

do research on and report on, but also have specific things that they have to look for and address in terms of what made that individual's character. What, for instance — basic kinds of things — what was the value of education, how much value was placed on education in Mary McLeod Bethune's time, in Madam C.J. Walker's time, in Septima Clark's time? What kind of families were they in? Were they two-part families, two-parent families? What was the economic level, you know, did they attend church, et cetera — different things to sort of try to look at what might be underlying things that people might need that will help them when they're out there on their own, by themselves, you know, what have you learned about, say, the importance of education, or how do people develop a certain amount of self-determination and fearlessness in themselves.

One of the things that always bothered me a lot is that when people, a lot of times people will come to these as speakers to speak to groups of women about empowerment or something along those lines, self-image, and people will say something like, You can be anything you want to be. You can do anything you want to do. And that may be true. Then again, it may not be true for some people. But the point is, when you tell someone, You can be anything you want to be, you can do anything you want to do, sometimes you have to say more than that. You can't just leave it at that, because if it was as simple as that, perhaps they might have already done that when they were growing up in the projects, OK, or, you know, living on some really Fort-Apache-in-the-Bronx kind of street and going to bed without any dinner, OK. And everybody that they saw around them was functioning fairly much in the same manner.

So I might need you to say a little bit more than, Anybody can grow up to be president that wants to be. And we've already seen that, you know, there are select-idents. Bush is a select-ident. So how is it that anybody, any boy, can grow up to be president of the United States? That is not actually necessarily true, OK? But if I'm going to be uppity in any kind of way, maybe I need to know a little bit more than that. Maybe I need some concrete tools, some concrete strategies, maybe I need something to help me unlearn certain behaviors and develop new behaviors that go beyond, You can just be anything you want to be. Or what is it, Nancy Reagan with drugs, Just say no, OK. Just say no. No, I don't want heroin. I'll take crack.

29:28

ROSS: So you feel that there's a disconnect between the theory of empowerment and the lack of empowerment that the women you were dealing with were actually living?

31:30

TOURÉ: Yes, I do. And I think that it was important to work to make that connection there, OK, so using the life skills, different types of life skills to help to bring that about and have people kind of see where they fit in all that. So that's part of the way of trying to interject the gender politics, talking with other staff, et cetera — when you can, or to the

extent you can, but really not, because there really is no point, you know. And that's been demonstrated, kind of.

ROSS: What do you mean, there isn't any point in talking to other staff?

TOURÉ: There's no point in the sense that, in attempting to have them change their position, or in attempting to have them be open to maybe instituting a new way of doing certain things or a new program or a new whatever, the energy could be better spent someplace else, OK? Simple dialogues around, say you're sitting around just eating lunch, whatever, eating, the conversations that come up in the context of the world. What do you think about the war? What about this? What about that? You know, and you're always the one who's like (laughs) over here, over here, and everybody else is like over here. And it's like, wow, OK. So that's what I mean, and that's what I meant when I was saying a little bit about sometimes we're isolated, which made it more important to still be doing something that was outside of that, because within that, I was not able to function in the same way that I was able to do it and function and doing it the 13 years that I was at the Crisis Center.

ROSS: (Coughs) We're going to have to call these the flu tapes. Pardon my coughing.

TOURÉ: You want to stop for a moment and get some water, take your vitamin C that I gave you?

33:55

ROSS: Possibly, but let me see if I can press through with the next question. So looking through your experiences in the Black Panther Party, the D.C. Rape Crisis Center, working in substance abuse with women, what would you say feminism means to you now?

TOURÉ: Wow, what a question. That is quite a question, it really is, in that I really haven't — let me try to articulate that. First of all I would say, to me at this point in my life, 2005, age 54, age 54, that I think that on certain levels, feminism is an ideal. It's an idea and it's an ideal. It's an ideal in terms of what a woman might be aspiring to. She's aspiring to be a feminist. She's aspiring to exist within a feminist world, a feminist reality. It is, um, ideas in regard to what kinds of freedoms, opportunities, how that woman is going to be able to live, what's available to her, you know, what she can access and in what ways, how she's seen and viewed in society, and how that view affects really all aspects of your life and your being. So you are striving for that ever so-called thing freedom. You want to be free as a woman, free as a human being, you want to have no limitations on you as a woman in regard to what you can do, what you can do. You don't want to have limitations on you in terms of what your rights are within the society, how you are viewed, OK.

So then from there, it's like, but in reality, this is an ideal because we don't have these things, and these are things that we are struggling for in real basic ways, from how my body is being dealt with, how I have control or lack of control over my body, to what kind of contracts, et cetera, I can enter into without having to have a male force there guarantee whatever the particular situation calls for, to how I am perceived and used in that society in regard to things like conflict and aggression in places where women get caught in the middle, as in rape as a weapon of war. All of these different things are things that women are struggling and endeavoring to change, to bring about the justice in that area, the fairness, the equality in those areas.

People see how to do that differently. Everybody doesn't see achieving that or getting there in the same way. Everybody doesn't see all of the same things in regard to what has to be a part of that. They don't see that in the same way. People on certain levels are obviously motivated by, and directed by, their experience and their interests, what their interests are, what their stake in it is. So anybody can be a feminist. That's why men can be, you know, they, men can be called feminists, you know — I kind of find that interesting — but men can be called feminists, you know. So it's a way of thinking and, I guess, an end result that you want to have. So —

ROSS:

When did you start using the F word for yourself?

39:00

TOURÉ:

Oh, my goodness. That book called *How to Start a Rape Crisis Center* [1972] that sort of manual. And it has a part in there where it talks about feminism, and it's talking about, you know, feminism is about bringing about change, and a number of other things that are part of this idea of what feminism is. And so, it was one of those little retreat things — I think Deirdre Wright was there, um, Solaria Catherine, Deb Freidman. It was, we were somewhere like up in, oh, Sperryville, Virginia, with this farm that [had] cows and the farmhouse set up on this hill, and you could see from the top of the hill where the house was, you could see down a mountain, and it was really deserted around there. And it was like all of us up there, women of color, lesbians, white women, we were all (laughs) up there together. And so we're having this discussion — I'm not sure, I think Judith Witherow [Native American woman from Appalachia who writes for *Sinister Wisdom*] might have also been there — we were having this conversation about feminism. And so I say, "Well, if feminism is defined as what I'm seeing here in this *How to Start a Rape Crisis Center*, then I guess I'm a feminist." You know, that was pretty basic.

ROSS:

What year was that?

TOURÉ:

That would have been about (laughs) — it was either '75 or '76. It was either '75 or '76.

ROSS: So when you started using the word “feminist” —

TOURÉ: I should say I didn’t really use the word. I mean, I never really, like, was declaring myself a feminist, you know, I was just there to talk about the work, the needs, whatever. I mean, if it has to be a category, definition, and you want to say feminism, fine, it’s feminism. I’m also a revolutionary, you know, so go ahead. When I started using the term I met a lot of opposition, not just from the term but from the work that was coming out of the term, you know. So that that’s where that little breakdown, those breakouts, would always come. You know, Are you for the people, or are you for women? Are you for the revolution, or are you just for women’s liberation?

Whatever do you mean? I am a black woman. I am certainly for liberation for our people. I don’t have to explain that. I’ve been doing that for a long time. And I would be a fool not to be about liberation for myself. So I find it very difficult to separate these out, and in fact, I refuse to do so. And so that was a thing that other women — that was a common thing. As people, women, became more involved in doing this kind of work, this was part of the way in which you got challenged, you know, and then was accused of being a lesbian or a man-hater, all of that, and being brainwashed by white women. All of that kind of went together, if that was your question.

ROSS: It was. So how did you feel that that affected the work that you did?

42:52

TOURÉ: Well, in dealing with the black community or communities of color, in those days, in those times, it made it more difficult, which therefore made me more determined that it had to be done, you know. I knew there were other women out there that thought the same way. I mean, come on, you know. And there were activist women who just needed to be able to be released and they would have that voice. And had to be able to talk about their gender politics, you know, of the black man as the king. I mean, it’s cool to be the king, and you can be the king and it’s cool for me to be the queen — but I can’t be the queen and be your slave, too. That’s out, you know. And at some point, even though we all understand on a deeper level, when we used to talk about The Man, on a deeper level, we all understand that it’s The Man’s fault, but at the same time that we understand it’s The Man’s fault, there’s a point at which we have to just like push past that and not even deal with that no more, OK? It is now no longer about The Man, OK, because we have to forge some new strategies and some new ways of doing it. So, you know, f* them. They’re not even in it right now in certain ways. So I guess that’s how.

ROSS: Define your relationship with white women in the movement.

44:25

TOURÉ: My relationship with white women in the movement. OK. Well, I worked with white women all through the movement, all through the

time from when I very first got involved with the Rape Crisis Center to, uh, I guess up to this very moment, you know. What I found over time for myself and for others was that you came to a point at which you were tired of trying to explain certain things to white women, you came to a place where you were tired of feeling like you needed to take care of them. We can't have frank conversations because your feelings might get hurt. You have to be protected. We can't say this in front of white women, you know. Well, she's all right, she's not like that. OK, then, she should not take it like that, you know. Or just getting to a place where it's like, I cannot take care of any more white women. I cannot explain anything else to any more white women. You know, I have clearly come to a place where I see that, for them to share power is very, very difficult. For them to be able to follow the guidance and leadership of women of color is very difficult.

Now of course I start this from the point of understanding that nothing is absolute. So thus, in saying nothing is absolute, it means that this does not apply to all white women, it does not apply to all Jewish women, but it applies to enough, OK? So seeing that, OK, and through that knowing that you just simply had to move on, move ahead, forge around, forge your alliances to the point that it could be forged, right, and know that on some level, it wasn't going to go beyond that. There was, you know — this is our point, we can work together up to five. Between five and ten, we can't. We can't, OK. So we're going to coalesce and build our alliances between one and five, the stuff that exists there. The stuff that's between six and ten, we ain't doing that together. I'm doing that with some other people. (speaking very quickly) Y'all are doing y'all's [work] with some other people. Y'all ain't doing yours at all because y'all don't need to go beyond one and five.

So I would say that that is the relationship, a belief that white women really need to be challenging other white women who don't have the ability to have a broader analysis. I believe there is a need on many levels for women to acknowledge that they have privilege and they're protected, and I don't care what they say. They have a certain amount of privilege, that they are protected. So therefore, the more articulate women of color are — not more articulate, but the more the mission, the platform of the organization, depending on what that platform is, is more threatening to some women, because it does conflict with their feelings of privilege, it does conflict with their comfort zones — that's what you're experiencing right now, you know. So that is very much there. And the privilege is tied in to those things that we have been systematically excluded from, that have been denied us, et cetera, that had to do with race and economics and class and all those other kinds of things.

ROSS:

In terms of other work that you'd like to do, to marry your understanding of racism and feminism and heterosexism all together,

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internationalism — because you mentioned all of those things — what do you see some of your future work looking like?

TOURÉ: What a question. What a question.

ROSS: I'll find easier ones if you want me to.

TOURÉ: No, I'm just commenting on the question. As I'm answering it, I'm commenting on it. There are two things. One is, I think on one level there are a number of things that I can think of that I know that I would sort of be interesting in doing or would like to do, and on another level, it's like I haven't really thought it through. I haven't really thought about how to marry those things in a way that they don't have to get a divorce or something. But how to marry those things, all of them or any of them, how to marry them together, to think about what those experiences have taught or what those experiences have allowed to happen, I guess in a lot of ways I haven't, I haven't thought about that.

I had been thinking about this — because I'm doing this work, because I'm organizing this program around rape as a weapon of war, it's got me thinking a number of things because of these places where these things intersect. We're talking about rape as a weapon of war, you're looking at all the various places where there is conflict in the world, on the globe, and what that means for women and children, and particularly, you know, what it means for women in these places of conflict and as it relates to globalization and imperialism and fascism, racism. It's very significant.

We're in 2005, so we're at the beginning of the 21st century, and at the end of the 20th century, et cetera, so you've been looking at things like what happens with women in conflict, what happened with the women in Bosnia, Kosovo, what's happening in the Sudan, Congo, what happened with Rwanda, Haiti, Afghanistan, El Salvador, Nicaragua. Just sort of start naming places — Korea, South Korea, Vietnam, the Civil War — just start naming places, and see and look at the treatment of women and the treatment of children, you know. Why were they treated that way? They were treated that way because they were women. They were treated that way because, in society, all these societies where there's male chauvinism and gender male dominance exists, they're seen as property.

So thus, they are used in that way as well to discourage a nation, to make men feel powerless because they were not able to protect part of their greatest treasures of things that they own, you know. That's where we get those sayings like, The hearts of people are not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. That's where, you know, all these different ideas come from in terms of resistance to this, but you see and you know that it's true because, if not, why is it happening? When you talk about spoils of war, how is it that women, who are human beings, become a part of the spoils of war, do you know? That you demoralize a village by raping all the women in the village? That

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you have an idea that you can improve a race of people, lighten them up, make them more worthy, more acceptable by raping the women and having them rape — like in the Sudan with the Geneina, where they're talking about, you know, You're too black and we need lighter people in the Sudan. You're black, you're ugly, you know. So you're systematically trying to genocide out a people and bring about a new people — all of this through the wombs of women.

I find this quite disturbing, quite terrifying, as a woman with a womb and a vagina. This kind of bothers me, you know. So you have all these places where these male-dominant attitudes prevail, not just on the level of conflict, but on the internal level within the society where these exist — in places in Africa where people believe that if you rape a virgin, that it'll cure you of AIDS. It's like, whatever could you be saying? You know, it's this idea in India that if the woman does something she disgraces the whole family and she must be punished, so, you know, we can just set her on fire, because we have to avenge the honor of this family. What are you talking about?

These kinds of conflicts that exist even on an internal level within the country, within the tribe, within the society, whatever, you know, women are the ones who are abused, the ones who are traded off and traded for. In a situation where a woman, her husband dies, in some societies where the husband dies so now the woman must marry again, and her family must find her a mate or the husband's brother must step forward and marry her. And all the property now becomes his, you know — because she can't function on her own without her husband? She might be glad to have the first time to be able to roll without him. But here she is now being passed on. So she doesn't even count. It's her and her property gets taken over to this next person. All these kinds of situations, you know.

So in that kind of an atmosphere, you're not necessarily — not very likely there're going to be a lot of women's centers or battered women's shelters, rape crisis centers, you know, or even kind of support groups that are organizable in an informal way or organized in a more clandestine way, like the Jane Collective used to exist, you know, in different ways. So the idea of being able to have these women — and then of course in some places, there are centers and there are things, and I guess a lot — maybe they come out of areas where there are universities, where women have resources at the university level and where the women maybe have more education or something like that. But to be able to kind of work to bring some of that together, so people can create their own, in the way that it's going to work where they are, where they live — to be able to do that, I think that would be a really good thing, interesting and exciting, whatever, very helpful, for sure.

ROSS:

So you see your future work helping women in other countries deal with the consequences of rape being used as a weapon of war? Taking your experiences from building the movement to end violence against women here and globalizing it from the perspective of women of color?

57:15

TOURÉ: I see it as something to think about. I mean, the way you just articulated it, you made it sound so good. I mean, the way you articulated it, it sounded really, really, really good and it sounded really organized —

ROSS: Well, I don't want to put words in your mouth. I'm just trying —

TOURÉ: No, I'm saying, the way you said it, that's what it is, but I mean, I didn't say it like that. So I'm saying, you know, the way you said it, it sounds really good, the way you said it. It even sounds fundable, the way you said it. But, yeah, I mean, that's just something that was just kind of like in my mind.

And then of course I have a very real affinity for dealing with at-risk young women. Before you actually get to be a full-fledged crack addict that sold your food stamps, that has done so many things that you're going to have to be in therapy for, before that, you know, when you're that at-risk person who's like between 12 and 17 or something like that — to be able to work with young women in that group around empowerment, around self-esteem and self-perception and, you know, helping them to tap their potential for school and for other things that would shape them, you know, out of at-risk neighborhoods and communities, I think that that's something that's really critical. There are so many young women who have never been out of the city that they're in, have never even necessarily been to the other side of the city to participate in things or to do things, who've never been in a writing contest or a spelling bee or anything that makes them challenge themselves and learn something new and exciting — so many young people who know nothing about how to deal with conflict resolution, which is another thing that we added in PEERS. As we went on, we added conflict resolution and a few other things that were very, very valuable to work with. Young people, conflict resolution. I mean, every time we pick up the paper, turn on the news, some of the things that are happening with some young people — which are not the majority, but with some young people — is scary. But a lot of young people don't know how to deal with conflict resolution, I mean —

So there're just sort of different things, you know, being exposed to different women that make you feel like, Oh, OK, I want to be a young Catherine Dunham or, you know, a Shirley Chisholm, a Septima Clark, a Geraldine Miller, a Wilma Mankiller, you know, a Angela Davis, a Loretta Ross, you know, a June Jordan. I want to do this, but I never even heard of these women. But now I've been getting exposure to different women like that, and I've been getting exposure to other young women who have come out of similar situations that I have that can help be my mentor, because it is about more than, No, you can just be whatever you want to be, girl, OK? Let's close the disconnect on how to do that, you know, so I need some mentors that came the way I came, you know. So that's something that's important that's always of interest to me.

lives and the quality and standard of women's lives — to force the participation of women of color at the table in regard to the leadership and direction for it, I feel that SisterSong was very significant and very instrumental in making that happen. And again, I got to see up front the fight you have to go through when you get to the table.

You know, it's like there are some things that just make you weary, because you just wonder at what point is it going to shift, which of course makes something like SisterSong all the more important, because it says that we have to in many ways go in our own direction, sing our own song on our own page. I mean, and that's the real deal of it. The success of that march was very much dependent upon the fact that it was a coalition effort, that there were so many diverse organizations that were a part of that, that one would hope that this would be a lesson, a positive learning experience and turning point for the more traditional women's movement, for the more traditional reproductive choice movement — to be able to see that and move in that way without all of that co-sponsorship, without all of those organizations that are traditionally not seen in women's movement circles, in the women's movement, around issues that have to do with reproductive rights, that these people who are not traditionally seen there, that that march would have probably been half the size that it was. That's a learning experience.

ROSS: Tell me something about the politics of representation of women of color in the women's movement. Because it seemed that at one point we were fighting for women of color to get a seat at the table, but now it seems like the discussion has moved beyond that, in terms of what the women of color represent once they're —

35:00

TOURÉ: At the table.

ROSS: — at the table. Tell me how you experience, first, getting women of color at the table, and [then] what do you have to say about the type of representation women of color have once they're at the table.

TOURÉ: Let me first say that I will remind myself that I'm on tape, OK —

ROSS: Well, you don't have to go there if you don't want to. This is your interview. You're in control.

TOURÉ: Yeah. When I say that I'm on tape, I mean, so let me articulate it in a little less of just a brash, base way, you know, because I think you know how I can get and how I can say things sometimes. Um, first of all, I think it is sad because it's the way that it seems invariably, that whatever movements that things happen in, you always seem to have some individuals or organizations that, once they get to the table, they very much begin to adopt the words, the practice, of the people that they're sitting at the table with. Or they very much begin to forget their mission for being at the table and become like independent operators,

you know, out for self or their organizations in many ways. That's very, that's very sad, when you adopt that.

It's like in '64 when Fannie Lou Hamer and Victoria Gray, they all went — the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party went to the Democratic National Convention in New Jersey because they didn't feel that they were getting the representation and the vote, and were basically told that they would be allowed to have, I believe it was two seats —

ROSS: I think that was Chicago, but —

TOURÉ: No, it was New Jersey.

ROSS: Oh, New Jersey. Mm-hm.

TOURÉ: That they would be allowed two seats, and some of the delegation was like, OK, well, two seats is better than nothing, you know. We came up here, we won something, we got two seats. And Fannie Lou Hamer was like, We didn't come up here for no damn two seats. There's a whole bunch of tired people want to sit down up here, you know. We ain't takin' it. We are not. We refuse, because that's not what the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is, OK.

My point here is adapting and adopting and being willing to adapt, you know, so that, it's like a real sad thing when you do a lot of struggling, negotiating, all kinds of things to get some women of color at the table in a position to make some leadership decisions that affect the direction that something is going in and can affect the involvement of other women of color — when I say affect, I mean affect to the extent of making it easier or being more of a barrier to it. Not that they will in fact stop it from happening, but you can determine in certain instances whether it will be easier or whether there will be more barriers. It might require more resources and energy on my part that shouldn't have to be required because that's why we got you sitting there, OK. But you have now forgotten that.

So I think that's a real thing. But I think that you see it in any number of formations and not just here. But it's sad because this is where we do our work, and it's sad because we like to think that, as women, as Mother Earth and all of this, that, you know, part of the great spirit and all of this, that, you know, the guy in effect and all of that, that we would be able to do this better, OK, and be more committed and not take on the ways of the oppressor or whatever, the exploiter, once you arrive there. How was that?

ROSS: That's very good. Again, I'm really not wanting to put words into your mouth, but I just wanted to get your idea because you've been fighting to get the voices of women of color represented for a long time, and now I feel that you're at a point of asking for a different type of representation. It just ain't enough to be colored.

40:22

TOURÉ: That's right. That's right. Because there will always be apples, bananas, coconuts, and oranges.

ROSS: What does that mean?

TOURÉ: That means there will always be people who will put their own self-interest ahead of the organization or the community or the issue itself, and they will, for their own personal possible benefit, you know, side with those who are not necessarily working in the best interest of the communities that we come from or the issues that we represent. And so, in the concept of black people or African Americans, you know, you have Oreos, you have people that are white inside and black outside. You have coconuts that are white inside and brown outside. You have apples that are red outside and white inside. Bananas are yellow, and, you know — making that sort of a parallel. Disregard that.

ROSS: Well, what do you think in the future will be the legacy of Nkenge Touré? What impact will historians be able to say that Nkenge Touré's life had on building a movement for justice?

42:00

TOURÉ: Wow. Well, first of all, I don't know if herstory can say it or history can say it or whatever. I know one thing is that in the 13 years that I worked at the D.C. Rape Crisis Center, I served a lot of people and I helped a lot of people. And I still run into people sometimes who say, you know, I remember when you used to work at the Rape Crisis Center. You were my counselor. Or, You were the counselor for a friend of mine. Things like that. Because I counseled a lot of women when I worked at the Rape Crisis Center, and I feel good about that. Also doing the education in the schools, the program, I run into people who say, I remember when you came to my school. You came to Roosevelt. You came to Paul. You came to Hart. You came to Charles Drew. You came to my school. And that was really good.

So I feel that I have touched a number of people's lives in a personal way that may not ever get broadcast, and sometimes I think about, What if I had not ever worked at the Rape Crisis Center? There would have been these people who wouldn't have got touched in that way that, you know, that you helped them to be able to heal themselves and resolve their conflicts so their lives could be better. That's really good.

Um, I think that the involvement of women of color at the D.C. Rape Crisis Center, through the organizing for Anti-Rape Week and working with the people who organized the Take Back the Night marches and the very first Third World Women and Violence conference, national conference, held in this country, that though were only about 75 women or so that attended, it was a significant thing for the First National Conference on Third World Women and Violence.

I think that I played a significant role in helping to shape and develop a network and a movement of like-minded, feminist-minded, whatever, third world women and women of color in the metropolitan area in doing work in the area of violence against women, you know,

kind of coming together to study and to expand around violence against women, because we were looking at sexual assault, domestic violence. We were looking at street harassment, you know, we actually tried to get D.C. declared a hassle-free zone, free of the hassle, sexual, verbal harassment and hassling of women. I worked on the interfamily bill to change the definition and way of dealing with domestic violence and battering, on the rape bill.

Just the consciousness of women around being active in gender politics, helping to facilitate this idea that we had to end the silence in our communities, and I think that all of these third world women of color, African American women, women in the Latino community, and so forth and so on, but definitely in the black community, of pushing and making dialog happen in our communities around us when people didn't want to hear it, you know, and challenging people and their ideas about it. So I think, I believe I've made some contributions in that area, you know, maybe helping to extend how people look at violence against women, like [what] we did with the whole braid thing, when they were wanting to fire these women at the hotel because they were wearing their hair in cornrows, you know. And I said that that was a form of psychological violence against women, and even though I had to sort of struggle with the Rape Crisis Center, the Crisis Center was able to initiate and take the leadership to organize a major demonstration in front of the Marriott Hotel down on 14th Street, where we actually had the unions, a couple of the union locals involved, and had almost a thousand people out there in the streets, including Ras Michael out there in the streets to protest that.

ROSS: Who's Ras Michael?

TOURÉ: Ras Michael is a brother, a Rastafarian brother who used to live here in D.C. that did a lot of (unclear) and things like that, you know, and the fact that he was out there for that was just ever amazing to me, that he supported that.

ROSS: I believe he's with the Carter G. Woodson Association for the Study of Black Life, or something like that?

TOURÉ: Yes.

ROSS: Is that who you're talking about?

TOURÉ: He was a part of that, the UNIA [United Negro Improvement Association] and all of that. He has now moved to Florida, but yes.

ROSS: OK. So, history will record that you had quite an impact on building the movement to end violence against women, both locally, nationally, and internationally. I seem to recall you telling a story about women from South Africa?

48:00

TOURÉ: OK.

ROSS: Maybe you're not —

TOURÉ: Maybe you have me confused with some of the people that you know.
(laughter)

ROSS: No, and it may not be — 30 years is not easy to remember all that happened.

TOURÉ: Thirty years is a while.

ROSS: But there was a book called *How to Start a Rape Crisis Center*.

TOURÉ: Yes.

ROSS: These women in South Africa got hold of this book, and I seem to recall when I was at the D.C. Rape Crisis Center that these white women showed up from South Africa.

TOURÉ: Oh, the white women from South Africa.

ROSS: Wanting to talk —

TOURÉ: Yes.

ROSS: — to us about how to start a rape crisis center.

TOURÉ: Right.

ROSS: And they seemed to be a little surprised because they walked in — this is my story, maybe — and they looked at Barbara, who was the white women who was the counselor at the time, and they immediately went to her.

TOURÉ: Barbara K — [Kletzick]. name

ROSS: Right (laughs). And Barbara pointed over to me and said, “Oh, you need to talk to her.” And you could see their jaws drop when they realized that they had to talk to this bevy of black women about how to start a rape crisis center. And I don't think they were prepared to do that. And I think you were there at that meeting. That's why —

TOURÉ: Yeah, I remember that now. But when you first said South [Africa], my mind immediately went to the indigenous South African people, and so I was like, what? But now, I do remember that, just as I remember that when we went to Kenya for the end-of-the-decade conference, that our rape reference, the one on the myths and the facts and everything, that we had had the logo done with the faces of women of color, that it had 49:52

spread itself so many places, and that when we went, there were people who were somewhat familiar with it. But that once we returned, we just got all kinds of responses from people who had taken it back to their countries and were like using the logo and just using the information. And it was just amazing. It was so great.

ROSS: So I think of those as part of your legacy, Nkenge, because certainly you brought me and hundreds of women of color who are now active feminists into the Rape Crisis Center. So whether you think of us as your children or your prodigies or whatever (laughs), never stop to claim the fact that you created a space for women that didn't exist before.

TOURÉ: Yeah, well, yeah. I have to think about that. I've not really thought about it in those terms. And another thing I think that is very — is that we did the first Anti-Rape Week in, well, it was actually, the first was just a weekend, and it ended with the march that *Aegis* and FAAR were organizing. That was like in 1978. I remember Sue Lerutes [sp? a white woman at the Rape Crisis Center] did the graphic work for the flyer. That that started out — it was like a weekend. We called it a week, but it was really a weekend because — and then it actually grew to being able to be a whole week of activities and so forth and so on that included the march. It included so many different aspects of sexual assault, and it's how we were able to pull in so many women of color to work on it. And that, you know, it grew, and that the Rape Crisis Center, they changed to Rape Awareness Week, and then Rape Awareness Week became Rape Awareness Month because of NCASA, the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault. And it's still recognized every year. And I feel very, just really kind of amazed about that one when I think about it, you know, from '78, from a weekend, to what continues to exist now. And it is also national, you know. I don't know necessarily that — I mean, the ideas are out there, so National may not have — when NCASA did it, they may or may not have known about us, but certainly the Crisis Center was a member of NCASA. They may or may not have known what we did when they decided to have this national month, you know, but certainly our Center here, to have something that started in '78 that still exists in 2005 is rather significant.

ROSS: And it's due to you. Are there any concluding thoughts or final comments you'd like to enter into the record about the woman formerly known as Anita Stroud that is Nkenge Touré, in terms of your feminist activism?

53:15

TOURÉ: Oh, well, one thing I believe, that from junior high school, when I first began to get involved in politics, you know, of where I was, anyway — from junior high school to now, I have really come to believe that whatever ways my purpose manifests itself, I believe that my purpose is to serve. I believe that that's what I'm supposed to do, that I'm supposed to be of service. People have different identifications or

whatever given to them. I believe mine is to serve. I believe that one of my gifts in being able to do that is the ability to articulate what I'm thinking and feeling, a talent for being able to bring people together and work with people, and work through conflicts and arrive at kind of solutions-oriented sorts of things. Good counseling skills, though I don't do good on counseling myself. I think that until the day that I move into the next life, and probably in the next life, that I will always be committed to issues of liberation of people, you know, of issues that have to do with justice and liberation, that I will always be committed to dealing with issues that have to do with women and that have to do with girls. And I guess finding different arenas and different ways to express that, different ways to fight for that.

ROSS: Well, what advice would you offer young people coming up behind you?

55:32

TOURÉ: The first thing is, pace yourself so you don't burn out. That's a very good one to learn. I mean, we just sort of took everything on and did everything and didn't really, I feel, didn't really take enough time to really incorporate ourselves into that, as far as taking care of ourselves physically, as far as doing little girly things for yourself, you know, that you rejected. I mean, I've had to think about how old I really was when I decided it would really be OK for me to have a manicure or a pedicure. Because it was like, you know, Who's got time for that? That's counter-revolutionary. And if you're a feminist or a womanist, you don't really — which is ridiculous, as I see it now, OK. Or, you know, I had time to advocate for all of my clients, but I don't have time to keep my own doctor's appointments or my own dental appointments and stuff. So I would say, to know how to take care of yourself. I would say, to know how to pace yourself, because this struggle is going to be long, and believe me, it ain't going to run out of issues, you know. So if you take a few vacations, when you come back, it'll all still be here.

To be able to make the connection between your spiritual planes and your other planes, you know. That you need something that's, I feel, something that's bigger than yourself that you can believe in and connect to. And to me that's just sort of a universal principle. It doesn't have anything to do with religion or anything, but some universal principle, that you are able to take some time to know yourself and appreciate the value — something we didn't get until really the Black Women's Health Project came along.

That white women had CR groups, they had the consciousness-raising groups from the late 60s into the 70s, but women of color, it was like you didn't have time to just like focus on yourself or have some time for yourself. You know, when people would talk about, I need my space, I need some room, they'd be like yeah, OK. If you were telling people, I need my space, then they've got a space for you over in some mental institution, over at St. Elizabeth's, over at Crown's (sp?) or out in Springfield somewhere. Yeah, we've got a place for you. You need some space? Because you were all about nurturing and taking care of

everybody else and being a superwoman and all that stuff. So to know that you don't want to be that, you don't have to be that, you know.

But also to know that you must serve your community. You can't function without knowing whose shoulders you're standing on. No, don't assume that women always said, If the man gets home first he should cook, because they didn't. That wasn't your unique idea that was just invading your mind. A lot of stuff happened for that to be the thinking, and you need to know what that is. You need to honor that, and you need to build on that and move from there. You need to be able to be responsible and accountable and do some things that support your community and not allow yourself to just be into individualism and believe that everything you ever achieved was totally all through your own effort and your effort alone, because that's insane, you know. So —

I guess things like that. And having faith in yourself to raise your voice and know that it is important to have a voice, you know, to have a voice and to use your voice, to get the courage to use your voice, you know, that we don't always have. Even if we have voices, we don't always — even though I have a voice, I don't always have the courage to use the voice as courageously or as fearlessly as I think that I should. So, yeah.

ROSS: Those are your life lessons to offer future feminists.

59:28

TOURÉ: I guess so. In a way, yeah, you know. And of course, also, try and do your homework around stuff. You know, you can't always just kind of just run in there. Sometimes I just go in off of my heart and my emotion and my passion. And so, you have to also be able to do homework and do research. And I find a lot of times that whatever it is that I'm working on, it is then that I do work and research or learn some things about it. So sometimes that's how I learn. I get motivated to learn based around certain things that I have to take on or have to do.

ROSS: All right. Well, on behalf of the Sophia Smith Collection and the Voices of Feminism Project, I'd like to ask you a few concluding questions. First of all, has anyone else ever done an oral history or an extended interview with you before, and if so, are tapes of that available?

TOURÉ: No, no, no.

ROSS: Do you have papers or other memorabilia you would consider donating to the Smith College Collection?

TOURÉ: Yes, yes, yes.

ROSS: And would you like a copy of this interview on DVD or VHS?

TOURÉ: VHS, because I have two VCRs, and DVD if I can get one because I've got a DVD and more people are having DVD players. So when I go show it to them, they'll need the DVD.

ROSS: So you're saying you want one of each?

TOURÉ: I want one of each, yes.

ROSS: OK. And once this tape is transcribed, you'll get a copy of the printed-out transcript —

TOURÉ: My extensive words.

101:23

ROSS: — as well as, at the end of the finishing of your part, you'll get the full edited transcript and copies of the tape. We do need a commitment from you that, when you get the transcript, that you will take the time to read it, and get it back, and not hold it for a year or whatever.

TOURÉ: OK. I can do that.

ROSS: That you will do so expeditiously.

TOURÉ: OK.

ROSS: Again —

TOURÉ: There's different definitions of expeditiously. No. Yes, I will (laughs).

ROSS: Again, on behalf of Smith College, Joyce Follet, Sherrill Redmon, and the Voices of Feminism Project, thank you.

TOURÉ: Well, thank you, Loretta. And let me just say this one last thing, and that is, in terms of — you were asking about something for people, younger people. And that is I think the last thing I will probably [say] is, keep a record. As I shared with you, I have stuff that as I was sharing with you, you were saying, "You're kidding? You've got that?" You know, because I just didn't know, and since I was not a good typist and all those other kind of things, and I came late to technology, and kicking and screaming to it, you know, I'm like the old-fashioned hard-copy-type person. So I'm saying, like, back up your hard drives, if that's the terms for now, and save some hard stuff. Save some of the actual flyers, leaflets, booklets, brochures. Save some of the actual things from events that you've had as a way to help to document it, you know, and not just assume, but actually hold onto that stuff, because it will be important in terms of passing on this herstory that we have.

ROSS: Well, thank you again, Nkenge.

1:03:18

END TAPE 6

END INTERVIEW

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