sims-Alvarado: Was the drug store frequented by members of the neighboring community? Was it a place where adults and students congregated?

Dr. Pope: Not as much, but you know, the teachers would go there uh, there were a couple of churches in the neighborhood, but there were there were some uh visit by the faculty, but they were not the main population that met there were the students.

Dr. Sims-Alvarado: When I think about revolutions igniting, I'm trying to help and trying to get to like... what the environment was like in the drug store as you were asking, and I think about like with the Boston massacre. How the was in the pub with these other people, so I'd imagine yall weren't a rowdy bunch like that.

Dr. Pope: We weren't really rowdy. We were very well mannered, but we were up to scheming haha and planning.

Dr. Sims-Alvarado: Was it a place where you would have...there was a sense of this of like social consciousness on the campus at that time and like what were the conversations be like in the space?

Dr. Pope: Well, before this there was no sense that we were concerned about anything other than our classes and our teachers and you know and the dances lots of social kinds of topics came up, but it all changed when the Greensboro four [5] set in forth. Then, it turned to political issues and

what could be done and what we were planning to do, so it went from just mainly social gathering to uh more serious political gathering.

Mr. Baker: So I won't keep you much longer. One more question to follow up on that. Lonnie has mentioned that at a certain point the meetings were pushed off campus into churches and things like that, so I know I imagine that the drugstore would be one of those places, but is there any other places like that where you remember going?

Dr. Pope: Well, I was I was a senior when the movement started, so all of my meeting took place in Yates and Milton; however, there was a church down the street from the drugstore called Rush Memorial, and uh they adopted the movement and gave office space, and uh and stationary, and you know the use of the facilities, so that was the main place the movement moved when we were asked to leave campus, and we have since then uh honored the pastor Joseph Boone [6] who uh was the church leader at that time now one of the streets on the main through fairs on south west Atlanta is named after him, and we have a marker there at the church to say that they provided the resources for the student movement.

Mr. Baker: I was at the unveiling of the marker. I remember that hahaha excellent um.

Dr. Sims-Alvarado: If I may add also, the umm umm that when you look at your organizational efforts years ago, there's other things that came about and some people's lives were impacted in a positive way long term, and I think about how you all organized yourselves, and how you wanted to disseminate information that you all had this very for lack of a better term bootleg hahahahaha newspaper called the Student Movement, and you were the, the paper was actually handwritten, hand drawn, typed up right, right there was no mass production, no newspapers, and then it becomes that through the efforts of the adults with the community. That they assist you

all, they allow you all to be the face of the movement, and they stepped back, and they assisted you all in ways that would be beneficial for this new generation um, and I think when you look at movements there's this, in the recent years demonstrations, there's like this tug of war between the old guard and the new guard. The old guard, they still want to be in front of the cameras, but for this generation, they pulled back and they gave you all, all the support that you needed and allowed you all to become the voice of this movement and so...

Dr. Pope: Which we were because we started it.

Dr. Sims-Alvarado: Right exactly, and so they used they gave you all the resources you all need in order to be successful, so I think that's important when you look at the organizational structure of the movement that the older guard they, they provided office space they provided a printing press for you all to disseminate your information.

Dr. Pope: That was the main thing the attorneys who would uh go down to the courthouse to get the students out of jail. There was a lot of jailing going on uh, and uh so we had a lot of support uh from people like uh Donald Hollowell [7], attorney Walden [8], and several uh judges and attorneys, and so often times the students felt that they had been gotten out too soon. It was an honor to be in jail you see.

Dr. Sims-Alvarado: it's a badge of honor to have that mug shot.

Dr. Pope: And even you speak to people now who didn't go to jail, and they regret that they, they wouldn't go to jail because it was a badge of honor yeah.

Dr. Sims-Alvarado: so I think about the the newspaper and look at the careers of individuals um that, that followed as a result of their participation in the paper. You have John Smith, who still works for the Atlanta inquirer [9], you have Charlene Hunter, who's one of the first writers of

the for the Atlanta inquirer. I remember seeing a picture of her she's typing, and then she goes to the University of Georgia and becomes a journalist.

Dr. Pope: She integrates the University of Georgia.

Dr. Sims-Alvarado: Right, so you think about her, and you think about Julian Bond [10], it allows him a space where he can really show off his talent as well too, so I think about what it did for individuals' long term. That it's wonderful when you're in a space where you can just really be your dynamic self without anything holding you back, and I think that was a beautiful thing about the movement that it allowed you to showcase your talents to the world as well too.

Dr. Pope: John Smith is being honored by the city of Atlanta this coming Monday.

Dr. Sims-Alvarado: Oh wonderful.

Dr. Pope: They're giving him a proclamation uh for his many years with the Atlanta inquirer.

Dr. Sims-Alvarado: Now did you all start the newspaper? Because, there were other newspapers that weren't documenting the movement?

Dr. Pope: Yes, we had to have a way of um telling our story. The paper came out of the movement. No movement, no Atlanta Inquirer.

1. Oberlin College is a private liberal arts college in Oberlin, Ohio, noteworthy for having been the first American institution of higher learning to regularly admit female and black students in addition to white males.
2. Spelman College is a four-year liberal arts women's college located in Atlanta, Georgia, United States.
3. Samuel Ernest Vandiver, Jr., was an American politician who was the 73rd Governor of the U.S. state of Georgia from 1959 to 1963.
4. William B. Hartsfield was mayor of Atlanta from 1937-41 and 1942-61.
5. On February 1st, 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina, four A&T freshmen students, Ezell Blair, Jr. (Jibreel Khazan), Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil & David Richmond walked downtown and “sat - in” at the whites-only lunch counter at Woolworth's. They refused to leave when denied service and stayed until the store closed.
6. Rev. Joseph Everhart Boone was a civil rights activist and organizer who marched together with Martin Luther King Jr.
7. Donald Lee Hollowell was an American civil rights attorney in the state of Georgia. Hollowell is best remembered for his instrumental role in winning the desegregation of the University of Georgia in 1961.
8. A.T. Walden (April 12, 1885 - July 2, 1965) was an African-American lawyer in Atlanta, Georgia who worked on many civil rights cases, campaigns for voter registration by African Americans, and building collaboration with the white power structure. In 1964 he was appointed by the mayor of Atlanta as a municipal judge, the first black judge to be appointed in the state of Georgia since Reconstruction.

9. The Atlanta Inquirer –"To Seek Out the Truth and Report It Without Fear or Favor" – became not only an educational tool but a distinctive, viable route of communicating news of, by and within the African-American community upon its creation in August, 1960.
10. Horace Julian Bond (January 14, 1940 – August 15, 2015) was an American social activist and leader in the Civil Rights Movement, politician, professor and writer. While a student at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, during the early 1960s, he helped to establish the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).